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**Rooted and Winged, Keeping Traditions Without Being
Traditional: Zimbabwean Women's Ancestral, Historical and
Contemporary Agency in Afrocentric Development**

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**A Thesis Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in International Development Studies
Saint Mary's University
Halifax, Nova Scotia**

September, 1999

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I am because you are,

You root, cradle and inspire me

To carry the legacy of my ancestors with reverence, humility and pride.

I am a blessed to be your daughter.

This thesis is dedicated to my late grandmother and to all female ancestors of Zimbabwe - *makanditakura madzimbuya ndiri mwana handigoni kutenda ndega.*

ABSTRACT

Rooted and Winged, Keeping Traditions Without Being Traditional: Zimbabwean Women's Ancestral, Historical and Contemporary Agency in Afrocentric Development

Ruramisai Charumbira
September, 1999

This thesis weaves literal, interpretive and metaphoric threads to give a glimpse into African women's ancestral, historical and contemporary agency as lived and experienced in Zimbabwe. Utilizing Afrocentric and feminist literature and African orature, it historicizes and contextualizes the legacy of the ancestor and spirit-medium Mbuya Nehanda who was lynched by the British for co-leading resistance against colonization. African women's agency and participation is traced in pre-colonial and colonial societies, particularly during the second *Chimurenga* – liberation struggle. Three case studies investigate post-independence women's agency: (1) the new government's Ministry of Cooperatives, Community Development and Women's Affairs; (2) the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Center and Network; (3) the development and feminist yardsticks used to measure rural African women. The study concludes by theorizing the legacy of the ancestor, exploring possibilities of developing bodies of scholarly African indigenous feminist knowledge from legendary ancestors like Mbuya Nehanda and African women's everyday experiences.

Introduction

Ours is a spiritual tradition. So, I want to begin this [thesis] with meditation

First I thank our ancestors, elders, and those who prepared the space for us ... then I tell my story

Ours is an oral tradition.

We tell stories to illuminate the paths we travel and to share humor, courage and wisdom in this liberation struggle. Our storytelling is our theorizing. And so an 'introduction' into theory is an introduction into spiritual, political struggles for peace and freedom (James, 1993: 31).

This thesis is a product of a very long process that spans many years of learning and living "development". *The reader should therefore be aware that in many ways, this will not read like a "normal" International Development Studies thesis.* Because of the nature of this study, I shall be making exits and entries on concepts, terminology and language common and uncommon to the Westerner, treasured and/or forgotten by the African, *including my usage of the English language as a medium of communication.*

This thesis is a search for African "development" roots, a celebration of the rich legacy of African women's agency in the "development" of Zimbabwe, a space – like many African and Southern spaces – where ancient traditions propel the flight of those that live today.

In true (sic) African tradition, I shall begin by pouring libation for the ancestors – *midzimu*.

Midzimu [are] like a shadow. They follow you wherever you go. Everyone has a *mudzimu* [ancestor] because everyone has a shadow. Each of us is looked after by a *mudzimu*. But we must also look after them. That is why we brew beer and pour [libation], to appease and thank our *midzimu* (Vera, 1994).

Since I cannot be traditional about the libation ritual, your participation through a critical reading of this thesis, dear reader, is your partaking in this ancient African tradition, where a community libates and invokes the ancestors before undertaking any endeavor. Communing with the ancestors in this manner ensures that those of us alive today are guided by and rooted in our past, informed by the present so we can strategize and make a confident leap into the future. It also means we turn inward into ourselves as individuals and collectivities so as to be able to create knowledge: knowledge about our ancestral and historical roots, roots that we have to preserve and share with those that (will) come after us; and knowledge that will welcome those that visit our community from other cultures. The creation of this knowledge shall be done with reverence, courage and humility – *Ndapfunya chisero ndichiuchira nokupururudzira midzimu yeZimbabwe. Uyayi*

*tiite basa guru Midzimu Mikuru. Wozani Madlozi eZimbabwe
Lisikhokhele thina ngane zenu.*

Therefore, this libation ritual (right from the start) helps the reader and author in the processing of this information, because it is written from African and Afrocentric perspectives. The ritual is an important and integral part of any (African) endeavor, because it allows us (Africans) to reclaim our idiom, without which our sense of self is and will always be defined by others. It reminds us, lest we forget, that those who have termed the African way of life “primitive” and “under-developed” do so because they have colonized our minds and souls, made us and continue to want us to turn to the altar of their own ancestors. In turn, those of us that have been coerced to learn, have assimilated and/or allow(ed) mental colonization to determine who we are, tell our communities and ourselves, that this is the “modern” way of life. But as Morrison (1992: xxv, xxvii-xxviii) powerfully cautions us:

The problem of internalizing the master’s language [and culture] is the problem of the rescued. Unlike the problems of survivors who may be lucky, fated, etc., the rescued have the problem of debt. If the rescuer gives you back your life, he shares in that life Voluntary entrance into another culture, voluntary sharing of more than one culture has certain satisfactions to mitigate the problems that may ensue. But being rescued into an adversarial culture can carry a huge debt Under such

circumstances it is not just easy to speak the master's language, it is necessary. One is obliged to cooperate in the misuse, erasure of difference ..., the denial of history, the crowning of patriarchy, the inscription of hegemony; to be complicit in the vandalizing, sentimentalizing and trivialization of the torture black people have suffered. Such rhetorical strategies become necessary because, without one's own idiom [and ritual] there is no language to speak [no ancestor to libate, no strategy for transformation].

This potent statement is an important touchstone to keep in mind throughout this thesis as we search for, re/discover and explore African women's ancestral, historical and contemporary agency and "development" approaches in particular (Zimbabwean) contexts. This necessarily entails utilizing African orature, Afrocentric and "feminist" theoretical and methodological frameworks for this spiritual and intellectual research project. Put simply, if I am going to explore African "development" and African "feminism", I have to be articulate in my own idiom so I can commune with my ancestors and the living community. I have to do so in a manner that is primarily focused on my community, while making it accessible to those that have to be part of this process, those that deeply search and/or are willing to learn from vilified cultures and oppressed peoples.

Chapter Outline

As stated at the beginning of this introductory section, this thesis is *not* a “normal” thesis. It weaves literal, metaphoric, and interpretive threads together to give us a glimpse into African women’s lives as lived and experienced in Zimbabwe. Thus *Chapter One (1)* contextualizes and historicizes the thesis from personal and collective perspectives, explaining the rationale for the theoretical frameworks and the methodology of this thesis’ “abnormal” “normalcy”. Some concepts and terms used throughout the presentation are explained in this chapter, while others are explained as they occur in the presentation.

Chapter Two (2) summatively explores African women’s agency in pre-colonial times, tracing the advent of European colonials and how this ruptured African people’s way of life in Zimbabwe. The agency of Mbuya Nehanda – an ancestral spirit personified by a spirit medium, Nyakasikana - as the epitome of Africans’ resistance to domination by White colonials leads into the next section of the chapter where I discuss the onset and establishment of European imperialism in Zimbabwe. The legacy of Mbuya Nehanda as manifested by women, children and men who mobilized, organized, and participated in the second *Chimurenga* –

liberation struggle - makes the last section of the chapter. The *Chimurenga* was the gruesome war that dismantled colonialism and apartheid in this country, generations after Mbuya Nehanda (and Sekuru Kaguvi) had been lynched for leading a resistance movement. This way, we expand our understanding of African women's agency, why and how they participated on the frontline – battlefield – in the villages, cities, farms and mines among other spaces to bring about (political) change in Zimbabwe; and what this participation meant when the goal of (political) independence was achieved.

Chapter Three (3) explores African women's increased public participation in "development" as a result of the *Chimurenga* and nationalist politics. This chapter looks specifically at the first ten years of independence, particularly the official national machinery instituted by government to address women's issues, gender, rural/urban inequities and inequalities that colonialism brought and/or reinforced. The exploration of the politics of women's agency, the knowledge created, how it was produced and disseminated between 1980 and 1990, will be done through the utility of a case study of the then Ministry of Cooperatives, Community Development and Women's Affairs (MCCDWA). This tripartite ministry was a national structure instituted by the new

socialist government at women's insistence in 1980, and was part of a broader strategy for women's empowerment in keeping with socialist notions of egalitarianism. It was also in keeping with international political trends of addressing the "woman question" in development. The United Nations (UN) had for the first time in its history declared 1975 the International Women's Year and 1975-1985 a Decade for Women. Thus our interest in this chapter, will be the investigation of female agency under national (patriarchal) structures, the gains and challenges African women made and faced in general after independence.

The beginning of the 1990s marked a decade of political independence in Zimbabwe. This decade brought great socio-political, economic and cultural turbulence in this country, in the South and the world at large. *Chapter Four (4)* explores women's responses to these uncertainties as they formed independent organizations after the MCCDWA became defunct. Of interest is the analysis of women's agency and their involvement in local, national, regional and international women's movements in the face of capitalist structural adjustment programs (SAPs) among other socio-economic and political ills. In the spirit of the preceding chapter, we shall also utilize a case study of the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Center and Network (ZWRCN) to

closely examine the manifestations of female agency in contemporary Zimbabwe. The study of ZWRCN as a women's non-governmental organization (NGO) sheds light on the types of agency and knowledge (mainly urban) women generate(d) as a movement to ensure that women's issues remain on the national development agenda of society and of policy makers in all sectors. The programs ZWRCN tailor made to address particular social issues will be examined closely, albeit summarily, to understand still further the types of strategies African women operationalize(d) to bring about social change in contemporary society. This analysis facilitates the understanding of African women's agency, their conceptualization and articulation of feminism, gender and development epistemology in their society. In this way, we can begin to make the vital and undeniable connections of agency between luminaries like Mbuya Nehanda and contemporary African women's resistance and activism, realities that speak of the rich ancestral and historical legacy on which the contemporary movement is built.

Chapter Five (5) engages the experiences of contemporary rural African women who more often than not epitomize the most studied yet misrepresented form of female agency in dominant (Western) women, gender and development theory, policy and

praxis. In this chapter I explore a case study of an incident that occurred in a particular rural community, an experience that reinforced the need for African women (and men) to seriously undertake the challenges of building grounded indigenous and endogenous African, Afrocentric and Afrofeminist theory from our own lived experiences. This experience among many, made me realize that by and large, the concepts and praxis of feminism, women, gender, development and activism in the contemporary development arena have been trapped in/by “western” constructs. These constructs deny those women whose feminism is manifested differently, access, legitimacy and control of feminist theoretical and methodological discourses that describe and affect their daily lives. This chapter urges us to rethink our notions and perceptions of rural African women as “dis-empowered” when discussing notions of female agency and representation in development, and more importantly, it urges us to question the yardstick(s) with which we measure their “dis-empowerment”. For not to question the yardstick(s) is to reinforce the colonization of African rural women’s experiences; researched, written, commodified, and patented, by women, gender and development “experts” who case-study their lives. African rural women’s types of feminism and agency should be theorized from rural women’s

own standpoints, for not to do so is to grease the voyeuristic engines of those hungry for “exotic primitive” cultures.

Chapter Six (6) concludes this thesis by venerating and theorizing the legacy of the great female ancestral Spirit – Mbuya Nehanda. By sitting on the lap of Mbuya Nehanda and listening closely to her heartbeat and wisdom, I remain rooted in my African heritage while flapping the wings of my spiritual and intellectual search for contemporary African and Afrocentric solutions to African development problems besetting our society today. In this chapter I synthesize the thesis by summatively tracing the multi-dimensionality of Mbuya Nehanda, situating but not confining her to the categories of philosopher, Afrofeminist theorist, role model, mentor, social scientist and community embodiment. This will enable us to draw important epistemological, theoretical and methodological maps that will trace the ancestral, historical and contemporary agency of women in Zimbabwe. Through this exercise, we get a glimpse of what I mean when I propose the adoption of African and Afrocentric theoretical and methodological frameworks when studying and theorizing African women’s agency and feminism in African “development”.

And last but not least, as you have already noted, dear reader, I place myself within the realm of my African (Zimbabwean) community with whom, for and about whom I am writing. I shall be travelling between the use of the first, second and third persons as my identity in this thesis is also multi-dimensional, including my dialogue with you the reader. Collins (1998: xx-xxi) offers an insightful proposition that you, dear reader, and I might find useful in understanding such multi-dimensionality:

I realize that locating myself in the narrative runs certain risks. People from historically dis-empowered groups are typically not seen as theorists, and our work is not deemed theoretical, unless we produce theory in ways comparable to highly educated White men. This presents a real dilemma for Black women intellectual workers. If we criticize elite discourse using its terms, we gain legitimation for our work by traditional standards. But by doing so, we may simultaneously delegitimize our work in the eyes of [communities] who use different standards. [And] rather than allowing decisions about language to masquerade as seeming objectivity and political authority..., my choice of language [in this thesis] is both an intellectual and political decision.

***One: Keeping African Traditions Without
Being Traditional***

A Bird's Eye View: Why This Thesis, Why This Standpoint?

Honoring the ancestors and making them the point of entry and departure for this thesis facilitated the summoning of the courage I needed to fully engage in this process as an African woman. While writing a thesis is a requirement for me (and many a graduate student), it is usually a hoop and/or luxury that most of us do to get it over and done with. It was going to be a hoop and my “luxury” too, as at first I managed, from time to time, to convince myself that I was working on an academic project, one that demanded my mind only, and I had of necessity to shut out other locations that I am – other than an aspirant “scholar” of course. While this façade held on, I managed to produce a few pages and discuss them with my supervisor, all seemed well, and she assured me that I was in the right direction and technically speaking I was. Yet the more I tried to write the harder and more frustrating it got; I sunk into a deep sadness feeling trapped by (western) academia. For no sooner would I have had this assurance and sat down to continue writing, than I would sink again. I could not find my voice. I failed to understand why I had done so well thus far, and

now with the last piece of work needed to put the icing on the cake, I just could not move myself. For all through my two-year study period at Saint Mary's University, I had been blessed to have intellectually nurturing teachers, and almost all had allowed me the intellectual freedom to explore beyond the boundaries in each course I took. I respected their intellectual nurturance and "disciplined" myself not to "stray" too far out of academic limits, and I did the best I could to "blend" my African perspectives with Western ones – and this thesis was not going to be any different. This being the case, however, I had almost always made Western¹ (feminist) theoretical perspectives the starting point of whatever piece of work I was doing, because these were "scientific", "rational" and "universal", and therefore the logical starting point of any scholarly (development) piece of work. It had worked well thus far; yet when it came to the grand finale (this thesis), I just could not rise to the occasion.

What saved me from getting into a deep depression at that point were my spiritual (*not religious*) practices, these helped me maintain my inner and outer equilibrium. Through these exercises, I realized that the deep sadness which engendered my intellectual impotence was because I was having an inner struggle, a "...sweaty fight for meaning and *response-ability*" (Morrison,

1993: xi, my emphasis).² As though waking from a deep stupor, I realized that my ancestors (broadly defined) were denying me the privilege and luxury of book-knowledge. Unless I was going to “sweat and fight for meaning” and respond to hegemonic development³ models rammed down the throats of the “materially poor”, conceptualizing, let alone writing this work, was not going to happen. I had to find meaning in my own community,⁴ search for theory in my own African tradition, anchor myself in my own heritage so as to find the voice with which to ably respond. Thus while my thesis was in partial fulfillment of the requirements of my Master’s degree, it was to be primarily written for my community, and all those that would find it useful would be (and are) most welcome to our community.

When I was growing up in the early 1970s and 1980s, education in my community was defined and meant to be so much more than book-knowledge; there was always a distinction made between the book-learned and the educated person. While I cannot vouch that the elders in my community who described an ostentatious “degreed / diplomaed / certified” person as – ... *uya munhu akadya mabhuku chete asi haana hunhu*⁵ – fully understood their colonial realities, I am ever grateful that they made the distinction between book-knowledge and education. This daylight clarity was critical

for the younger generation, even though it was trivialized. In retrospect, I realize that it was from these vilified rich “illiterate” heritages which continue to be undermined, that most of us learnt the meaning and value of an (African) education. Many a child that went to school away from home in my day was reminded by the elders that no matter how much book-knowledge one got, and no matter how low or high one was in the social structure, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* – a person’s identity, value and dignity as a person was and is with community (Biko, 1998; Gyekye, 1998; Kaphagawani, 1998; Prinsloo, 1998). According to this philosophy, therefore, a person is a person by virtue of their community, and *not* because of their own individual achievement (separate from that of community).

It is thus to, for and with my community that I shall *labor for meaning and the ability to respond* through a holistic approach to this thesis writing process. It is a process and perspective that definitely flies in the face of (white, patriarchal and western) academic standards. And since I locate my thesis in the African ancestral and living community of Zimbabwe,⁶ my standpoint is “naturally” Afrocentric because:

...the center (cavity) of the community is located between the above and the below world. The reality of the cultural heritage of a community, that is, its knowledge, is the experience of that deepest reality found between the spiritualized ancestors and the physically living thinkers within the community.⁷

Conceptual Framework: Coming to Voice

The “*response-ability*” that this thesis is addressing, is that capacity to rejoin, to create conversation and the courage to transgress the “sacred” boundaries of White academe so as to create spaces for social change both within and without. It therefore calls for a critical need to chart new courses of theorizing “development”, so the discourse can have a focus clarified by both the means and the end of the development agenda.⁸

I am therefore assuming the right, responsibility and privilege of writing on African women’s agency and feminism (in Zimbabwe) in a “transgressive” manner; because first and foremost I am African, and am very aware that:

One of the most difficult things to do these days is to talk with authority on anything to do with African culture. Somehow Africans are not expected to have any deep understanding of their own culture or even of themselves. Other people have become authorities on all aspects of African life ...(Biko, 1996: 26).

This, however, is not to say being African only (however defined), is the sole determining factor in assuming this privilege. I assume it because that which is African, female, grounded in African philosophies and theories articulated by African women and feminist “scholars”⁹ is in acute short supply. I am also transgressing (Western) academic standards because I want to reclaim the subjugated knowledge that the colonizer termed “primitive” because it did not fit his (sic) own world view. It is in much of this colonized and subjugated knowledge and world views that the dishonored and unacknowledged ancestors are relegated to and only wake when it makes economic sense to the rich and the powerful. This thesis is a cry that joins the deep loud groan of the South from varied

... mountains, ..., points where stillness and movement are together. [It is from these points that] I invite you to listen to the wind;
 More specially to the wind from the South: the South as third world, as the civilizations of Africa, Asia, the Pacific, the Arab world, Latin America; the South as the voices and movements of peoples, wherever these movements exist;

The South as the visions and wisdoms of women:

The South as the discovering of new paradigms, which challenge the existing theoretical concepts and categories breaking the mind constructs, seeking a new language to describe what it perceives, refusing the one objective, rational, scientific world view as the only world view: the south as the recovery of other cosmologies, as the discovery of other knowledges

that have been hidden, submerged, silenced. The South as an 'insurrection of these subjugated knowledges'.

The South as history; the South as mystery...the South as the revelation of each civilization in its own idiom: the South as conversations between civilizations ...(Kumar, 1998: 1).

Hence, while the (Western) literature on women, gender and development is quite voluminous and rich in its own way, its Western ethnocentrism and colonizing agenda cuts the political tongue out of the mouths of those that seek indigenous and endogenous strategies for social transformation without the "tangible proof" of development. This lack of tangible "material" development silences those that question the social construction and production of development knowledge, a construction that sets out whom the have-nots and the haves are. Thus instead of structuring my research project based on the (Western) conventional "theory, method and case study" frameworks, I, as you may have already noted, dear reader, engage all three (and more) simultaneously throughout the thesis. The primary reason for this conceptual and methodological choice, is that it is very difficult to be linear in intellectual rigor and (academic) writing when one's ethos is constructed and informed by philosophical foundations that transcend the (Western) mathematical and scientific one plus one, equals two ($1+1=2$) methodology. This

however does not mean that this project will ignore some of the intellectually and spiritually stimulating (Western and feminist) development literature available, by no means. What it means is that I am heeding the call to *response-ability* from my ancestors because:

When you follow a path through the bush, you follow in the footsteps of those who were there before you. But as you are walking, you are not only following others, but you yourself are also making and keeping that path, because by walking on it, you step on grasses which could make the path disappear, or you can use your axe to cut some small branches or trees [that might block the path]. Now some day, a person can think: 'Why do I always follow this path? Maybe if I cut through these bushes here, I can make a shortcut'. So this person makes a new path. Now the next person, when [s]he arrives at this junction, [s]he can choose 'Shall I follow the old path or the new one?' If the people start following only the new path, the old one will disappear. But if some follow the old path, you will have more roads in the area. The same with a tradition, if you follow a tradition, you are keeping that tradition" (Kaulenti Chisenga).¹⁰

Chisenga's excellent analogy thus informs the conceptual and theoretical choices that I made and am making throughout this thesis. I am following in the African and Afrocentric footpath of my ancestors, elders and contemporaries who charted and are charting old and new ways of valuing African societies and people of African descent wherever they maybe. It, however, does not mean that I am going to be reifying Africanism while vilifying

Westernism.¹¹ What it means is that I shall be theorizing social change and transformation – read development – from African and Afrocentric perspectives using African, Afrofeminist¹² and Afrocentric lenses and tools of analysis, because:

Any interpretation of African culture must begin at once to dispense with the notion that in all things, Europe [and/or North America – the West] is teacher and Africa the pupil. To raise questions of an imperialist intellectual tradition is to ask one of the most meaningful questions as we pursue African [female agency and epistemology], because Western theorists have too often tended to generalize from an Euro[-Ameri]centric base. [Africaness] and Blackness are more than biological facts; indeed ... more than color, they function as a commitment to a historical project that places the African person back to the center and as such, it becomes an escape to sanity Asante (1987: 59).

It also means that I have to let you the reader (particularly those of the West) know that I do not classify my work as post-modern and/or post-colonial;¹³ and therefore, this is neither a de-construction of Western culture(s) and re-construction of African cultures. It is an Afrocentric project that refuses to use Western yardsticks to determine its validity and usefulness. It is a project primarily focused on listening and documenting what my African ancestors and communities are saying and/or taught and continue to teach me. For indeed, “...if some follow the old path [and others the new there], will be more roads in the area [of development theory, policy and praxis]”; I am coming to voice.

*Theorizing "Without the Mandate for Conquest"*¹⁴

Having said the foregoing, however, it does not make this project an African, Afrocentric and/or Afrofeminist caretaker project.

Rather, it is my heeding of the voice of the ancestors, a pouring of libation so as to be worthy to stand on the academic podium and contest the politics of (mis)representation that African women (and people) are subjected to in dominant development scholarship and arenas. The current state of women, gender and development theory, policy and practice necessitates the charting of new-old paths because the creators of the dominant (Western feminist) development paradigms have consciously and/or unconsciously

... aim[ed] to replace subjugated knowledge with their own specialized thought, because they realize that gaining control over this dimension of subordinate groups' lives simplifies control. [Thus] given that groups are unequal in power [and] in making themselves heard, dominant groups have vested interests in suppressing the knowledge produced [by subjugated groups] (Collins, 1991: 228 & 235).

By looking at feminist development issues in Zimbabwe from a multifaceted theoretical and methodological perspective, this project is also challenging the hierarchy that has been built in feminist development theory and praxis. This pecking order stakes

development theory and models as “naturally” coming from the “developed-First World” and case studies to test and/or substantiate these theoretical and methodological assumptions as necessarily from the “under-developed/developing-Real World”.¹⁵ This means that along with mainstream, patriarchal, and white supremacist political economy development theories and practice, where the Real World remains the producer of raw materials (intellectual and otherwise); most western feminist theories on women, gender and development do not challenge the economic development status quo. This perpetuates the old-age political-economy dependency model – *of the center-semi-periphery-periphery* – which ensures that the (Third World) producers of raw materials by and large do not enjoy the fruits of their labor in the same manner that the (First World) manufacturers produce primarily for its citizens – save a few privileged of the periphery that have aligned themselves with the center (Meena, 1992; Mbilinyi, 1992; McMichael, 1997; McFadden, 1998).

Thus through this study:

I want to draw a map, ... and use that map to open as much space for discovery, intellectual adventure, and close exploration ... - *without the mandate for conquest*. I intend to outline an attractive, fruitful, and provocative critical project, unencumbered by

dreams of subversion or rallying gestures at fortress walls (Morrison, 1993: 3; my emphasis).

For in as much as those that come from societies that advance and reward individualism will encourage and nurture the search for meaningful social change from their standpoints; I search for transformative strategies with my community because it is a community that rewards communalism – *esintwini umuntu ngu muntu ngabantu* (Biko, 1998; Prinsloo, 1998; Asante, 1987; Asante and Abarry, 1996; hooks, 1984, 1994). Therefore in order to theorize and strategize for African social transformation, Africans (and all interested parties) have to use African and Afrocentric experiences and tools to create knowledge because “The Master [and Mistress] Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master [and Mistress] House[s]” (Lorde, 1979: 98).

It is such a tragedy and an irony that the West is not willing to apply the same rules using the same tools it has and continues to invent and develop so as to police and rule the world, to investigate its own ethnocentrism and colonizing agenda(s) in “development”. In the same breath that the West denies Real World people’s cultural rights to self defined and determined development, it enforces an exhausting list of conditions for Western gender equality, democracy, participation, bottom-up approaches,

environmental awareness. These covert, highly sophisticated and immensely subtle contemporary imperial notions of colonization shrouded as “development” theory, policy and praxis have to be unveiled, denied the luxury of “promoting” “development” in ways that subjugate non-Western people’s ways of bringing about social change and transformation. As hooks (1994: 62) points out:

Often individuals who employ certain terms freely – terms like ‘theory’ or ‘feminism’ [equality, development ...] – are not necessarily practitioners whose habits of being and living most embody the action, the practice of theorizing or engaging in [those] struggle[s].

Therefore, if it so satisfies Western, and other gender “experts” and technocrats to carry out research and produce knowledge on women in the “Third World” for their intellectual pursuit, gratification and economic realities, they cannot and will not be denied the “privilege and luxury”. But by the same token, however, they shall be denied the privilege and luxury of desiring – overtly and covertly – to colonize African women and Real World People’s experiences and knowledge for Western consumption and/or to further Western and other hegemonic agendas. Exercising one’s freedom of expression among other rights and freedoms at the expense of other people’s rights is a practice that Western “civilization” has thrived on for so long and can no longer

be privileged to have. The resistance in armed struggle has taken a new turn: the South has to resist new forms of colonization masquerading as development research, yet creating frontiers of intellectual property ownership and patents. To this the South has to assert its own socio-cultural and political agency and demand the right to development, as Kumar (1998: 3) once more powerfully asserts:

The 'South' has, for too long, accepted a world view that has [homogenized] its cultures, decided its development model, defined its aesthetic categories, ... determined its science and technology A cosmology constructed of what has come to be known as 'universal' values; a cosmology whose philosophical, ideological and political roots were embedded in the specific historical context of the culture of the west. What qualified it then to be termed 'universal' ...? All that was western ... simply became universal. Every other civilization, every system of knowledge, came to be defined and compared vis-à-vis this paradigm submitting to its insights as imposition, its blindness as values, its tastes as canons, in a word, to its eurocentricities. The 'other' in this cosmology was the civilizations of Asia, the Pacific, Africa, Latin America and the Arab world. Scarcely twenty years were enough to make [two thirds of the world's population] define themselves as under-developed, vis-à-vis the [western] postwar growth model, the market economy and the international economic order conceived at Bretton Woods.¹⁶

The contestation of contemporary imperialism – development – that continues to reinvent itself is why those of the Real World have to have the courage of the ancestors to stand up and refuse to be

defined or have our way of life deemed “*alternative*” to and by the West. For it is through this collective voice articulated in different forms that the South can take the wind out of the North’s sails and put a stop to the denigrating pecking order that contemporary “development” reinforces.

“The African Book Without A Title”¹⁷: The ‘Missing’ Literature Review

For most of my life, I have been immersed in written books of one form or another. Yet the oral tradition of my African heritage just as much informs my social worldview because stories and story-tellers have always been an integral part of most African societies; they tell stories with a graphic description that is lyrically rich and carries with it the symbolism of life’s lessons, joys, pain and challenges (Asante, 1987; Prinsloo, 1998). Thus while the “choice” of a “different” thesis “foot path”, is my own, it is also a choice embedded in the world view of the community that taught me my first idiom and philosophies, a community that taught me life’s lessons from the “African Book Without A Title”. Since my conception of “development” is informed by this standpoint, trying to construct a conventional (western) literature review for such a project is therefore undesirable. Christiansen-Ruffman (1998: 15) compellingly argues the undesirability and problematics of a

traditional literature review when entering the arena of knowledge creation and production through the non-dominant and/or “alternative” perspective doors. She describes her struggles for a feminist sociology in (western) patriarchal academe as follows:

I rejected the conventional literature review because of its focus on the creation, celebration and reproduction of individualized, abstracted, ‘objective’ knowledge that embody patriarchy and [Western] ethnocentrism. I knew I could not accomplish the lofty claims of the scholarly literature review – to account for all knowledge and then to order it abstractly, in the name of objectivity. The literature review has a western, English language bias and social location. The available publications and abstracts provide an inadequate and incomplete sampling basis and deny access to feminist knowledge used in praxis, written in other languages and published in obscure sources such as the so-called ‘gray literature’ of reports and non-books. Even if one ignores this sampling bias, often the literature reifies [Western and] patriarchal knowledge because it cannot question the layers of [colonial] and patriarchal assumptions, even within published feminist articles, and then it utilizes abstracted [Western] patriarchal concepts to inter-relate articles. The association of authors’ names with ideas in a literature review suggests ownership and individual invention Too often individual authors are cited for knowledge that they appropriated and had no role in creating.

This being the case, however, it does not mean that individuals within communities and societies are not tasked with the responsibility of “representing” their community’s worldview (in writing and otherwise). From African standpoints, it means that

those of us documenting our African communities' ontology and epistemologies¹⁸ have to necessarily move toward the reclamation of de-hierarchicized and de-colonized African and Afrocentric education.¹⁹ Thus those of us (Africans) that write today have the social obligation to keep the tradition – without being traditional – of tuning ourselves in toward the living community and that of our ancestors so as to preserve the reality and sense of community as we produce knowledge about our African societies. It means that writing like the act of living and being, has to be necessarily part of community since it is essentially and simultaneously a communal and personal experience. It cannot therefore be claimed as solely one person's act and achievement as there is the community involved in the social construction of that personal and communal reality and therefore the writing.

Concurrent with conventional academic standards, therefore, I am going to utilize those ways of knowing that inform African worldviews, African ways of being, knowing and doing. That is, I shall be utilizing citations from African "*orature*", rituals, written and spoken fiction, poetry, idioms, proverbs and folk songs *inter-alia* because African philosophies are informed by more than just the written word as Asante (1987: 60) reminds us:

What is of importance to us is [to remember] that Africans ...[have] an expressive sense that manifest[s] itself as a life force in dance, music and speech. Expression, therefore, is not the captive of the written word; it is the word revealed in life. I use the term *orature* to refer to this phenomenon ... the sum total of oral tradition, which includes vocality, drumming, storytelling, praise singing, and naming.

This perspective might seem “unscholarly” to those (particularly Westerners) accustomed to the literal word as the primary representation of knowledge creation, production and reproduction. Yet if we are to find African centered solutions for African development problems, then we have to start from the African people’s own culture. We, therefore, do not need to always “deconstruct” Western constructs as we create our own, instead, our energies are to be tuned toward the healing of our traumatized African psyches as we create grounded knowledge with, for and within our societies. We need to articulate our own theories from our own socio-cultural locations in a way that represents knowledge creation, production and reproduction as experienced and lived by our African communities.

For instance, in contemporary society around the world, if anyone wants to pursue a degree in (Western oriented and centered) development, sociology, economics, psychology, medicine, political science among other disciplines, the learning of classical theories

by the (Western) fathers (sic) of these disciplines is not only imperative, it is the essence of mastering them. Any student from anywhere in the world able to articulate these Western classical theories and apply them to their own “developing” social reality comes to be identified by or with that school of thought and or theorist(s), like Karl Marx – Marxism; Sigmund Freud – Freudian; Maynard Keynes – Keynesian *inter alia*. Thus, while what I am saying about (my) African ancestors and African societies as sources of knowledge for African development might sound “alien” and “deviant” to many, essentially it is not. I am just being as faithful to academic rigor and standards as any other Western (oriented and centered) scholar in any field who starts any scholarly project on a particular philosophical and social issue by reflecting on the teachings of Western ancestor(s). Therefore, for this African project, citations from African *orature* is my way of reflecting on the teachings of the African ancestors so we can better understand African people and African women’s agency and epistemology in Zimbabwe.

Seeing Through The African Lens: Methodological Framework

Given the foregoing conceptual illustration, the literature review for this project is therefore circular, interconnected and linear only in

its chronology as it taps into different kinds of knowledges. It refuses to regurgitate and/or reinforce the same stereotypes found in much of the dominant Western feminist, gender and development literature, stereotypes that objectify African women knowledge and agency. Tapping into the richness of African orature means delving deeper into Africa's contributions to development discourses from women's standpoints, because colonial education in Zimbabwe and much of the Real World was not only racist; it was also sexist. Many African women today find themselves trapped and deemed "backward" and culturally "conservative" because they are dis-advantaged by the non-acquisition of the "modern" basic skills of reading and writing (Van Allen, 1972; McFadden, 1998; Nadin, 1997). Yet these same "illiterate" ²⁰ women have given and continue to give us the "literate" academic development "experts" the "data" to assert our "women, gender and development theories" and "expertise" as we test our academic hypotheses in the "fields" of their lives.

In order to fully understand and engage this Afrocentric perspective of the development story of African women in Zimbabwe, the author and reader have to necessarily journey into the margins.²¹ For it is in the vilified, the forgotten, the obscure, the "primitive" and the "under-developed" African woman that we

shall learn, re-learn and claim the beauty, genius and challenges of African (female) agency, which will inform our construction of Afrofeminist epistemology for organic and radical social transformation. Because not to go into the past, into the margins is to kill the ancestors, and “[w]hen you kill the ancestor[s] you kill yourself ...[and] nice things do not always happen to the totally self-reliant” (Morrison, qtd. in James, 1993: 43).

Given the foregoing, it is therefore very important for you, dear reader, to be constantly aware that information in this thesis is not processed in a linear (point A to point Z) logic. Such logic – inherent in a conventional Western thesis – would thwart the purpose of this study where the only guarantee is the exciting and unexpected, because:

... within traditional African cosmology, philosophers travel full circle to realize metaphysical ideals – freedom, beauty ... – on the physical realm; they think and act in service to the community; ... connecting spiritual and material worlds merge[ing] ideals with action. Here philosophy is not viewed as an idle luxury of a privileged sector or as alienated mental abstractions. Philosophy is practical. Its pragmatic function is service. Philosophy, in this worldview, is a necessity, for it embodies active service for the good of the community and individuals within the community (James, 1993: 33).

This thesis is therefore a personal and collective spiritual journey, an intellectual exercise, a physical discipline, a privilege and an honor to be *umuntu ebantwini* and represent the “race”.²² It is a journey that begins on the lap of the woman who taught me my first idiom; the meaning of community and:

Believe it or not²³

..., it was my “illiterate” African mother
That taught me how to recycle
Before I went to “school” and
Learnt how to spell *r-e-c-y-c-l-e!*
And yes, you heard right I said the “*illiterate*” African Women!

Do I trace a cynical smile on your face?
Well believe it or not,
It is my “illiterate” African mother
Who taught me how to use “*appropriate technology*” for the land
So the soil can retain its soul and life giving self,
When the rain comes lashing down
With the impatience of a full bladder!

Oh yeah, believe it or not,
It was my “illiterate” mother
Who said to me,
Baby girl, you go to school!
And it is my “illiterate” African mother that says to me
Excel in school my baby, learn and share of yourself.
And remember to compare yourself with only yourself my baby,
Don't compare yourself with anybody else,
Because you are not them, and they are not you!

And believe it or not, some of what
My “illiterate” mother taught me
I have seen and have been reading in them books.
A lot of it has not been any different from what she taught me,
And what her “illiterate” African mother taught her before me.

I got a letter from my "illiterate" mother the other day,
 Believe it or not!
 She wrote me the most beautiful letter an "illiterate" African mother
 Can ever write to her literate daughter.
 She wanted to know how her baby girl was doing in school.

*You go baby mine..., my "illiterate" mother wrote me.
 Learn what the books and the learned people say.
 Only, don't lose nor forget who you really are.
 I raised you the best I knew then,
 I learnt it from the university I and my peers attended in those days,
 The University of Life Experience.
 Your life today is very different my baby,
 And the skills for survival in today's world,
 Come from a different type of university,
 And you will do me proud learning, giving and sharing as best you can.*

I wrote back and said;
 You know what Ma, I have and am learning a lot,
 But believe it or not,
 What I learnt from your "illiterate" self has been
 The best foundation for whatever education I have,
 Have been having and will ever have.

I read in some of the books
 And realize that you are and have always been an environmentalist.
 I read in some of the books, the patterns that you learned,
 Observed, experimented with, adapting it to your life over time,
 This way you learnt what works and what doesn't in raising me.
 And Ma believe it or not, you were *theorizing!*
 You were producing *scientific* knowledge!
 Of course some of it might belong to archives now, but heck much of it is
 still so applicable and making such a comeback you won't believe it.

Take heart Ma, what you taught me,
 I will not squeeze between my thighs as I sit in the citadels of knowledge.
 And believe it or not,
 The citadels of knowledge *Are* because of what you
 And all other non-book-learneds have and continue to share with
 Book-learneds Who have and still make their names
 By studying your experiences and producing *scientific knowledge*.
 And yes believe it or not, I have joined their ranks,

And yet remain illiterate in so many ways that you are literate in.

Ma, I will not shy away from saying I learnt it
 From "illiterate" and African you,
 Who learnt it from your African "illiterate" mother,
 Who learnt it from her African "illiterate" mother,
 Whose "illiterate" African mother passed onto her

Yes Ma, believe it or not,
 You and I shall reclaim what you, your mother,
 Her mother, her mother's mother and all "illiterate" African mothers
 Could, did and have not codified in writing.

You and me Ma will be co-authors in memory of the forgotten memory
 A memory that connoisseurs in the art of making knowledge
 Have not only drawn from but patented!
 Yes, believe it or not Ma, what is in most of the books that I study,
 Comes from what "illiterates" like you,
 Have and continue to share with literates like me!

May your "illiterate" vision and longing for a "literate" me,
 Be a beacon of light for me, a source of strength and refuge
 As the pressure to forget and denigrate my Africanness harasses me,
 And all that is African in me,
 Wanting me to forget that I learnt to recycle from you,
 Before the environmental movement was born....
 Thank you for being my mother,
 and the African woman that you are to me (Charumbira, 1997).

Endnotes

¹ By Western I generally refer to Whiteness as an ideology of subjugation of Colorful people – so called people of Color – particularly Black people wherever we are.

² The scholarly, fictional and collective genius of Diasporic Africans (particularly African-American women and men) have been a necessary anchor for a *shell-shocked-fresh-from-Africa* student of international development and women's studies that I once was. I have therefore found their work particularly liberating as I strove to find meaning in my ancestral heritage in a capitalist society. Thus in as much as I honor my "own" ancestors, I feel just as deeply connected to the Spirits of African (and African-American) slaves that built North America (and the Western world) through blood, tears, sweat, untold and untellable human suffering. They were the sacrifice offered at the altar of western "civilization" and "democracy", and their anguish is not to be forgotten.

To you Oh Spirits that came before me in slave ships bound in chains enduring rape, torture, hunger and the unimaginable horrors of the Black Holocaust, I Venerate and pour libation in deep gratitude. I Thank You oh Spirits that endured the trauma of being traded like stocks on the market, yearned for home and freedom as you wandered in a strange and brutal land. You did not die in vain. I honor the price you paid a price that ironically made it possible for me to choose to travel and study in North America of my own accord. For you, traveling to North America was not a choice five and even up to less than a century ago. Yet it seemed and seems "natural" for me and my generation today – despite the hurdles put in place to "keep ethnics where they belong" – to travel to North America. Weep not, your dream to unite with your motherland was not in vain, weep not, for we shall reclaim every last one of your wandering souls, and bring them to rest in peace in this land of your slavery, and that of your ancestry.

³ Esteva (1994: 7-8, 10) has one of the most illuminating "definitions" of the concept, term and project of development that this thesis is going to be utilizing and building on, and using interchangeably with social change and/or (social) transformation.

For those who make up two-thirds of the world's population today, to think of development – of any kind of development – requires first the perception of themselves as underdeveloped, with the whole burden of connotations that this carries. Today, for two-thirds of the peoples of

the world, underdevelopment is a threat that has already been carried out; a life experience of subordination and of being led astray, of discrimination and subjugation. Given that precondition, the simple fact of associating with development one's own intention tends to annul the intention, to contradict it, to enslave it. It impedes thinking of one's own objectives..., it undermines confidence in oneself and one's own culture..., it converts participation into a manipulative trick to involve people in struggles for getting what the powerful want to impose on them For two-thirds of the people on earth, [the] positive meaning of the word development – profoundly rooted in two centuries of its social construction – is a reminder of *what they are not*. It is a reminder of an undesirable, undignified condition. To escape from it, they need to be enslaved to other's experiences and dreams.

⁴ I use the term community interchangeably with *Ubuntu/Hunhu* – *Isintu/Chivanhu* which are Ndebele and Shona concepts. While there is extensive Western literature on definitions of community, I will not engage in that debate. Here I use community in the African ancestral and historical sense of a person's individual identity as inextricably linked to that of the collective, and principally as not superceding that of the collective. This, however, does not mean that *Ubuntu/Chivanhu* is a natural trait, it means it is a social philosophy that most people of Africa and those of African descent in the Diaspora still more or less have as an ethos of defining African people (Wiredu, 1998; Gyekye, 1996; Biko, 1996; Prinsloo, 1996; Asante, 1987, 1990; Asante and Abarry, 1996).

⁵ This expression was usually used to describe the pompous “educated” people like university graduates (very few at the time), teachers, nurses or some such people that had accessed colonial education in as far as Africans (Blacks) were allowed to go. The expression literally describes (or means) *someone as having ate books only, yet without personhood*. The closest one can get to translate this idiom is: *a person might be well read (have book knowledge or be degreed) but unless they have a sense of community and use their (book) knowledge to advance the community, then their knowledge is morally bankrupt*. I therefore use this expression to illustrate the perspective with which I approach this thesis. It is also important to note at this point, that I grew up in a multicultural community, and by extension I acquired more than one language and culture. Because of this, I shall therefore be traveling across some of these cultures and languages to “capture” some of the expressions that will facilitate the intellectual “processing” of this thesis. I shall be identifying and explaining which language the expression(s) comes from, if, as and when the need arises. I say this because there are more commonalties than differences in these diverse cultures, and I will celebrate the cultural diversity in as much as I highlight the similarities.

And lastly, I consider translation/interpretation an art more than a skill, and while I am skilled, I shall endeavor to be artistic in my translation so as to “capture” the essence of the meaning of concepts and expressions, more than the literal meaning.

⁶ I will refer to this country as Zimbabwe throughout the thesis, even for the colonial era, and will only state Rhodesia or Southern Rhodesia for clarification purposes, or where it would confuse the reader to make out the period under discussion. The – teapot like – space we now know as Zimbabwe on the (physical) geography map was officially declared British territory on September 2, 1890, and was named Rhodesia after the leader of the colonial pack, Cecil John Rhodes. It then became part of the Federation of Southern and Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the latter two countries getting their independence in the 1960s and reclaimed as Zambia and Malawi respectively, leaving Zimbabwe as Rhodesia (Martin and Johnson, 1981).

⁷ This is a “Kongo proverb – philosophy”.

⁸ This dilemma is usually engendered by the fact that most teachers who teach international development are Northerners with “Third World expertise”, not that they cannot do the work. The problem is that their work becomes the most important sources of information (books, journal articles among other media) that students and other interested parties use to do their research on particular “Third World” issues; and feminist and/or gender literature in development is no exception. Accessing “Third World” or “progressive” Northern literature means one has to go out of “development” canons, and even more, one has to go out of “acceptable” scholarly referred work to get to the “soul” of “Third World” development.

⁹ I use the term “scholars” very loosely here, to refer to more than just those academically accredited with (western) degrees, diplomas and some such qualifications; so they can speak “for” the “rest”. I use it to mean all those silent, loud, soft, subtle, overt, and covert voices of women (and men) who articulate issues pertinent to their individual and collective lives as members and contributors to community “development”. For enlightening articulations on notions of methodological constructs of knower and the known, see among many, many others; hooks, 1984; Mbilinyi, 1992; Collins, 1991; Spelman, 1988; Christiansen-Ruffman, 1985, 1998; Smith, 1992; Maguire, 1987; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Whyte, 1955.

¹⁰ Kaulenti Chisenga is a Zambian farmer quoted in a thesis (by Hans Seur) on agricultural change in his country, and is here quoted from Cecile Jackson (1997: 162). My choice of naming Kaulenti Chisenga as the originator instead of the persons that quoted him first, is in an effort to cut through the academic (and intellectual) bureaucracy that builds up slowly but surely in development literature. Issues of intellectual “property” rights come up, and as shall be

explored shortly, sometimes knowledge even though written and/or synthesized by one person, does not necessarily mean that they are the sole owners and originators of that knowledge (Christiansen-Ruffman, 1998). Placing Chisenga as the originator in this quote questions notions of “discovery” of the “New World”, “Dark Continent” and the “Far East” and the conquest missions that were (and still are) carried out to expand empires.

In Zimbabwe, one of the greatest jokes about “discoveries”, is David Livingstone’s (a British 19th century “explorer”) “discovery” of *Mosi óa Tunya – The Smoke that Thunders* – which he re-named after the queen of England at the time – Victoria (see also, Philip, 1991). To this day this natural wonder remains stigmatized by colonialism as “Victoria Falls”, because the tourism industry in Zimbabwe among many other socio-economic sectors of this country remain predominantly White owned and operated. The effort to rename “Victoria Falls” when most names were changed after independence sparked an intriguing colonial controversy. The tourism industry it is argued cited that it would not be economically viable to “rename” this site because “no-one” (read Westerners, especially British) would recognize the name, and this might lower business profits. This is a whole topic on its own, but it serves to illustrate (small as it may seem), the vicious cycle that “developing” countries find themselves in, when they attempt to define their own “development” paths when the rules have already been laid down.

One can only ask the question: If White male colonials “discovered” so much natural and historical phenomenon across Africa and the Real World, what are we to make of the intellectual, spiritual and non-tangible realities that they “discovered”, coded and patented as their own phenomenon which are “harder” to “prove” than natural falls, mountains and even art?

¹¹ See also Morrison, 1993.

¹² *Defining Feminism*

Like many concepts, Feminism as a term has been defined differently by different people located in different spaces in the social structure. In this thesis, (African) feminism Afrofeminism is defined as primarily a political, social, cultural and economic movement that advocates the rights, privileges and responsibilities of women, children, and the oppressed in this society (and globally). It is a heterogeneous movement that is multi-centered propelled by an ethics of care for human life, the environment and universe that we inhabit (Miles, 1996). Feminism as a political movement has been around in most societies longer than the Western notions of individual female autonomy largely found in most dominant Westcentric feminist, women, gender and development literature. Westcentric feminism(s) reflects Western values, and while there is nothing necessarily “wrong” with that, the problem is that this type(s) of feminism(s) has

become universalized and used as the yardstick(s) for “measuring” female agency, epistemology and activism across cultures. Feminism in Africa

... owes its origins to different dynamics than those that generated Western feminism. African women’s resistance to Western hegemony and its legacy with African culture have largely shaped it. Clearly, it does not grow out of bourgeois individualism and the patriarchal control over women within capitalist industrializing societies The African variant of feminism ... is concerned with many bread, butter, culture and power issues ... [because it] grows out of a history of female integration within largely corporate and agrarian based societies with strong cultural heritages that have experienced traumatic colonization by the West. Until recently, the reference points for Western feminists and African women activists have been totally different, because Western women were emphasizing individual female autonomy, while African women have been emphasizing culturally linked forms of public participation (Mikell, 1997: 4).

In this thesis therefore, feminism is conceptualized as necessarily a collective experience, an experience that the individual owns because it is a shared sense of community, a search for social transformation. In this regard, I shall also be referring to Afrofeminism and/ African (Black) feminism as defined by Collins (1998: 67);

... the term *[African] Black feminism* ... disrupts the racism inherent in presenting feminism as a for-White-[Western]-only ideology and political movement. Inserting the adjective *Black* challenges the assumed Whiteness in feminism and disrupts the false universal use of this term Since many White women think that Black women lack feminist consciousness, the term *Black feminist* both highlights the contradictions underlying the assumed Whiteness of feminism and reminds White women that they are neither the only nor the normative ‘feminists’. [The term] *Black feminist* challenges Black women to confront their own views on sexism and women’s oppression, [which] makes many African ... women uncomfortable. Even though they African ... women may support global feminist ideas, large numbers ... reject the term feminism because of its association with Whiteness. They are not alone in this rejection, ... [non-white] women ... globally have questioned the association of the term *feminism* with Western domination.

¹³ It is important that I make it clear to the reader from the onset, that I do not consider my work post-modernist, even post-colonialist in any way – the

modernization and colonial processes and projects are still very much alive and ongoing. I have read (and occasionally cite) the works of some post-modern and post-colonial scholars, and while I find some of their work quite interesting, I have generally shied away from it because it would take my project in a totally different direction, and would erode my ability to respond responsibly. Collins (1998: 222) eloquently observes this dilapidating diversion when she discusses post-modernism in the United States of America's (USA) feminist movement:

White ... [feminist] critics of standpoint theory may emerge in part from discouragement with the seeming failure of feminist struggles for sisterhood. In part, the increasing attraction of the post-modernism form by many White ... feminists may lie in its de-constructive mode. By arguing that multiracial, multicultural women's collectivities are neither desirable nor possible, post-modernism seems to offer no way out. Turning attention away from challenging women's oppression to de-constructing the modern subject provides conceptual space to sidestep the theoretical failures of Western feminism. If women cannot be organized as a group, then groups themselves must go, and everything associated with them, including standpoints.

¹⁴ Morrison (1993: 3)

¹⁵ *The Real World, the "South" and/or the "Third World"*

The term "Real World" shall be utilized interchangeably with the "Third World or the South" – other scholars like Miles (1996) articulate this concept as "Two-Thirds World". The concept/term Real World emerged from discussions with friends, as we shared the joys, pain and challenges of trying to conceptualize development from an African, Southern and/or Afrocentric perspective without being silenced by the post-modern flag or as reinventing the Western (feminist) wheel. Western hegemony in development theory, policy and praxis, chokes the life out of subjugated knowledges of African (development) traditions. It makes those that try to bring them to voice risk being branded reductionist, essentialist and romanticizing the past, yet in the same breath, the romanticization of Westocentric development is rammed down our psyches as the ideal. Thus when I say people who live in the "Real World", I mean those that live with the reality of having to pay for development with their lives. Those that depend on the soil for their livelihood yet live with the reality that fertilizers, pesticides and other poisons have irrevocably polluted and "killed" the soil. I am talking about those that live on the fringes of internal and external power structures only to be a spectacle "captured" by the eye of the camera of the powerful. Their images are beamed across the "civilized" world to remind its "civilized consumer" society how "lucky" they are to have been born in a capitalist society (Charumbira, 1999a). By naming this the "Real World", I am owning my individual agency as part of a collective that is increasingly marginalized. I am therefore refusing to

allow the real, relative and/or imagined fear of ostracization (broadly defined) to colonize my soul and mind thereby paralyzing my voice from protesting the damage that Western development brings to my community. As Kumar (1998: 2) once more urges us,

...we must no longer be afraid to ask the non-questions, to analyze what is considered non-data, the non-rational, the non-scientific. Perhaps we must begin to search outside the dominant discourse, beneath the required level of scientificity and beyond the established parameters of knowledge, discovering the *disqualified* knowledges and civilizations that are non-western, the social knowledges and civilizations of those who are on the edges – tribals, indigenous peoples, women, and to discern in their mythologies, in their metaphor, in their motif, other world views. We must move away from traditions of the dominant discourse and find ourselves in that terrain which has been denigrated by the discourse – the eastern, the black, [the african], the indigenous, the woman. To discover hidden knowledges of the South in the South; of the South in the North. To listen to the wisdoms of these vernacular, local knowledges against all that is dominant and hegemonistic. Perhaps, we may then move to creating new political visions that are holistic, more holographic, responding to the complexities of reality, more critically, more creatively (my emphasis).

¹⁶ See also Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983; Mies, 1998.

¹⁷ Fu-Kiau, K. Kia Bunseki, 1980.

¹⁸ Stanley and Wise (1993: 194, 188-189) excellently define ontology and epistemology as follows:

An '**ontology**' is a theory of 'reality' or of being ..., [of both the mind and body]. [An African] feminist ontology is concerned with theorizing being, and ... understanding the relationship between the body, the mind ... emotions, [the spirit and community] (194). An '**epistemology**' is a framework or theory for specifying the constitution and generation of knowledge about the social world; that is, it concerns how to understand the nature of 'reality' [ontology]. A given epistemological framework specifies not only what 'knowledge' is and how to recognize it, but who are the 'knowers' and by what means someone becomes one, and also the means by which competing knowledge-claims are adjudicated and some rejected in favor of another/others. The question of epistemology, then, is crucial, precisely *fundamental* for [African] feminism, for it is around the constitution of [an African] -feminist epistemology that [African]

feminism can most directly and [deeply] challenge [Western and] non-feminist frameworks and ways of working.

¹⁹ The notion of education is one that needs a deeper analysis in the African context. For over time, there has been a synonymity drawn between illiteracy (the inability or lack of reading and writing skills), and being uneducated – not having attended colonial type schools or present day educational systems modeled on Western education (Nadin, 1997). This construct has over time dis-empowered the majority of women, particularly those in the rural areas where in the name of “culture”, women were denied access to colonial education in the manner that men were allowed to. Education as defined in this thesis, is the transmission of social norms and values and skills *inter alia* from one generation to the next in the maintenance of a society’s way of life (culture). This definition is informed by the reality that in pre-colonial times most (if not all) women and men were “educated” people, because they were taught those skills that prepared them to live life to their full potential in their societies. European colonization wiped out the African educational system, imposing its own based on racial, gender and class discrimination. This disproportionately disadvantaged women who remained on the periphery and unrecognized as repositories of a rich base of knowledge on African society (Van Allen, 1972; McFadden, 1998; Gaidzanwa, 1992; Mahlase, 1997; Asante, 1987; Asante and Abarry, 1996). The issues mentioned here shall be further explored in the next chapter and in chapter five.

²⁰ I am acutely aware that in this literacy (of the written word) driven world, exulting African women’s varied ways of knowing can be read as celebrating our “ignorance” and reifying our poverty. In a world where education (read book-knowledge) is a primary development issue for millions of African women and girl children, and of which I am privileged to have, we have to question and demystify these hierarchies while formulating strategies for ensuring social justice for women and the underclass of the world who have and continue to be excluded by varied forms of power and categorization. The reality that millions of dollars have been spent on “educating” African women and girls children and yet millions more remain in abject poverty, vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and all sorts of circumstances, means this issue has to be addressed urgently and more holistically (McFadden, 1992; Van Allen, 1972; Sachs, 1996; Dubisch, 1993; Moore, 1993; Abwunza, 1996; Cutrufelli, 1985; Raheja, 1996).

²¹ For an excellent articulation of journeying into the margins, see among many others, hooks, 1984.

²² I was taught never to forget that wherever I go, whatever I do, I am judged on the pretext that I am African, Black and woman, and therefore unwittingly represent the race, and particularly African women. Thus if I do anything “bad”, all Black women (people) are “bad”, if I earn my keep, then Black women (people) work hard All these might be considered stereotypes (among other

labels), yet while I was conceptualizing and re-conceptualizing the writing of this thesis much of it rang true as it did then. I will not claim to speak for the Black race in its broad African and Afro-Diasporic diversity, yet I shall accept the social obligation and responsibility to “sweat for meaning and write response-ably”. I am not the sole creator or the first to “discover” this, my mother (broadly defined) knew it before me, so did her mother, and her mother’s mother; all through the generations of mothers (and fathers) that passed this knowledge to me (and their children) which I freeze today on this paper in written form, see poem.

²³ I wrote this poem over a three-month period from December 1997 to March 1998, from conversations I had with my mother in my dreams *and in retrospect, marking the beginning of the writing of this thesis*. I struggled with the reality that “development” is not what she or her mother, and most of the Real World needs. Instead, they just want to be left to live their lives in ways that are meaningful to them, ways that retain the soul of and sense of community where they live and in relation to the ecological environment in which they find themselves, while welcoming those that come to share different knowledges from diverse societies.

Two: Searching for the Silver Lining: Women in Pre-Colonial and Colonial Zimbabwe

Introduction

In order to understand the organic and radical development of Zimbabwe and particularly of women in this country, the recollection of the legacy of African and Afrocentric personal and collective agencies personified by Mbuya Nehanda¹ is not only necessary; it is paramount. Mbuya Nehanda, one the ancestors of this country's *Zvimurenga* – liberation struggles – has to be put back into the center of our discussion of Afrocentric development, and our search for the silver lining of women's agency in pre-colonial and colonial Zimbabwean societies. We have to will her (and all our ancestors) back into the community; we have to theorize her life, so she (and all our individual and collective ancestors) can guide us as we deliberate on strategies for social change and transformation. Thus, as I pointed out in the introductory and first chapters, in order for us to find sustainable African and Afrocentric development strategies, we have to place our African ancestors at the center of our theorizing. It also means that we have to look within our contemporary community for grounded clues and frameworks to guide and direct our lives.

It means that instead of invoking Western female and male ancestors whose theories inform Western knowledge, we invoke the wisdom of our own African ancestors to inform our African social theory before internalizing those of others. It means we also invoke the wisdom and authority of our own individual and collective experiences so as to begin to actualize notions of *Isintu lo Buntu*. This way, we take western knowledge as complimentary and/or supplementary knowledge to expand our worldview on how other societies function, but not as the quintessential wisdom on which to model our own social realities. Tuning into ourselves in this manner ensures that we de-colonize our minds from seeing our theories as less important, worse still, as non-theory because they do not have the “necessary” “abstractions”, “complexities” and other “tough” features. For if “theory” is not tough, then it is not theory, and since men more than women in our society have accessed Western theory, we have to see them as doing theory, while women’s experiences are “nothing” but female experiences – *zvinhu zvechikadzi*.

The study of an ancestor like Nehanda as philosopher, as shall be later discussed, means we produce theory that comes from and suits our society. It also means we desist from fanning flames of superiority, claiming the universal applicability of our social theories the way western knowledge has done for centuries

through coercive and other assimilation strategies. Instead, our theories should be informed by our lived experiences, which in turn form the basis of the decisions we make about our life as a society. From this grounding, then, we read what other societies have produced as useful information that we can learn from, so we can strengthen and/or begin to build cross-cultural alliances that are not motivated by conquest.²

In this chapter we shall turn our focus into the past, in an effort to unearth the roots and/or misconceptions of African culture on which most of the women and/or gender and development program and project “failures” are often “blamed”. The condition and status of the majority of women in this country bleeds this society to its very soul. And as long as women and children are not fully participating as co-decision makers at all levels we can be sure that as a nation we have betrayed our ancestors, denied and continue to deny our history.

I shall begin this chapter with a brief geographic and historical description of present day Zimbabwe, contextualizing the socio-cultural make-up of the present day population. This is followed by a focus on the advent of colonialism and the establishment of apartheid in this country. This historical account, like much of the thesis, while literal, is much more an Afrocentric interpretive and

metaphoric account of African women's agency in Zimbabwe. This is mainly due to the problems embedded in conventional Western, Western centered and oriented literature – historical, anthropological and sociological among others – that has perfunctorily denied African women's lives from their non-Afrocentric standpoints. Of interest here is the understanding of women's situation and status in the construction of what constitutes present day Zimbabwean society. The last section of this chapter examines African women's agency as invoked in the name and spirit of Mbuya Nehanda, as women responded to the untellable conditions under which they operated, motivating them to participate in the second *Chimurenga* as combatants, grassroots mobilizers, and organizers, consenting and/or coerced participants alongside their male counterparts.

Contextualizing Zimbabwe – Geo-politically and Socio-Economically

Zimbabwe as we know it today is a landlocked country that lies to the southeastern part of Southern Africa. Its borders were partitioned during “the scramble for Africa” as European colonials scrambled to expand empires, “incidentally” at the time that slavery was abolished. I say “incidentally” because through the study of history, one can trace that when overt slavery was said to

abolished, capitalism had already re-invented itself, ensuring that Africa remained a source of cheap labor and exploitation for the benefit of Western empires. As Mason (1997: 203) points out:

Until the 19th century most of the African hinterland had remained beyond the reach of European control, but between 1875 and 1900 ... almost the entire continent south of the Sahara ... [was colonized] ... after deciding on the rules for the division of Africa at a conference held in Berlin [Germany] in 1885. [T]he major European powers – Britain, France, Portugal, Germany, Belgium and Spain – sent small bands of armed men to invade the continent and stake out its lands. This invasion – a kind of a gold rush for territory – became known as ‘the scramble for Africa’. Only Liberia, an unofficial U.S. protectorate, and Ethiopia remained independent.

Juxtaposing the foregoing statement with the reality that the abolishment of slavery was officially discussed at a congress in Vienna, Austria in 1815, it is clear that the abolishment of slavery was a well calculated Western centered and oriented step (Nyerere, 1996; wa Thiong’o, 1986; Mason, 1997; McMichael, 1996).

Donnelly (1998: 4) clarifies this issue stating that a “... treaty to abolish slavery was finalized in 1890, ... [yet it was] a treaty to abolish slavery, [not the] international trade in slaves, a treaty not drafted until 1926”. Martin and Johnson (1981: 36) take the argument further noting that

... Europeans ... portrayed themselves as liberators who ended the slave trade and brought peace. [In

fact, they] brutally enforced their will and enriched themselves while crushing African political, economic and cultural autonomy, relegating ... Africans to new forms of slavery and denigrating traditional authority and values.

It is from this reality, therefore, that I shall be discussing the colonization of Zimbabwe of any and every kind.³

The socio-political history of what is modern day Zimbabwe spans many centuries, and a much larger (land) area. Then, it was much wider, stretching east to the Indian Ocean to include a large portion of present day Mozambique (Bourdillon, 1982; Ranger, 1967; Nyangoni, 1977; Blake, 1977; Nelson, 1983; Asante and Abarry, 1996). As Martin and Johnson (1981: 36-37) illustrate:

Contrary to ... settler propaganda, the area of [what used to constitute Zimbabwe] was bounded by the Zambezi River in the north, the Limpopo River in the South and the Indian Ocean to the east.... It had complex [empires] with stable political and economic system[s]; and evidence of this great sophistication is seen in the stone [city-states] - *Dzimba dza Mabwe Zimbabwe* - [Houses of Stone] scattered around the country including the Great Zimbabwe.

Given the foregoing scenario, present day Zimbabwe is a land (as is most of the continent) rich in flora, fauna, minerals, climate among other natural endowments. It has a land area of 39 075 700 hectares/391 000 square kilometers. It borders Mozambique to the east, Zambia to the north, Botswana to the west, and South Africa to the south. The natural ecological land distribution can be categorized into five or six natural geographic regions, each unique yet interconnected to the others, as outlined on table on next page (Moyo, 1987, 1995; UNICEF, 1994; GOZ, 1986; Nelson, 1983).

Box 1: Zimbabwe's Five Natural Geographic Regions

Natural Region I – 5 835sq. km.

Eastern Highlands slopes of Manica Province, along the border with Mozambique. High altitude, cool, high reliable rainfall: >1000mm annually. Very susceptible to erosion when divagated. Intensely used for dairying, forestry, tea, coffee, tree-fruit, vegetables and in the valleys, maize.

Natural Region II – 72 745sq. km.

Intensively cropped, mainly commercial farmland of northern Mashonaland, occupying much of the northeast quadrant, reliably receiving 700-1000mm of rain annually. The main areas of rain-fed maize and tobacco cultivation, important also for winter wheat, cotton and vegetables....

Natural Region III – 67 690sq. km.

Semi-intensively cultivated areas occupying much of Mashonaland and Midlands Province, receiving 650-800mm rainfall mostly during infrequent heavy storms. Rain-fed cultivation of drought-resistant cotton, soya beans and sorghum, but water shortage [necessitates] irrigation ...for other crops. High proportion of communal land – ["reserves"].

Natural Region IV – 128 370sq. km.

Hot, lower lying land, north and south of the semi-intensively cultivated area. Subject to seasonal drought and [has] a mean annual rainfall of 450-650mm. Suited for semi-intensive animal husbandry. Marginal for rain-fed maize cultivation (yields are often <0.5 tonnes per hectare). High proportion of communal land. Particularly hard-hit by the 1982/84 drought and always vulnerable.

Natural Region V – 112 810sq. km.

Without irrigation, this very hot low-lying zone with less than 650mm annual rainfall, is suitable only for extensive irrigated cultivation of sugar cane in the south-eastern lowveld and intensive wheat production at Chisumbanje. A smaller region in the north, below the Zambezi escarpment, is drought-prone and infested with tsetse-fly.

Source: Moyo (1995: 16) – SAFERE, 1 (1), 13-31.

There are various socio-cultural groups that make up the mosaic of the Zimbabwean human population today. Most African groups had (and still have) similar and sometimes very different linguistic, socio-cultural, political and economic features. Of these groups, there is a general classification that group people as the VaShona and aMaNdebele.⁴ But within these groups, there are very diverse cultures that developed during the (so-called) Bantu migration that saw people moving north, east, west and south in search of land and greener pastures. As each group moved, it settled and established itself, thereby developing its culture and language from wherever they moved (Beach, 1994; Nelson, 1983).

In the case of Zimbabwe, the two major groups I mentioned earlier – Shona and Ndebele – are composed of diverse cultures. For instance, the term “*Shona*”, that is used to describe or refer to approximately eighty (80) percent of the current Zimbabwean population is actually a historical misnomer that colonialism solidified (Nyagoni, 1977; Martin and Johnson, 1981; Bourdillon, 1982). While it has come to mean a particular group of people with more similar cultural, linguistic and social practices, the Shona are a combination of more than five genealogical groupings with significant differences in terms of language (so-called dialect) and social practices.⁵ The term is a verb derived from the Zulu

language – *uku/shona* – meaning *to/disappear*, the “Ndebele” people used it to describe some of the people that were settled around the Limpopo River that they encountered heading from present day South Africa. They dispersed some of Shona people that lived around the south and southwestern areas, who were not well armed to resist the encroachment and hence they *disappeared into the hills* – *ba-shon’ ezintabeni* (Bourdillon, 1982; Beach, 1994; Martin and Johnson, 1981; Chivome, 1999; Nyangoni, 1977). The Ndebele, on the other hand, are also made up of varied social groups and were a group formed by *Mzilawegazi* who had defected from Shaka’s Zulu kingdom during the *mfecane*,⁶ absorbing some of the groups that they encountered along the way.

This description of the Shona and Ndebele people is however not meant to advance notions of “difference” and so-called identity politics. I discuss this as an important exercise in opening up one of the many closed doors of our rich socio-cultural history and diversity in this country. For unless we see our differences as diversity, and diversity as a necessary ingredient in our development as a nation – as air and water are - then we shall be bogged down by trying to settle scores and/or establishing hegemony. We therefore have to necessarily revisit the past so as to learn new lessons that were distorted, forgotten, or seen as

unimportant then, but are important today when development and social transformation are no longer distributive.

Women, Pre-colonialism and Resistance: Zvimurenga Zvekutanga

The history of how Zimbabwe came to be British territory is long, and I shall not go into the details at this point. Suffice it to say that it was a very long process involving a lot of brutality and bloodshed. Both the Shona and Ndebele people vigorously resisted this colonization - *Zvimurenga zvekutanga / Indlakela zo mbangazwe zakuqala*.⁷ At this point, I shall focus on what most scholars refer to as *Chimurenga Chekutanga* – the first Chimurenga. I choose to focus on it because it is the only Chimurenga where the influence of a female ancestral spirit – *Nehanda* – through a female spirit medium – *Nyakasikana* – are highlighted in most documentation, oral and written. Also, it is from the invocation of the spirit of Nehanda that the last militaristic *Chimurenga* was born (in the 1960s) and at whose end political independence was realized (Gaidzanwa, 1992; Synder and Tadesse, 1995; Martin and Johnson, 1981).

“Mbuya Nehanda – Gandangakadzi Guru re Zimbabwe”⁸

From the middle of June 1896 until October 1897 blood spattered the burning soil of Zimbabwe as the people of this nation united across their cultural differences to resist White colonial invasion. In Shona society,⁹ it is believed that the spirits of our great, great ancestors of many generations past are still part of our supernatural protectors and community guides. Among them were especially powerful and respected spirits – *Midzimu Mikurukuru* – and such great spirits were called *mhondoro* or lion spirits. These were the most powerful Spirits and they looked after the wellbeing of entire regions. They were also responsible for giving advice to these groups, ensuring peace among them as well as presiding over rainmaking and other important ceremonies and rituals (Bhabhamuzungu, 1999; Ranger, 1985, 1994; Bourdillion, 1982).

Bourdillion (1982: 246-47) expands on this stating that:

Lion Spirits, ... are essentially public figures and their operations are for the most part open to the ... public.

Perhaps the most significant distinction is that lion spirits are guardians of communities within their domain, [and] accept a responsibility towards the people who come to them for help.

One such Great Spirit was a woman by the name of *Mbuya Nehanda*. Her spiritual leadership spanned the entire region of Zimbabwe – meaning beyond present day borders - and her spirit possessed only those with leadership skills and qualities; and her spirit mediums were only women. *Nehanda* was so powerful and well respected that when people had any social concerns, they would not go directly to her; instead, they went to her assistant who was always given the name *Nechombo*. *Nechombo* would listen to the people's concerns and relay them to *Mbuya Nehanda*; it was indeed an honor to be *Nehanda's Nechombo* (Bhabhamuzungu, 1999).

When the colonial Europeans arrived in Zimbabwe, *Nehanda's* spirit medium was a woman by the name of *Nyakasikana*, who lived in the northern part of Zimbabwe, and some believe she was of the *VaRozvi* while others suggest she was from the *VaHera*. During *Nyakasikana's* mediumship, there was also another regional (Shona) spirit, whose medium was a man by the name of *Gumboreshumba*

– lion's foot – whose spirit mediums were known as *Sekuru Kaguvi*. *Nehanda and Kaguvi* (among other spirit mediums) used their leadership to spearhead *Chimurenga CheKutanga* against European invasion in this country (Bhabhamuzungu, 1999; Nyagoni, 1977; Blake, 1977; Martin and Johnson, 1981; Chivome, 1999). As Bourdillon (1982: 264) further elaborates:

With the rise of nationalism among the Shona, spirit mediums provided a focus for a common feeling. The political movement was accompanied by a cultural nationalism which included a movement away from Christian churches back to traditional [spirituality], and some spirit mediums involved themselves in the movement by becoming openly political.

Mbuya Nehanda was one of those spirit mediums that became “openly political” when the Europeans carved out what is present day Zimbabwe, Mozambique and the rest of Africa.

Because Mbuya Nehanda’s political agency was much more subversive than that of her (male) counterparts, colonial and some African male scholars did and do not record as much of her story as is done those of Chaminuka, Mapondera, and Mutota to mention but three. This obliteration of Mbuya Nehanda from the literal recording of

the story of this country's "development" has meant that her legacy has been, and continues to be officially under-rated and mostly survives in the preserves of the ordinary people's orature, and increasingly in women's literary works.¹⁰ Mbuya Nehanda's particular agency and defiance to colonization of any kind, including Christianity, is not to be trivialized as merely the stubbornness of an "illiterate savage native". It has to be studied much more closely, as agency that informs us of what she (and her contemporaries) fought against and were punished for by lynching. Vera (1994: 79) eloquently portrays this agency when she eulogizes Mbuya Nehanda's agency in the Chimurenga as follows:

[Nehanda cautioned her people:] 'Do not take anything that belongs to the stranger [white man]. If you take anything that belongs to the stranger, surrender it Take only the guns. If you touch anything else that belongs to him, even the spirits shall be offended. The spirits will abandon you for such travesty Take only the things that will protect you Do not covet anything of his. Approach the stranger with a single eye, the other must be blind. It is the envying eye that will destroy us, that will change us entirely. We can become stronger and whole if we believe in our own traditions.'

Yet even though Mbuya Nehanda insisted that her people resist, she could not do it alone. Subsequently, she and

Sekuru Kaguvi were captured by the British, “tried” and sentenced to death by lynching, for treason and instigating civil unrest in the country. They were lynched on a hill near what is now the capital city – Harare. However, before her death, Mbuya Nehanda promised her people and told the Europeans that her bones would rise to lead the second Chimurenga and liberate her people from bondage – a promise that she kept as shall be later explored (Bhabhamuzungu, 1998).

After the execution of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi, there was an increased and steady influx of white settlers into Zimbabwe. These were indiscriminately allocated and/or sold the most fertile land¹¹ administered by the British South Africa Company (BSAC) (Martin and Johnson, 1981; Moore, 1993). The sudden change in land ownership to private property through roughshod eviction of African people from their land – a common good in an inherently communal society – was something that irrevocably changed the condition and status of women in this society (Gaidzanwa, 1995; Moyo, 1995; Moore, 1993). It also put tremendous stress on women whose relationship with the land was (and is) one of spiritual, socio-economic and political significance. However, this is not to say that women in pre-colonial society were

the only ones closer to the land (Bourdillon, 1982; Nyangoni, 1977). In fact, according to Samkange (1968)¹²

...the Mashona concept of land was as that of something very sacred – *chinoyera* – belonging to the [collective] but held in trust by the chief and elders whose duty it was to allot it to those who needed it. Land that was given to an individual did not become his property in the European [and Western capitalist] sense of the word. It only meant that he could use it and that his [sic] family and descendants could have first claim on its use Land was sacred because it contained the graves of the ancestors. These ancestors were very much part of the day-to-day thinking of the people, [whose] actions and behavior were, in one way or another, affected by their belief in the proximity and power of their ancestors in the same way that Christianity, Islam, [Buddhism, Capitalism...] does for others. The land in which the ancestors were buried was not only sacred, ... it was also the link between the past and the present and future members of the [collective].¹³

*BoGogo Liphi Ihlobo?: Quest for Our Grandmother's Granaries*¹⁴

The major cultural groups of pre-colonial Zimbabwean society as we have briefly explored, could be classified as patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal. However, the manifestations of patriarchy, its social regulation and women's place in these structures depended on the particular group, and while there were similarities, there were also differences. Of these similarities were Shona and Ndebele women's places, roles and political power within their societies in relation to their immediate family, the

extended family, clan and collective (ethnic) group. In the African societies of those times, women accessed power within socio-political structures based on various categories such as those of age, spirit mediumship, chieftainship, kinship, village networks among other socio-cultural, political and economic mechanisms. These mechanisms differed from those of capitalist colonial women who were much more constricted and defined in private (domestic) domain terms and in relation to the individual male who owned property and/or to whom they were married. African women's places in their societies on the other hand were defined by a multiplicity of locations beyond the individual male to whom they were married. This multiplicity of locations went beyond the individual household to the collective, forming the basis of some of African women's essential power networks (Gaidzanwa, 1992; Mikell, 1997; Auret, 1990; Van Allen, 1972; Mikell, 1997).

Given this scenario, then, it is obvious that African women at the time had a different perception of themselves and their place in their societies because along with living in a communal society, they were agriculturists and producers in their own right (Synder and Tadesse, 1995; Mohanty, 1991; Kandiyoti, 1997). They therefore had levels of social control as Auret (1990: 98) observes of Shona women:

Prior to the advent of colonialism, Shona women exercised considerable power and authority in the domestic or private sphere, [Their power was] regarded as being of equal importance [with that of the men]. This flexibility and balance was evident in the sex roles in all aspects of the society, but particularly in the economic system. As a result, women did not feel subordinate to men, nor did they feel that they occupied positions of lesser importance in their society. The domestic sphere was therefore of central importance in the social and economic aspects of the society.

This reality was perceived as deviant by colonials and over time mis-construed and misrepresented as Europeans “documented” the African population’s way of life, usually for their own colonial ends. They were quick to equate African women’s lives with their own, and this began the process of cultural misrepresentation that has over time actually become validated as “African culture” in present day society in this country and across the continent. Gaidzanwa (1992: 107) further expands on this cultural imperialism when she articulates the socio-political and cultural differences between African and colonial White women using the exemplar of Mbuya Nehanda’s leadership as follows:

The settler military and administrators who were coming from Victorian England where the domestication of women, particularly among the bourgeoisie, was advanced, were dumb-founded by the unexpected role Mbuya Nehanda played in the resistance. They explained it away by saying that she was a *witch* with some kind of power over the men

of her nation, hence her bizarre behavior and the men's cooperation with her. Mbuya Nehanda's involvement in the anti-colonial struggles is an indication of the spaces that existed for women in pre-colonial Shona society in the spiritual-political realm at a time when the distinctions between politics, religion and [economic] production were not pronounced (my emphasis).

The fact that African women's social roles were minimized to a sexual division of labor analysis in the codification of this country's history, excludes the reality that women in pre-colonial African societies had agency, a life and roles intimately connected to the socio-political, economic and cultural structures of their societies. These structural networks ensured that they would assert their agency overtly and covertly, thereby cushioning themselves in times of familial and/or collective conflict, death and natural or social catastrophes (Mikell, 1997; Van Allen, 1972).

Analyzing the life of African women in pre-colonial times from this perspective is particularly important in working through and debunking patriarchal cries for the preservation of "our culture". Usually these (patriarchal) cries in modern day Zimbabwean society are those that mean the preservation of a *macho* culture, one now meshed with capitalist greed to the detriment of women and girl children. For instance the culture of violence against women that has so pervaded contemporary society on all fronts over the last fifty or so years, is usually flaunted as "African

culture”, yet it has little and/or nothing to do with the totality of *Ubuntu/Hunhu*. This macho culture is one that lies trapped in colonial antiquity, under-theorized and misconstrued as a tool of power to control and dominate women and girl children.

Patriarchal interests take advantage of the fact that the social checks and balances that ensured the security of women and children in pre-colonial times are no longer there as the social system (has) disintegrated because of colonization and incessant capitalism (Auret, 1990; Mikell, 1997, Gaidzanwa, 1995). Women and girl children are vandalized, raped and infected with the HIV/AIDS virus at alarming rates in this country, yet “our culture” is still the flag raised by most patriarchal stalwarts when African women refuse to be silenced and continue to be vulnerable to the AIDS pandemic (McFadden, 1992).

Dismissing the fact that women had a place and power once upon a time, and/or disqualifying their power is to deny African women a cultural right to our story in this society, denying us self-definition and our rightful place as citizens of this country and continent. Searching for our foremothers’ granaries of wisdom and agency in this (African) society is therefore of paramount importance so we can honor their spirits and *theorize from the books of their lives*. In order to “redeem” our society, we have to

unashamedly go back to those “primitive” hidden philosophies of our ancestors, our grandmothers and mothers in order to (re-) discover our own fullness as African women and as an African people so as to move forward confidently. As Kwame Gyekye (1996: 303) exhorts:

It is never too late in human history to start from where one should start (or should have started). ... modern African philosophers should turn their philosophical gaze on the *intellectual foundations of African culture and experience* (in addition to contributions to Western philosophy, which some are in a hurry to pursue). As part of the people of Africa and speaking their language ..., modern African philosophers are in a unique position to elucidate, analyze, and interpret the philosophy of African peoples and sharpen its contours on the global philosophical map¹⁵ (emphasis in original).

Along with patriarchal agendas just discussed above, are white supremacist agendas that colonialism brought and development is constantly reinforcing in contemporary society. Black women are placed at the bottom of the racial, class and gender ladders, and this placement has very negative effects on their access to and control over social, economic, cultural and political resources to improve their lives and that of our society. For instance, a lot of development programs and projects aimed at improving the condition and position of women have been documented as having failed because “cultural” barriers impede women’s full participation

in the development process. However, so few studies interrogate notions of culture beyond the colonial (and African patriarchal¹⁶) constructs that were codified primarily by White males mis-constructing the social reality of Africans and African women's social position and material condition in all cultural groups found in this country (and across the continent).¹⁷

The suppression and/or omission of African women's knowledge, their individual and collective agency in pre-colonial and colonial Zimbabwe means that African patriarchy mediated by racism historically exaggerated and continues to mis(represent) "African culture".¹⁸ Batezat and Mwalo (1989: 46-47) remind us that letting what was documented by white men using black men as primary informants be classified as representative of African culture calls for serious contestation because:

As happened elsewhere in Africa, [customs in Zimbabwe] were distorted during the codification process, as officials trained in western frameworks wrote them. Given that [African] informants were men, the overall result was the manipulation of pre-colonial custom and tradition [which] was integrally connected to the perpetuation of racial differences ..., [and this] had an important side effect; the increased subordination of women by men in African society.

However, this is not to say had White Western women codified African culture with African women as the only and primary

informants, it would have been the “true” representation of African customs, traditions and social life.¹⁹ I say this because the prolific dominant Western development literature available to date on women, gender and development speaks volumes of the dominance of white supremacy in the construction and production of knowledge on women in this country (across the continent and in the Real World) (Meena, 1992; Mbilinyi, 1992; McFadden, 1998). White (feminist) women have and continue to codify Black women’s experiences through Western (patriarchal and/or feminist) lens. This way they continue to re-invent the same colonial stereotypes of “dis-empowered” African women, which this study among other works is seriously questioning and contesting (Meena, 1992; Gaidzanwa, 1992; Mohanty, 1997; Mikell, 1997; Kandiyoti, 1997; McFadden, 1998).

Inadequate historicization, theorization and documentation (written and otherwise) of Zimbabwean women’s lives, agency and their role in past and present societies beyond the domesticated female view means that African feminist theory and methodology shall continue to be a privilege of the West and/or the “educated” African few. This practice maintains the status quo, digs even deeper and wider the glaring chasm between grounded theory and praxis. This void makes for easy generalizations on the status of

African women in pre-colonial, colonial and contemporary societies in this country. This politics of misrepresentation is not only theoretically dangerous, it also obscures the reality that “ ... comparisons [between past and present] cannot be made since pre-colonial society was based upon entirely different patterns of distribution and accumulation of wealth and social relations” (Batezat and Mwalo, 1987: 47). This, however, therefore does not mean that we have to staticize or go back to live life as lived by our ancestors then, because even they, if they were alive today, they would have moved on with their lives. What it means is that we need to extrapolate lessons from the past, in as much as we still extrapolate and use as standard theoretical frameworks from Ford, Keynes, Engels, Marx, Gramsci, Weber, among many Western (male and increasingly female) ancestors to inform our contemporary (western oriented) development models.

Mikell (1997: 17) takes the argument further arguing for the valuation of African women’s agency within their societies because European agendas irrevocably changed the status of women across Sub-Saharan Africa by employing divide and rule tactics between African women and men.

[W]hereas traditional African cultural principles and social status factors allowed women to participate

publicly in society prior to European ... interventions, after 1896, hegemonic control mediated women's status across the continent. Four factors were significant in establishing a new form of gender bias:(1) Christianity, with its notion of monogamy and female domesticity and subordination, (2) Western education, which gave men advantages over women, (3) differential marriage systems, with Western marriage guaranteeing women access to property rights that women married under traditional rites could not claim; and (4) alternative legal systems that supposedly acknowledged African women's independent rights, although colonial magistrates often treated women as jural minors needing male guardians.

This being the case then, those (of us) African women and men who engage in the exercise of documenting African ontology (through writing and other means), have a social obligation to contribute to the healing of our traumatized personal and collective souls and agencies. This way we can individually and collectively contribute to the regaining of our sense of personhood as Africans so we can begin to center our knowledge production endeavors on our own societies. This means that we have to guard against the old sexist argument that Black men had and have to assert themselves by dominating Black women because they were emasculated by slavery, colonialism, apartheid and capitalism (McFadden, 1992; hooks, 1992, 1994; Collins, 1998). Patriarchy has and continues to damage men in unspeakable ways, and as long as African men (and Western men among others) hold onto it as though their lives depended on it, we - as a society - have a long

way to go in actualizing our agency as African women, children and men to resist white supremacy and capitalism.

What African men seem(ed) to conveniently forget, is the fact that in pre-colonial African societies, public and private domains, women, children and men's lives were inextricably linked. For there to be an African community – *Isintu / Chivanhu* – women and children were (and have to be) an integral part of that community as was and is the reality of (female and male) ancestral spirits that complete(d) African people's sense of community. For instance the notion and politics of food in pre-colonial society expanded beyond the feeding of a family (immediate, extended and beyond) to social, economic and emotional significance as expressed in the Shona proverb – *hukama igasva huno zadzikiswa nokudya*. As Auret (1990: 100-101)²⁰ observes:

Food had economic, social and emotional significance [in the pre-colonial society of Zimbabwe]. Food was not simply nutrition; the sharing of food expressed and reinforced bonds of kinship and community. The necessity to produce a surplus was therefore of critical importance to a woman in the maintenance of socio-cultural and politico-economic ties. Thus ... African women as the primary source of this economic wealth ... [had] influence and status

Vana Mai we, Mabaiwa Nei?: Women in Colonial Society

As noted earlier, land (inclusive of nature) was and is a sacred space for African people. And so sacred is this space (land), that ancestors like Mbuya Nehanda urged the people to resist its appropriation, for not to do so would mean perpetual subjugation not only of the land, but, of the mind and soul.

Once the British, like other colonial *conquistadors*, had suppressed the first *Zvimurenga*, they set up an apartheid system, appropriated land and drove Africans into – “native reserves”. By 1923 as Mandaza (1987: 25) points out, the British South Africa Company (BSAC) so administered the colony in a way that “... the British tended to endorse the belief that Southern Rhodesia²¹ was to be a dominion, like Canada and Australia ...”, which could run its own affairs with little direct interference from Britain. Having obtained this self-governing status, the BSAC by 1930 enacted the Land Apportionment Act (LAA) which in effect gave the colonial settler population – who at the time made up 3% of the population – control of over 50% of the most fertile land in the country (Ibid.).²²

This was an expansion of the first land appropriation that had designated (now) urban areas into White, Indian/Asian, Colored and Black areas, and in that racial hierarchy. This left 97% of the population – Africans – with less than half the most infertile land, while being relegated to what came to be known as the “native Reserves” – or the “Tribal Trust Lands TTLs” (Moyo, 1987, 1995; Mandaza, 1987). The LAA ensured private ownership of land by the colonials most of whom had realized that there were no large gold deposits as they had previously speculated. To compensate for this “loss”, most turned to agriculture as most of the soil was (is) rich and the climate excellent (Martin and Johnson, 1981).

Africans on the other hand were rallied like livestock and packed like thatching grass onto the “reserves”. To ensure the continued and total exploitation of Africans, a hut, livestock and wife tax was imposed. Because of the racial and patriarchal construction of this colonial tax, it meant that African men were forced (and the only ones allowed) into urban spaces (Gaidzanwa, 1992, 1995; McFadden, 1998). They entered these white spaces as slave laborers onto the plantations, in the mines, cities and white households to earn cash to pay the imposed tax, because failure to do so amounted to the confiscation of their livestock and marginal land. Women on the other hand, remained in as much slavery;

they were managers-cum-laborers of arid land, land that was now expressly (male) personal property, belonging to their husbands, fathers, brothers, uncles or any other males (Gaidzanwa, 1988, 1995; Moyo, 1995; Auret, 1990; ZWR CN, 1996).

Because of this movement women's workload more than doubled, as they had to learn new skills living on "reserves" which in effect became the margins of the "new society".²³ In this new social order, Africans were to be kept at the margins, and African women were not only to symbolize this marginality, they had to live it.

Many African women's lives became so harsh and like their mothers and ancestors before, rebelled against the harshness of a segregated rural life on arid "native reserve" land and the general systemic and systematic breakdown of African people's way of life by "illegally" entering urban spaces (Gaidzanwa, 1992; ZWR CN; 1996; Van Allen, 1972). African women refused to be dominated and instead, made their presence felt in the cities in significant numbers, destabilizing colonial and patriarchal definitions of these (urban) areas. Those that did not go to the cities headed to the mission schools in pursuit of those survival tools – "education" – that men had minimally accessed and were now utilizing to dominate African women. However, African women's massive movement out of the "reserves" meant that there would be a

decrease in agricultural output, limited income to pay the required colonial tax, and a decrease in family subsistence and land (Batezat and Mwalo, 1989; Gaidzanwa, 1992, 1995; Moyo, 1995; ZWRCN, 1996).

To curb this move, African men sought legal measures from the colonial government; measures that would control African women's movement into the cities and to the missions. The colonial government obliged and took the opportunity to "...placate African men who had many other grievances ..., by strengthening their control over African women" (Gaidzanwa, 1992: 107). Thus African women were harshly punished for asserting their agency and contesting their new roles as custodians of a raped culture, relegated to subsistence farming and representative and/or *de facto* heads of households.

McFadden (1998: 111) further illustrates the feminist tragedy of the creation of urban and rural spaces, when she states that:

The [African] urban space, as we know it has developed very much as a consequence of capitalism. These urban spaces are qualitatively different from Africa's large cities of many centuries ago, with very energetic and dynamic populations, which produced highly advanced intellectual, socio-economic, political and artistic products The last three centuries have seen a re-definition of where cities were located

and the relationship of Africans to these spaces, especially in Southern Africa We have become strangers in our own lands, ... without a personhood even as we built and serviced these spaces for the benefit of the white elite. The irony of the African urban space is that not only did it exclude Black males, and initially treat them as mere chattels, but that despite its colonialized nature, it also united white and black males to conspire against African women.

The establishment of colonial urban spaces, therefore, ushered in the politics of the rural/urban dichotomy, which has over time solidified and become associated with “poor” African people, particularly African women, and therefore the need for “rural development”.

Thus for African women, the assertion of agency and the contestation of the politics of representation in the colonial era was something that was not a foreign idea as they lived a sub-human life under gender and racial apartheid. Hence, when Africans as a people began to seriously mobilize, organize in preparation of the launch of the second *Chimurenga*, women were ready to enter into the process as Africans and as African women to get back Africans’ and African women’s right to life.

Itoyi toyi: African Women's Participation in the Second Chimurenga

By the 1960s, the political landscape of Zimbabwe had changed as the white colonials led by Ian Douglas Smith had declared a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) (Martin & Johnson, 1981; Mandaza, 1987). The contempt Smith had for Africans epitomized patriarchal white supremacism as illustrated in part of a speech he made addressing a White Rotary Club luncheon gathering on 21 December 1972. He said:

I have been taken to task ... for describing our Africans as the happiest Africans in the world, but nobody has yet been able to tell me where there are Africans happier – or, for that matter, better off – than in Rhodesia. The reasons for this relaxed racial climate which we enjoy here are many. First and foremost is the nature of the people who make up this country. The Africans of Rhodesia are by nature unaggressive, and they have an instinctive leaning towards a peaceful communal life. They have a highly developed sense of humor – which is an essential ingredient of happy race relations – and they have an appreciation of the security of both themselves and their families' ²⁴

Given the foregoing, anyone who can put themselves in the skin of an African person at the time and today will understand what participating in the *Chimurenga* meant (then), and what its symbolism today.

While there are varied accounts among several scholars about the motivation and involvement of African women in the second Chimurenga; which range from those arguing that it was from a general nationalistic ideology that women participated to focused notions of women's belief in racial and gender equity and equality after independence. The general consensus however is that women's participation in the second Chimurenga irrevocably shifted pre-colonial and colonial gender constructs in this country (Kazembe, 1987; Staunton, 1991; Gaidzanwa, 1992; Ranchod- Nilsson, 1994).

At the dawn of the second *Chimurenga* in the 1960s, the legacy of Mbuya Nehanda that had been preserved in the people's folklore was invoked even more by women, men and children as the movement gathered momentum. Mbuya Nehanda the elders recounted to the young,

... had so much wisdom and courage!
She spoke [to the young] of her memoirs of the first Chimurenga and how they fought I died in flesh, but my spirit lives on. Here *you* are the spirit of tomorrow. The white men only hanged my flesh, but I am alive in you.'
'I knew my spirit would live on, so I sang and danced to my death.'

'Mbuya Nehanda! Mbuya Nehanda! The water is boiling,
Mbuya Nehanda! The *Chimurenga* has started, Mbuya
Nehanda ... !' (Gabi, 1994: 61).

Not only were the memories of Nehanda preserved in stories, they were also safeguarded in the sacred songs of resistance that bore testimony to what it meant and means for Africans to keep the traditions of resisting domination without being traditional. The following verse, also speaks of this rich oral tradition of the African people's resistance at the initiation of the second *Chimurenga*:

*Mbuya Nehanda kufa vachitaura
Kuti tinotora sei nyika?
Shoko rimwe ro vakandiudza
Tora gidi uzvitonge ... !*

Our ancestor Nehanda died with
These words on her lips:
'I'm dying for this country.'
She left us one word of advice
'Take up arms and liberate yourselves ... !'²⁵

As the people composed new songs and lyrics, rooting themselves in the legacy of the ancestors' agency, challenging the history of Black people's oppression in this country. In keeping with the practice of those that evoked the Spirit of the ancestor(s), some of the leaders of the *Chimurenga* sought the ancestor's representative for guidance and blessing at the launch of such an important endeavor. The new medium of the Spirit of Mbuya Nehanda at the

time was a woman of considerable age who had for more than sixty-years been recognized as the medium of Nehanda Nyakasikana hanged in March 1898 by the colonials. To this Nehanda, the new generation of freedom fighters went and

... when they met her, they talked with the [S]pirit of the first Nehanda, explaining that they were her children and that they needed guidance to launch the liberation war. [T]he [S]pirit ordered them to take the medium to a place of safety where she would give them plans for the war through her medium (Martin and Johnson, 1981: 49-50, 73-78).

Nehanda had thus lived true to her word, that her bones would rise and lead the second *Chimurenga* which would liberate her people and her land from the claws of colonialism.

The involvement of women in the liberation armies²⁶ and particularly on the (battle) front-line was initially resisted by the leaders of the liberation movements. Most of them (men) perceived women's roles in the struggle as those of cooking, cleaning, medical auxiliaries and as sexual partners to male freedom fighters (Staunton, 1991; McFadden, 1992, Made and Matambanadzo, 1996).

Gaidzanwa (1992: 110) further illuminates women's reality at the start of the Chimurenga when she discusses that ZANU-PF invoked the name of Mbuya Nehanda at the launch of the armed

struggle, yet the same men invoked patriarchal constructs to try and deter women from participating as equals. When this happened,

... women in ZANLA threatened to fight the party if it did not allow them to participate as combatants. Women pointed out that the colonial army did not spare them [because they were women] when they raided the guerrilla camps ..., so it was a matter of survival that they should be trained in fighting

Women's persistence to access these spaces thus gained them a power that had been the preserve of men, a power men used to justify their patriarchal hegemony over women. As the war intensified, more women joined the combatant ranks, and toward the end of the war they made up 25 - 30% of the active fighters (Muchena, 1996; Synder and Tadesse, 1995). Women like Ruth Chinamano, Victoria Chitepo, Joyce Mujuru, Margaret Dongo, and Oppah Muchinguri among many, many known and forgotten others asserted their agency as mothers and daughters of the Chimurenga, re-defining women's place on the socio-political landscape of Zimbabwe. For instance, Joyce Mujuru at age seventeen (17) became the first woman commander of the Women's Detachment and led battles even during her last trimester of pregnancy (Muchena, 1996). While this speaks of the strength and resilience of women in times of crises, it also speaks of women's

vandalized bodies and sexuality in times of crises like wars (McFadden, 1992). The fact that at age seventeen she was already pregnant, and this highlights women and girl children's vulnerability when old systems are not replaced with equally new ones. This calls for our urgent social attention to protect our girl children in today's age of capitalist driven SAPs and the runaway HIV/AIDS pandemic.

However, women did not participate in the *Chimurenga* as active combatants only, they fought against colonialism in many other ways. They provided food and clothing for the guerrillas and spied on their behalf to ensure the success of the *Chimurenga*. Young women (and men) who had not made it across the borders to be active combatant fighters, or had no relatives in the cities to escape the horrors of war, became the crucial links between the guerrillas and the villagers. They provided intelligence information among other services as *vana chimbwido nana mujibha* – girl and boy spies²⁷ (Staunton, 1991). While these were harsh and traumatic times for everyone, they held added horrors for women. Women were not only in life threatening situations like everyone else, they had the added vulnerability of being subjected to sexual advances, assault, harassment and violence by both the male guerrillas and the Rhodesian army soldiers.

This side of the war story is one that is usually hushed or brushed under the *it-was-a-war-situation* social carpet. The violence against women committed on all fronts during this time, violated and violates African (and Western) notions of human rights on personal and collective levels. Yet that trauma of rape and sexual violence that women suffered (and suffer) during the war is never talked about as needing healing in the same social manner that we seek to heal racial and other social difference traumas. Children born from these coerced and/or consented non-committal relationships during the war have matured and make the bulk of children living on the streets in our cities today. These children (now young adults some with their own children now) remind this society of the social crises we are in today because we have forgotten who we are as a people – *takamhura uye tirikumhura madzimbuya nemadzimai edu, zvinotoda bira rokutanda botso kuti tichenurwe munyika muno.*

However, this is not to say that women were mere sexual victims and/or objects throughout the war. The other side of the aforementioned reality is that a significant number of women, particularly active women combatants asserted their agency bending gender rules over backwards, thereby re-defining the

social construction of sexual and gender roles and rules in this society (Gaidzanwa, 1992; Jirira, 1995; Geisler, 1995). Engaging the enemy alongside men meant that male combatants could no longer claim female weakness and therefore their belonging in the home. Women in these spaces worked just as hard, if not harder because they had to prove themselves – indeed the oppressed have always to go an extra mile, even when fighting another type of oppression. The experiences of women combatants thus demystified notions of male prowess versus women’s timidity, and the fact that women survived to tell their story serves to remind those that believe feminist activism and agency is a western concept to rethink their perspectives and perceptions of African women.

The *Chimurenga* experiences of African women in the villages, cities and elsewhere in the country, are well documented by various scholars, including Staunton’s (1991) compilation entitled: *Mothers of the Revolution: The War Experiences of Thirty Zimbabwean Women*. This is a collection of the experiences of African women who speak from their personal and social locations at the time, shedding light on the Chimurenga’s impact on them as mothers, daughters, single mothers, wives, among other (female) social locations.

What is most striking in many of these personal accounts is the implicit and explicit reality, affirmation, and acknowledgement that if African women had not asserted their individual and collective agencies, as agents of social change, the *Chimurenga* would not have been successful. And if successful, it would have been a totally different *Chimurenga* than the one we know as the following six excerpts testify:

... It was only after the war that we started to hear discussions about women. Then we realized that women were being recognized, but it was no big deal, because women should by right, have this recognition considering what they did during the war So I say women are heroes: all over Zimbabwe women are heroes ... (Thema Khumalo, Esigodini, 81)

... Yes, women did a lot, but no one recognizes what they did ... (Mary Gomendo, Chipinge, 145).

... I think people are stronger because during the war they worked together and women are stronger because of their participation in it (Tetty Magugu, Zhombe, 168).

... I tell you, my friends a woman is a very strong person. Women are courageous. During the war mothers did a great job. They were committed to helping liberate the country After the war, it is they who began to cut the grass to re-thatch the schools that had been burnt or damaged during the war Yes, women are very strong, very courageous ... (Cheche Maseko, Siphaziphazi, 222).

... If the women had not helped, the comrades would have starved and perished. You can't walk carrying weapons for such long distances as those boys did

without eating. It is impossible. So the women who provided the food worked as hard as the comrades themselves did ... (Emma Munemo, Buhera, 306).

This being the case however,

There is a need for material about [African] women, collected and explained by African and other Third World women themselves, from which adequate theories and methodology can be worked out It can be argued that because of their plural and multicultural backgrounds as a result of the colonial[ism], Third World women are best qualified to carry out comparative studies and make generalized statements about women's positions in their societies (Amadiume, 1987:10, qtd. in Judith Abwunza, 1997: 34).

Conceptualizing Afrocentric development and Afrofeminist epistemology in this manner is therefore an important factor in ensuring that we synergize our personal and collective agencies as African women (and men) to bring about social change in this country. It means we become less dependent on Western women, gender and development frameworks to inform our actions. By theorizing our experiences from various locations, we produce knowledge about ourselves and cease to depend on Western "rescue" packages of one kind or another, because " ... the costumes and circumstances [of slavery and colonialism] may have changed but the relationship still remains the same" (Mungoshi, 1997: 120).²⁸

The Gendered and Racial Carving of a "New" Zimbabwe

The *Chimurenga* having been long drawn and bloody, the British "brokered" talks to which they invited African nationalist leaders for cease-fire and peace talks with the Rhodesians, in Lancaster, England in 1979. It was at this meeting that the constitution was amended, and this is the constitution that has been in use during the first twenty years of independence. Currently, there is ongoing public consultation for the drafting and development of a new constitution to be launched in the year 2000. Strikingly, these constitutional changes were drawn without a single woman among the African delegation. Interestingly, the African nationalist leaders that participated in the negotiations and (ultimately the signing of) the Peace Agreement – usually referred to as the Lancaster House Agreement – expressed deep disappointment about the Lancaster House experiences. They declared that it was an agreement that shortchanged their people, because it ensured the economic security of the British kith and kin (that had permanently settled) in Zimbabwe (Mandaza, 1987). This meant that after independence, Whites in this country would maintain their lifestyles and an iron grip on the land and economy; indeed so much had changed and yet everything had remained the same.

Given such a (patriarchal and racist) situation, it does not take much to understand how little if any space women had to enable them to negotiate for an equal say in the carving of a new Zimbabwe. It was a new Zimbabwe they had contributed to its "birthing" in as much as their male counterparts, and had a right to a say and equal representation (Kazembe, 1987; Gaidzanwa, 1992; Geisler, 1995).

The marginal representation of women in nationalist leadership and their zero representation at the peace talks bring to bear some of the effects of colonialism. It overwhelmingly disadvantaged and discriminated against women by disallowing them the right and opportunity to access (colonial and Western) education in the same manner that African men had. Political debates and negotiations for a new Zimbabwe among Africans (and with the international community) even though translated into the local languages were debates grounded in Western (white male) political frameworks, particularly Marxism and Leninism. These were articulated by African men that were well read and versed in these frameworks, while the majority of African women and the *povo* – masses – had limited knowledge of the English language, let alone the written word.

These types of theorizing for a new Zimbabwe bring to bear some of the consequences of hinging African social knowledge, theory and realities on Western language(s), frameworks, lifestyles among other assimilation features. This dependency makes us (Africans) a “rescued” people instead of “survivors” of colonialism to use Morrison’s (1992) analogy. Because the social philosophies of our independence shifted from being informed first and foremost by African philosophies and epistemologies at the beginning of the Chimurenga to Western models and frameworks, thereby subconsciously and consciously binding ourselves to the West. As is now the obvious case, we embraced Marxism at first, and since that did not work, because another Western model capitalism undermined our African realities, we are yet again left at the mercy of the West – for instance the IMF and its “rescue” packages. What needs to change as we strategize for change in contemporary society then, is our colonized minds that see everything Western as “developed” and anything African (and/or Third World) as “under-developed”. We need to keep resisting and fighting back, as did Mbuya Nehanda and our ancestors. This time not through the barrel of the gun, but by putting African women back to the center of our development discourse so we can strategize for African and Afrocentric development as an African people in this country.

Conclusion: BoGogo laboMama Bethu, Sangeni Lisiqinise

The lessons we have thus far traced from women in pre-colonial time through to the nationalist movements are valuable knowledge repositories to draw lessons for the contemporary women's movement. Relying on the "educated" to articulate women's issues means we kill the ancestor by individualizing collective experiences and knowledge. Waiting for our stories and life experiences to be "discovered" and documented by those of "goodwill" from abroad means it will take long or never to have an Afrocentric feminism and development. Our African and Afrocentric perspective to our development as a people, and as African women as we have explored thus far, is rooted in our ancestral past, yet we are in flight, winged by the rich diversity of own experiences. It is therefore incumbent upon us to assert our personal and collective agencies and contribute to social theory for social change by affirming and practicing African traditions, without being traditional. Put simply, we still have to libate, to wear with pride the legacy of Nehanda (Kaguvu, Nandi, Chaminuka...) on our sleeves; and do it in a way that the ancestors will squeal with joy, because we are living our lives contemporarily – in flight: yet guided by them – deeply rooted – in our Africa heritage as we explore Afrocentric development strategies.

Under-rating, discounting and/or (mis) representing these experiences from patriarchal and Western feminist standpoints eliminates a critical element in understanding African women's present day development capabilities, capacities, limitations and challenges in this country. Afrocentric feminist "development" research should of necessity be encouraged and consolidated in order to facilitate the re-clamation and "discovery" of other forgotten and/trivialized female ancestors. Mbuya Nehanda stands alone "in the cold" as our "educated" psyches (seek to) first assimilate and learn of Western centered and oriented feminisms, thereby denigrating our foremothers' agency as "primitive", "rural", and therefore "non-feminist". It is important for African women in this society, as we shall discuss later, to libate and theorize our own ancestors before we engage in the politics of Western and Western and White feminisms – *ngoba intandane enhle ngekhotwa ngunhina*. This way, we do not "internalize the master's idiom", incurring debts (shall) weigh on us disabling us from dismantling patriarchal and white supremacist capitalism among other forms of domination. Invoking our foremothers means we build connections with African women in the Diaspora, build alliances with fellow Third Worlders and those of the West that seek to build

bridges “without the mandate for conquest” and/or capitalist trappings.

Endnotes

¹ The term (A)mbuya has various meanings (and can also be dependent on the Shona “dialect”/intonation one uses); grandmother, mother-in-law and/or as a title used for women who were (and are) healers and/or diviners. In this study Mbuya (or *Sekuru* – grandfather or uncle – for male healers and/or diviners) will be used because it is culturally appropriate. Also, I shall use this title for Nehanda or any other spirit-medium, diviner and/or healer because it was a title that was (and continues to be) used to denote their status. It is a title that I shall use in the same manner that I would refer to a scholar as a Master and/or Doctor (Dr.) of; philosophy, medicine, education, and law among other disciplines, in modern day Western (and increasingly universal) culture, I shall pursue this issue more fully in chapter six. For interesting studies on the connections between African spirituality, politics, economics and social systems, see (among others); Asante, 1990; Asante and Abarry, 1996; Ranger, 1985; Reynolds, 1996; Matthews, 1998; James and Farmer, 1993.

² I must add that writing this thesis from an Afrocentric and Afrofeminist standpoint has been an act of courage for me in many ways, as I have had to live with the fear that my work may be discounted as non-scholarly; because I have chosen to transgress Western “scholarly” boundaries and defined “scholar” among other concepts from Afrocentric perspectives. These perspectives include tapping into oral traditions as “scholarly” because for the African, as we discussed in chapter one, there is more to communication than just the written word, see also (Asante, 1987, 1990; Asante and Abarry, 1996; Coetzee and Roux, 1998). Taking an Afrocentric standpoint means making African philosophies the center and starting point of my argument, in the same manner that someone writing on class analysis will take a Marxist standpoint, and so on. It does not mean that I totally dismiss Marxism or other Western philosophers as Western therefore irrelevant and begin to build the same hierarchies that I am refusing to fit into. It means I am yearning for meaning and belonging, for my “education” to be meaningful for me and my people since I could and cannot find us (Africans) in development canons as producers of knowledge about our own selves in our own terms. In order to achieve this honesty and longing for community, I have had to transgress; see also hooks, 1994, 1999.

³ I am going to be referring to the whole gamut of the White settler community, that is, missionaries, administrators, explorers, and farmers ... , as colonials. I am aware of the arguments (and reality) that some had “good” intentions, and should therefore not be clustered together with the “brutal” ones. Despite their intentions, I choose to “homogenize” this group because in essence they had a western ethnocentric approach to the “natives”. They therefore had an implicit

and explicit white supremacist agenda regardless of their particular role in the European expansionist agenda, and from this agenda, African women as a category had the rawest deal on all fronts as shall be later explored in this chapter and others. See also, Philip, 1991, 1992.

⁴ I shall be using VaShona/MaShona/Shona interchangeably, as I shall be using aMaNdebele/MaNdebele/Ndebele, depending on what I am discussing or describing.

⁵ The VaShona are made up of varied cultural (ethnic) groups, and among them are the VaKaranga, VaZezuru, VaKorekore and VaMaNyika to mention but four (Asante, 1987; Nelson, 1983; Martin and Johnson, 1981; Bourdillion, 1982).

⁶ The Ndebele are made up of AbeNguni, AmaSwati, and AbaSotho to mention but three. (Asante, 1987; Nelson, 1983; Martin and Johnson, 1981; Bourdillion, 1982).

⁷ Another point to take note of is that much of the literature on pre-colonial and colonial society is patriarchal and Eurocentric. While this does and does not mean historical inaccuracy, for this chapter (and thesis), it means a long detour analyzing patriarchal constructs instead of pursuing our subject matter, that is, tracing and theorizing the agency of African women in pre-colonial and colonial society in this country. It however does not mean we are not going to be analyzing, critiquing, and trying to understand patriarchal constructs, it means patriarchy is not the most important subject here, that is, it is an element of our discussion, but not the essence. For more studies on the history of Zimbabwe, see among many others, Samkange, 1968; Blake, 1977; Ranger, 1967, 1986; Gale, 1976; Beach, 1994; Bourdillion, 1982.

⁸ Loosely translated, the title of this piece means “*Ancestor Nehanda – Great Female Revolutionary of Zimbabwe*”. Please note that I have borrowed the development of this section from a Zimbabwean World Wide Web site: ZimSite – Bhabhamuzungu Productions 1998-2000 Zvauya Nepamwe, www.zimsite.com. Click on the “ZimSite Women and Gender Issues” icon then onto “ZimSite Sheroiners” and follow the leads until you get to “Mbuya Nehanda”.

⁹ Both the Shona and Ndebele had (and still have) a socio-political system based on beliefs in a god, ancestral spirits and spirit mediums – *Mwari/Mlimu, Vadzimu/Amadlozi, nemasvikiro*. They practiced a life based on a spirituality that gave them a sense of identity at the individual and collective levels. Spirit mediums were therefore an important part of these groups of people, because they oversaw the well-being of their societies through spiritual and political guidance at both natural and supernatural levels. Thus in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, spirituality played a significant role in the lives of the indigenous people, and those endowed with the gift of divination were respected and considered “natural” leaders because they represented the connection between those still alive and the

ancestral world, whose presence, blessing and continued support was much needed and maintained through rituals and ceremonies at different times of the year (Bourdillon, 1982; Gelfand, 1977). Since divination was (and is still considered) a gift from the spirit world, and therefore choice to be or not to be is something that was considered to be for the most part to left un-tempered by human intervention.

Thus the reality that the choice or practice of spirit medium-ship was and is something left to the ancestors and not humans, it meant and means that women could and did access this space(s) of (relative and real) power becoming influential people in their societies, as was the case of Mbuya Nehanda. While not many women were (or are) spirit mediums – and neither were or are men – those that did access it, did become agents of social change, they used the agency of spirit medium-ship to pioneer the cause of their societies. To the Victorian British settlers of the 1800s, this just reminded them of the seventeenth (17th) century European witch-hunt, that had seen many women burnt at the stake.

¹⁰ It is important to point out that there are some African male scholars who have dedicated works to Mbuya Nehanda, for example, Mutswairo's *Mweya WaNehanda* – the Spirit of Nehanda. However, the paucity of material scholarly and/or fictional, on Mbuya Nehanda necessitate an urgent project(s) into more research on female ancestral spirits and spirituality in this country and region (southern Africa).

¹¹ By land, I include the whole ecological gamut found in each and every area under discussion. I will not at this point go into the ecological/environmental debates that there are, suffice it to say that when I talk of (ancestral) land for Africans I mean more than just a commodity.

¹² Quoted in Martin and Johnson (1981: 44).

¹³ See also, Moore, 1993.

¹⁴ See also Walker, 1983.

¹⁵ See also Asante and Abarry (1996) Part Three on "Culture and Identity" pp. 109-281 and Part Four on "Philosophy and Morality" pp. 285-440.

¹⁶ Even where African men have accessed (western) education and accreditation, their re-collection and rewriting of African history – and the totality of these societies using "scientific" tools – have been dominated by male nationalist agendas learned from Western "scientific" knowledge that does not factor in women's perspectives. African women's realities thus remain obscured in the and where represented, they are constructed as the disenfranchised who need(ed) a man or an outsider (westerner) to pull them out of their drudgery. See also,

McFadden, 1998; hooks, 1992. I shall return to a fuller discussion of this issue in chapter three.

¹⁷ bell hooks (1994) and Molefi Asante (1987) help to sharpen this colonial discourse when they analyze the Eurocentric colonizing agenda of most European colonials. Their encounters with indigenous people's notions of community and hospitality was misrepresented to mean docility and therefore in need of salvation in Africa and North America. To this end, Asante (1987: 62) states that

... the white missionaries who, once given hospitality by Africans, wrote in their diaries that the 'natives' thought white men were gods, [shows that] their conception of themselves and their hosts, contributed to an inadequate interpretation [and representation of African] hospitality and generosity to strangers (Asante, 1987: 62).

hooks (1994: 201) takes the argument a step further, critically assessing Columbus' cultural location and allegiance to the notion of domination of non-Europeans when she asserts that:

Colonizing white imperialists documented the reality that the indigenous people they met did not greet them with the will to conquer, dominate, oppress, or destroy. In his journals and letters to Spanish patrons, Columbus described the gentle, peace-loving nature of Native Americans Though he seemed in awe of the politics of community and personal relations that he witnessed among the indigenous people, Columbus did not empathize with or respect the new cultural values he was observing and allow himself to be transformed

This colonizing spirit as we shall explore later survives to date, and has re-invented itself through the current development project, and has reinforced (mental, cultural, spiritual, economic, political among other types of) dependency and those that challenge the myth of capitalist development are reminded to *us-concentrate-on-the-positives-that-the-white-people-brought-and-still bring*. This concentration on the "positive" or "gesture of kindness" that colonialism and development brought and brings, has become the surveillance tool that shuts the souls, minds and mouths of the subjugated from critically assessing and resisting what *multi-western-national corporations* bring to the Real World in the name of investments. This mechanism maintains schisms among the dominated (Third World countries), who police each other on behalf of the powers that be and outshine each other to have the attention of West instead of building coalitions among themselves and those of the North that are genuinely interested in transformative social change.

¹⁸ In the process of colonization as pointed out earlier, men were the primary (and only) informants and contacts with the white capitalist male settlers, since they were the cattle herders and hunters and hence in the public to use a westocentric analysis. bell hooks (1994) in her critical essay “Columbus: Gone But Not Forgotten” interrogates notions that equate “civilization” of the world with whiteness, and especially notions that espouse that for there to be (western) civilization, domination is not only a necessary evil, but the essence of civilization. More importantly for this, is the fact and reality that patriarchal bonding happens even where community values are radically different for the black and white men.

¹⁹ Here notions of research methodology and frameworks become key issues to investigate, in order to understand how African men and White men conveniently constructed an image of an African woman and her role, eliminating notions of kinship and age (among other categories) that governed African socio-economic and political and cultural relations. For instance it is with deep rage and fascination that I read to this day “educated” African men that write and uphold “traditional” notions that African women are “children/junior males/minors”. This patriarchal depiction is inconsistent with another empirical reality of true African tradition (sic) where women, and particularly mothers are more important than fathers. While all elders are to be respected and never to be raised a voice let alone a hand at, cursed is the one that raises their voice let alone strikes their mother – *ukarova mai unotanda botso kuti uchemurwe*.

²⁰ Please note that Auret’s (1990) articulation more or less translates the Shona proverb as well.

²¹ Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) had become part of a federation with present day Zambia and Malawi – then known as the Federation of Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

²² See also table on page 50.

²³ This is an important historical issue to take note of especially when discussing issues of Western frameworks of women and the development process, namely; Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD) and Gender and Development (GAD). Usually African or Third World “cultural conservatism” is blamed for women’s double and triple work loads, yet what is often missing from this analysis is the context and the history of this triple and multiple workload. There is extensive literature on these issues, which under “normal” circumstances, would have made the essence of this thesis. See among many, many others, Rathgaber, 1990; Ballara, 1992; Moser, 1993; Young, 1993; Cleves, 1993; Macdonald, 1994; Barrig and Wehkamp, 1994; Karl, 1995; Snyder and Tadesse, 1995; Visvanathan *et al*, 1997.

²⁴ Quoted in Martin and Johnson (1981: 1).

²⁵ This is the first stanza of one of the most popular second *Chimurenga* songs that were sang across the country where young people (including myself) grew up dancing to the rhythms of the African *Chimurenga* drum. After several attempts to “accurately” translate this stanza, I settled for the quoted English version which is as close as it can get to the original, and this translation is recorded in Asante and Abarry (1996: 619).

²⁶ Namely the Zimbabwe African People’s Union - Patriotic Front (ZAPU - PF), and the Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU - PF), and their military wings Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) and Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) respectively. These two political parties signed a “Unity Accord” in 1987, after a civil war ensued right after independence, and saw a lot of people particularly in Matebeleland suffer gruesome brutalities. The president only recently officially acknowledged this dark past of Zimbabwe’s post-independence history at the burial of Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo, one of the luminaries of African nationalist politics.

²⁷ While we admire and honor the courage of these young children, in true (sic) African tradition, children should not be exposed let alone made to participate as soldiers or some such war personnel.

²⁸ And the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA, 1998: 3) reminds us that:

“Aid Works for All of Us.

- The jobs of more than 36,000.00 Canadians are sustained by our aid program.
- Over 70 cents [\$0.70] of every aid dollar benefits Canada.
- Fifty Canadian universities and 60 colleges benefit from aid-related contracts.
- The [two thousand] 2,000.00 Canadian businesses receiving aid-related contracts are making connections with some of the world’s growing markets”.

Three: African Independence, African Women's Independence?

Introduction

Having traced African women's agency from pre-colonial times through to the *Chimurenga* era thus far, this chapter explores the experiences of African women after independence. Of interest here - as in the rest of the thesis - is the understanding of women's agency under a different socio-political and economic environment, and the types of knowledge we learn from their experiences.

Exploring this will facilitate an understanding of the epistemological contributions African women have made to women, gender and development conceptual and theoretical frameworks.

African Socialism: Manpower (sic) Development At Independence

At independence, ZANU (PF) – which emerged as the winner of the first universal elections in 1980 – explicitly stated that the new government was going to adopt Marxist-Leninist political ideologies as both the party and government's guiding principles. Robert Mugabe, secretary general of the party and first Prime Minister of Zimbabwe (now president), addressed party delegates who had

gathered at Chimoi, Mozambique, just before official independence in the following manner:

The Party has accepted scientific Socialism as its guiding philosophy. We have ... examined the theory in light of our history and the environment of our country ... [and have] evolved it from pure ideology to a workable practical one for Zimbabwe (Mugabe, 1983: 38).

Thus ZANU-PF chose socialism as its political ideology citing African culture as the basis for this ideological choice. The party was also following in the footsteps of African luminaries like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia (to mention but three), who had adopted African socialism as a political ideology when their countries got independence (from Britain) in the 1950s and 1960s. Zimbabwe like many African countries got its independence in the international political climate of the Western Cold War. There were many factors that made Marxist-Leninist socialism very attractive to many African and Third World nationalist parties. These factors were (*inter alia*): (a) Western “democracy” had colonial and former colonial powers as key players, including the US and Canadian “democracies” founded on the subjugation and enslavement of indigenous people and Africans in particular; (b) Armed wings of nationalist parties were trained and heavily funded by the former

Soviet Union (to advance its own politico-economic agendas); (c) Socialism in western literature and/or governments, came close to notions of the possibilities of an African Renaissance once independence was achieved, and Julius Nyerere's Ujamaa in Tanzania was a sterling example; (d) Learning from the post-independence era it would not be overly-presumptuous to point out that since the majority of African leaders were (and still are) men, their notion of an African Renaissance was one based on the restoration of an African (Black) masculinity "wounded" by colonialism than on a holistic renaissance of *Isintu/Chivanhu* (Senghor, 1996; Nyerere, 1996; Nkrumah, 1996; James, 1996).¹

Much of the African nationalist-cum-socialist literature generated by African male leaders and scholars makes for illuminating reading into the minds and idealism of these leaders, and it speaks volumes of African agency and resistance to colonization. However what is most glaring is the reality that in much of these writings – though insightful and radical – their notions of an African culture reinforce the colonial misrepresentation of African women. This misrepresentation for the most part remains unquestioned and under-theorized as issues of economic development occupy the minds of these leaders. Thus at independence in Zimbabwe as most African countries independent before itself, the issues of the

oppression and (mis)representation of women did not get adequately addressed as were issues of racial equality and equity. Simply put, African men saw the decolonization process primarily as a process for African men to access those spaces denied all Africans (and especially them) during colonialism. When women wanted to access these same spaces, they were told that men were the breadwinners, and women's place was in the home, similar politics as those played out at the beginning of the second *Chimurenga* we explored in the previous chapter. Ironically, this conflicted with notions of an "African socialism" they were espousing, an ideology based on notions of equity between women and men and a communalism extending across all African people.

In Zimbabwe, because the majority of African women were disadvantaged by the lack or inadequacy of reading and writing skills at independence, they did not fully articulate the sexism embedded in the Western political ideologies so championed by their leaders. It was also at this precise time that a critical mass of African men accessed the public and private sectors in record numbers because they had minimal to maximal skills required to enable further manpower (sic) development for optimum participation in the left-over-white-capitalist-soon-to-be-black-socialist economy. African men's advantage over women as we

explored in the previous chapter arose because they had acquired a colonial and/or Western education, or had worked as migrant workers in the factories, cities, mines and so on during the colonial era and therefore had an advantage over women. On the other hand, the majority of African women could and did for the most part access jobs in service positions both in the public and private sectors or as domestic workers, jobs deemed as “unskilled” and/or requiring limited or no skills training.²

Zimbabwe at independence therefore busied itself in establishing its position among other African and Real World countries that had asserted centrist or alternative politics from that of the East and West through the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) (Mason, 1997). In the Southern African region’s political context where apartheid regimes were still in power in Namibia and South Africa, Zimbabwe followed the political route that Mozambique, its eastern neighbor and comrade in arms under the late Samora Machel had taken. The difference between Mozambique and Zimbabwe’s political policies at independence however, was that the latter extended a hand of reconciliation to the white population at independence,³ – a trend that Namibia and South Africa also adopted at their respective political independence. The international community – particularly the

West – heralded this reconciliatory gesture on the part of the new government as a progressive one, a choice that placed Zimbabwe as a shining example of progressive African political development.

What is often uninterrogated however, are the gender consequences of such a reconciliatory gesture that saw yet another round of bonding between (informed) Black men and White capitalist patriarchy, sidelining African women to the socio-political and economic margins of a newly independent Zimbabwe. This also meant that the “African community” – *Chivanhu/Isintu* – was not as important as making sure that the white settler community, who still had (and have) near total control of the economy, would cooperate with the new (male dominated) government.

At this point, it is also crucial to remember that while the new government advocated socialist ideologies, colonialism had brought with it capitalism. Over the hundred years of direct colonization, individualism and capitalism had crept into the people’s way of life, and was intricately welded with the African way of life. Nationalist leaders and the emerging black petit bourgeoisie, some of whom had been in exile overseas during the war, had come to look upon private ownership of the means of production and property in a different light. Thus even though there was a leadership code that

theoretically deterred the accumulation of personal property while in political office, the reality today tells a radically different story. Thus the entrenched nature of western values through colonial and western education, religion and cultural values contradicted the African communal and socialist values that the leaders pronounced, to say nothing of the economic relationships and values embedded in and central to capitalist colonialism (Mandaza, 1987).

This is an important contradiction to keep in mind, as we shall investigate African women's agency in trying to negotiate for access and control over resources in the household and the society at large. This concentration on placating the white population at the expense of systemic social transformation, has meant that over time, the noose of who can own property has tightened and significantly excluded women as a category (Batezat and Mwalo, 1989; UNICEF, 1994; Gaidzanwa, 1995; Moyo, 1995).

For instance, almost a year after independence, on March 23-27 1981 the government of Zimbabwe convened a Conference on "Reconstruction and Development" dubbed "*ZIMCORD*". This conference was convoked in a bid to rally international financial, technical assistance and cooperation in the rebuilding of Zimbabwe after the war. The community of donors and friends of

Zimbabwe attended ZIMCORD in impressive numbers and strength: 70 delegations, comprising a total of 267 delegates, representing 45 countries, 10 international agencies, and 15 specialized agencies of the United Nations (ZIMCORD, 1981: 188).

The most disappointing and yet very enlightening reality at this conference was that both the South and North – with an overwhelming majority of male delegates – were almost silent about the issues of women and gender in the reconstruction of Zimbabwe. Only those Zimbabwean women present utilized their agency as women and official delegates to raise concerns and issues for and about women. Thus women's issues at this important conference were not part of the conference's theoretical and conceptual frameworks, nor were they part of the vocabulary of both the hosts and their distinguished (international) guests. A reading of the conference report indicates that there was at best an *add-women-and-stir* attitude to the issues of women and gender in the conceptualization of the reconstruction and development of Zimbabwe. One of the delegates from the (Zimbabwe) Ministry of Women's Affairs, who was called to answer one of the few⁴ official questions on women, succinctly summarized this disappointing reality when she stated the following:

I do not know whether that was the order of priorities in terms of rural development and resettlement, that women's role is given only five minutes – or is not given enough time to prepare for it. So we are always given five minutes' notice and expected to perform miracles, [I will emphasize that] it will not be possible to carry out the objectives of the government without the full participation of women ... (ZIMCORD 1981: 149).

This might seem like splitting hairs, but the *let's-get-on-with-the-common-objective- (development) -first- then-we-will-deal-with-women's-issues-later* attitude that prevailed at this crucial conference – which was the foundation stone to the reconstruction and development project of Zimbabwe in the transition period – is one that demands revisiting. From an Afrocentric and Afrofeminist standpoint, revisiting this conference is definitely not splitting hairs, but a process that is necessary for the understanding of the dynamics of *catch-up* types of development into which this country and other Real World countries are implicitly and explicitly cornered. ZIMCORD did garner a lot of financial and technical “aid” for the reconstruction and development of the country from the international (mostly Western) community. Yet the gains to women as a category and a disadvantaged social group left a lot of unanswered questions, to which even the (“gender conscious and sensitive”) West did not object. It is only now in the 1990s, when gender is the buzz word in (Western oriented) development, that women have been and are being considered as equal development

partners in their own right. This brings to bear the problems associated with always emulating dominant groups' theories and perspectives without theorizing and articulating our own experiences. This reality is dangerous for oppressed groups because they get rallied into pushing the agendas of the powerful, which often turn out to have hegemonic tendencies.

While it must have been quite discouraging for many women in the national machinery to note that women's issues were treated peripherally, something else must have become very clear for women delegates. Women's emancipation would primarily come through women's political activism (Afrofeminism) in as much as African freedom had come through African political activism – Afronationalism. Afronationalist men in power (as a collective) could not be relied upon to desire sharing power with African women, even when they had known and intimately experienced the brutal trauma of oppression and discrimination themselves. When African men embraced a “progressive” Marxist political perspective and “adapted” it to suit the Zimbabwean situation, they did not critique nor change the inherent sexism in Marxist-Leninist and other Western (male) ideologies of reconstruction and development.

Thus while attempting to get rid of the capitalist ideology that the British and other colonizers had brought to this country, it would seem that independence meant a swoop of the color of the men in power. The foregoing discussion is not to trivialize nor under-rate my country's independence, I value it deeply; it is a country born through the sweat, tears and blood of my ancestors and fellow country people, and I respect and honor their sacrifice, including the authority of those that represent us today. What I am contesting here, is African men's treatment of African women at independence.

On the other hand, it is understandable that the world (even the West with its we-are- always-the-first attitude) had not fully appreciated women's and gender issues as important theoretical and policy issues in the development discourse and praxis. Therefore, why should African leaders be critiqued more "harshly"? What needs to be emphasized again and again is that African women and men have been victims and survivors of capitalist colonialism, they struggled together to bring about socio-political change to African people's condition and position in this society. If African women's equal and equitable contributions to bring about social change in this country were and are not enough homegrown female agency and representation, then what is?

The other reality about independence was that development was (and is) still measured in economic terms, and the drive to build manpower (sic) was so that the (male) worker and peasant could access and hopefully control the means of production. This saw a skills training drive at independence with a burgeoning of cooperatives (co-ops) of various shapes and sizes.⁵ Some of these cooperatives were gender specific while others were mixed; and the projects that most of the co-ops engaged in were gendered in that they focused on socially constructed gender (“male” and “female”) skills.

Zvinoda Madzimai: National Machinery, By Women Administered...

Given the foregoing scenario, however, it does not mean that the new government totally “forgot” about African women’s contributions and role in the political development of the country right after independence. The preceding events are important in understanding the context in which African women found themselves after independence, and the reality that even the West was not so “advanced” in terms of considering women’s issues as key issues in Zimbabwe’s development. This context therefore sharpens our perception of Zimbabwean women’s activism and

allows us to see their activism as important contributions to social change in this country.

In the first years of independence, the new government showed “progressive” signs through its official acknowledgment of women’s contributions and participation in the (political) development of the country and particularly the years that expedited the attainment of political independence. This it did through a variety of ways, one being to ratify and sign many of the Declarations, Conventions and Treaties of the United Nations on Women, like the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1979. Concomitant with these international pledges, nationally the new government instituted legal structures to ensure women would not be discriminated against on the basis of gender in a new Zimbabwe (Kazembe, 1987; Gaidzanwa, 1992; Chigudu and Tichagwa, 1995). These structures were also meant to “integrate” women into the national development process, thereby improving their material condition and social status in a new society (Auret, 1990). Kazembe (1987: 399), observes that the most important gesture the new government showed on the status of African women at independence was its institution of

... the Ministry of Cooperatives Community Development and Women's Affairs (MCCDWA) in 1981, whose task was to:
Mobilize, organize, coordinate and monitor public and private non-governmental organizations (NGOs) geared towards closing disparities between men and women in Zimbabwe

MCCDWA⁶ thus became the official structure that would ensure the inclusion of women's issues (as permanent features) in national development programs and projects at the micro, meso and macro levels. The institution of the Ministry of Women's Affairs – as it became popularly known – was lauded by many as a positive move, one that showed African men as capable and egalitarian leaders when given a chance to lead.

One of the first tasks MCCDWA undertook was to conduct a National Development Needs Assessment Survey in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Educational Fund (UNICEF) and a local NGO, the Adult Literacy Organization of Zimbabwe (ALOZ). The survey (using various research qualitative and especially quantitative methods) attempted to determine women's development priorities and problems (Kazembe, 1987; UNICEF, 1994). According to the survey findings, the following were some of the development priorities and problems:

- economic deprivation
- negative legislation
- illiteracy
- child care facilities

- negative socio-cultural attitudes toward women and
- the taxation system (Kazembe, 1987).

From this list of priorities and problems, the consortium of organizations – MCCDWA, ALOZ and UNICEF – prioritized literacy, the ability to read and write, as the first priority to be addressed for a successful national and particularly rural development program. The rationale for the prioritization of literacy was based on various theoretical rationales, particularly one that argued that literacy would have an unparalleled *knock-on/spill-over* effect on the rest of the development programs and projects. It was also based on examples from Tanzania and particularly Brazil where the (Paulo) Freirian versions of community development through adult education and group consciousness raising is documented as having fostered individual and collective liberatory “development” experiences for the disadvantaged *povo* – masses (Freire, 1985). The prioritization of literacy also made sound “development” sense because even statistical evidence showed that as of 1977, literacy rates in Zimbabwe were as follows: Women 31%, Men 48%; Racially, by 1981, the rates were Black 30%, White 99%; and women made up 60% of Black non-literate in 1982 (Muchena, 1996: 746).

Thus with plans all set and funding secured from central government, UNICEF and other funding agencies, the MCCDWA and consortium of

organizations launched a national literacy program in 1983. This program aimed at equipping those people - particularly African - women in need of these skills so they could “empower” themselves. This “empowerment” process, it was argued, would enable the “illiterate” to participate more fully in the development processes through access and use of information. African women, being the larger majority of the non-literate, welcomed this program enthusiastically and registered in record numbers (Auret, 1990; Foley, 1980). By 1986, 35 000 adults – 75% of whom were women – had enrolled in rural and urban centers around the country. Thus the projected positive knock on effect on many other national development programs seemed to have held true in the first years of independence, because people got interested in forming cooperatives for their various socio-economic needs (Kazembe, 1987; Staunton, 1991; UNICEF, 1994; Muchena, 1996).

Other than the national literacy program, another positive gain women made at independence was the reversal of customary laws codified during colonial rule that made women jural minors.⁷ In December 1982, the government instituted the Legal Age of Majority Act (LAMA). The Act made eighteen (18) years, the legal age for anyone to vote and essentially be considered a mature adult, able to make decisions concerning their lives without parental consent.

LAMA effectively reinstated African women as legal majors. This process was in keeping with national and international standards, particularly

... the first article [of CEDAW which] defines . . . 'discrimination against women' . . . [as] 'a distinction, exclusion or restriction' made on the basis of sex which has the 'purpose or effect' of preventing women, irrespective of their marital status, of fully enjoying and exercising human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social cultural, civil or any other field (Liebenberg, 1997: 28).

LAMA, while applauded by MCCDWA and women's groups, engendered general social resistance, particularly from men who saw this as limiting their control over their daughters. Under the colonial capitalist system, with institutionalized notions of private property, women had become commodities; notions and cultural meanings of *lobola/roora* – so called bride wealth – became misconstrued to suit male agendas (Gaidzanwa, 1992; Jirira, 1995; Kahari, 1995; Mikell, 1997). The concept of *lobola*, like many African cultural practices in development literature, is one often under researched, under theorized and misrepresented not only in Zimbabwe, but also in much of the Real World where cultural practices have been misconstrued through colonialism and patriarchal agendas. Due to the inadequacy of historically contextualized written material, the temptation is to join the

bandwagon in condemning the practice, which in turn sparks negative reactions and reinforces the very negative effects these practices now have on women.

For instance elderly women in Zimbabwe, whose roles changed without equal replacement during colonialism, are usually perceived as the custodians of this “repressive” custom. However some of my experience has been that because notions of “our culture” are now meshed with Western Christian and European values, if we take them at face value, we de-contextualize them. By so doing, we lose some of the valuable pointers to sustainable clues for long term solutions to the problems that many (young) women face today. One elderly woman, *Gogo MaSibanda*⁸ once told me that in her experience the original meaning of *lobola* was not for the commodification of women, but the cementing of relations between two families (clans ...). *Gogo MaSibanda* went on to elaborate in the following loosely translated and paraphrased manner:

... *Mzuku*, this (commercialization of *lobola*) is an evil spirit that has possessed our people ... *Esintwini umuntu kathengiswa Isintu sethu sifa nsuku zonke abantu sikhangele kanje mzuku* – In African culture a person is not a commodity Our culture is dying while we (Africans) watch and idle by the sidelines my grandchild ... (Gogo MaSibanda, 1997).

While *Gogo MaSibanda* may not call herself a feminist, her critical analysis on the material condition and social position of women in her society was for me definitely Afrocentric and Afrofeminist and radical. It was a wake up call for me that had been “educated” to see “African culture” as “bad” for women without going deeper to try and understand it beyond the predominantly patriarchal and/or White Western centered and oriented written word.⁹

A Pause for Reflection: African Men in Development

It is critical at this point that I still maintain that African and European colonial masculinity colluded to produce a misogynous reading of African women’s position in African society. Since this (thesis) writing is an intellectual, spiritual and physical journey for me, I have found it critical at this point to pause and reflect on what I mean by African patriarchy. It has become apparent to me that in the process of trying to understand African feminism as I defined it in the first chapter, there is also need to understand the role of men in pre-colonial society. We have to look beyond that which was codified by the colonials, because African community then, meant and means a collectivity of women, children and men,

each in their individuality, diversity and totality. In this regard, African patriarchy, if it be so called, has also to be re-examined.

For instance, what is there to hold us back from thinking that the white colonial administrators, lawyers, teachers and missionaries did not misrepresent what the African men told them to be African customs and norms, women's and men's social roles in African society then? Presenting African maleness as totally negative reinforces hegemonic stereotypes and perpetuates the divide and rule tactics of the West on the African continent and the rest of the Real World. It discredits and disallows the understanding of the African male psyches, even where they might have had radical and revolutionary ideas about the emancipation and (social) development of the African people. This is important to ask because of the curious reality that even though African men have over the last hundred years or so, been and continue to be "educated", "refined" and "civilized" in the ways of the West (could) and can intellectually engage Western philosophies, their sexism for the most part seems to solidify and continues to date.

For instance, young "very well educated" African men try to deny young African women the same right to "education" and other socio-political and economic rights and skills that they have

accessed and use to position themselves into leadership positions across the socio-political and economic structures. Thus the Western demonization of African men is one that has to be distinguished from African women's feminist critiques that seek social justice for women and children in this society. This call is hence for "educated", "socialist" and "progressive" men to refrain from denigrating Afrofeminists, women and men activists as Western copycats, when their own Marxism, liberalism and capitalism are informed by Western (patriarchal and sexist) constructs. And hooks (1994: 195) offers a particularly insightful perspective when she examines similar issues looking at Black radical civil rights leaders in the United States and particularly at Malcolm X. She critiques Malcolm X's sexism at the beginning of his political career, celebrates his "gender conversion" and enlightenment once he left the Nation of Islam and independently engaged in the discourses of the condition of Black people in the USA. hooks reminds us of the importance of X's radical teachings, and insists that:

Malcolm X would still be an important political thinker and activist whose life and work should be studied and learned from, even if he had never confronted and altered his sexist thinking. However, the point that has to be made again and again is that he did begin to critique and change that sexism, he did transform his consciousness. When I hear Malcolm urging us to seize freedom 'by any and all

means necessary,' I do not think of a call to masculinist violence, but rather to a call to *decolonize our minds*, and strategize so that we can use various tools and weapons in our efforts at emancipation.¹⁰

Thus my critique of African patriarchy and African nationalist politics thus far and throughout this thesis does not discount as invalid, unimportant or non-radical, the contributions of African luminaries like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda, and our own nationalist leaders in this country. If anything, it is a cry of despair from those of us that grew up in spaces like Southern Africa in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, whose political (activism) training was done in the community at a very early age in the Black townships of the various cities and other spaces of this region. We learnt defiance and resistance to domination from the time we could talk, we chanted political slogans, marched in demonstrations, danced to the rhythms of the African nationalist drum and cried freedom for the African chanting: *Amandla! Ngawethu! Mayibuye! iAfrika!* It is from the political teachings of these same men that we learnt the importance of resistance to domination and now when we talk of women's oppression we are told that "*decent*" African women know *where their place is in society*. This is a big let down coming from "enlightened Marxist socialists", who have now consolidated their patriarchal hegemony and want to lord it over others. They seem to

forget that they are where they are also because of African women's sacrifices and contributions then and now.

Thus when African feminists and activists critique the sexist politics and misogyny that has permeated this society, we are only living true to the teachings of Mbuya Nehanda, Sekuru Kaguvi and the same fathers (sic) of the African nationalist movements. It is our duty to remind them that they taught us to resist domination and we learnt our lesson well, domination is domination regardless of the shape, size, skin color, gender or other form it comes in – *nyoka inyoka veduwe-e*. We have to ask ourselves what went wrong when we see the majority of women ground down by poverty today. This country came to be at too high a price, with lost lives and the destruction of an African social system that continues to be degraded as if the contributions of our ancestors and those that lost their lives do not matter in the grander (Western) development scheme of this country.

African men (and scholars) have to take up the challenge of placing gender issues in perspective in their lives and work, as putting African women down means we are only deepening the fragmentation of this society even more. Embracing Afrocentric development means we African women and men begin to

collaborate as equals, search for solutions to problems that beset this country, each other and every member of this society (including children) as important contributors to social change regardless of their social location – the Chimurenga continues, *Aluta Continua*. That is our social obligation; we have to go back to the roots and in true African tradition (sic), *toungana semhuri* so as to find ways out of the crises we are in – *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu mahlabe' zulu*.¹¹

Zvinoda Madzimai: National Machinery, By Women Administered...

Having made that important pause, we continue our tracing of the gains African women made at independence under the new Zimbabwe government. Other structural measures put in place to correct gender imbalances in Zimbabwean society were the Minimum Wage Act (MWA), the Equal Pay Act (EPA), and the Labor Relations Act (LRA). The MWA placed minimum scales of remuneration for the “unskilled” personnel category, where women were (and continue to be) concentrated. The EPA on the other hand, equalized remuneration for women and men so that all employees with the same qualification got equal pay for equal work, a practice that had not been in place pre-independence (even for white colonial women). This legislation was designed to

eliminate some of the western gender biases that the colonial settlers brought from their own cultures and imposed on the “natives”. Women (and children) in the settler Victorian culture were to be seen not heard, and when (white) women entered the public arena, they were in the “female” jobs – service industry - and were remunerated differently and very poorly (this issue is still a global feminist issue to date even in the West). Also important for African women at the time (though still discriminatory) was the LRA, which included a clause stating that

... a woman [could] get 75% of her full pay while on maternity leave if she forfeits all leave due, six months prior to the start of maternity leave. If she does not want to forfeit her leave, she gets 60% of her normal pay (Jassat and Jirira, 1987: 14).

All these gains could be seen as positive responses that the new government made to address gender inequities and inequalities.

More importantly, women working at various levels in various institutions (grassroots, academia, NGOs...) collaborated with the Women’s ministry in lobbying for these changes and the inclusion of women’s issues on the national development agenda.

Thus at independence Zimbabwean women from different walks of life ensured that the issues of women would remain on the various agendas of the micro, meso and macro development organizations

they were affiliated. This drive for women's spaces in society fed the engines geared toward the preparations for the second UN World Conference on Women, the first to be held in Africa, Nairobi, in 1985 and the first one in which Zimbabwean women participated as citizens of a (politically) free country.

The experience of the Nairobi Conference engendered in many Zimbabwean delegates a renewed sense of identity as African women, and the crucial need to keep lobbying and advocating for women's advancement in national development. Those women that had participated in this UN World Conference on Women realized that their issues as African (Zimbabwean) women while unique, were not necessarily peculiar. They learnt to value their own experiences in the processes of political, cultural, social and economic development of their country as important sources of knowledge about female agency that should be utilized to ensure the inscription and implementation of women and gender responsive and sensitive (national) development policies.

Comrades in Arms – Yes; Equals – No!: Between A Rock and A Hard Place

Given the foregoing “progressive” scenario, it is also important to recognize that at independence, African women like most people in their society, were (also) “infected” by the euphoria of political independence. They therefore embraced all the (small and big) gains made thus far as very positive, thereby relaxing their attitudes toward patriarchy to some extent. Generally, women believed that since they had participated equitably and equally alongside men during the *Chimurenga*, men had by and large shed their sexist perceptions of women as the weaker sex and hence belonging in the home. What women later realized was that, patriarchy, like all forms of domination, has a way of disguising and overtime re-inventing itself in often subtle and sophisticated ways, ways that co-opt the oppressed, while the resilient also invent new ways of resistance. Patriarchal and white supremacist power changes today’s comrade into tomorrow’s seat of oppressive power, and it is for this reason that we have to urgently seek transformative power sharing structures.

Thus for women in this country, while they basked in the gains made at independence, they had a rude wake up call from patriarchal viciousness when the state police and army cracked

down on women travelling at night in the name of “cleaning up” the streets of “indecent” women (Gaidzanwa, 1992; Jirira, 1995). This gross violation of women’s human rights brought home the meaning of the proverbial *end of the honeymoon*, as blatant patriarchal sexism lashed out in a bid to control women’s lives and bodies through terror. (African) men in power flexed their sexist muscles reminding African women that they were (patriarchal men) in charge and would dictate the parameters of African women’s independence in this country. If anything, the men in power were going to tighten the noose so as to ensure that African women were reminded that their place “was in the home” where “good” women “belonged” and not out in the public (Gaidzanwa, 1992; Jirira, 1995; Kahari, 1995). African men (like their Western counterparts) were not ready to share power with women, and had thus to find a way to “terrorize” women out of their hard won independence through the notorious “clean-up” operation(s). The misogyny embedded in such acts is clearly illustrated by Jirira (1995: 79-80) when she states that:

In the post-independence period female ex-combatants became viewed by some members of society as sexually starved nymphomaniacs The ‘de-feminization’ of women, a socially sanctioned attitude practiced by most men and women, meant that female ex-combatants were turned into morally corrupt women, thus rendering them unfit to form consensual unions with ‘decent’ men and/or to form

bonds of solidarity and friendships with 'decent' women The general social backlash on female ex-combatants made several of them deny their newly found status as ... emancipated women. Some women [even] reverted back to domesticity, to the ideal [female] status of wife, mother and homemaker ... ”.

This overt move to “tame” women by the state machinery reinforced the internal (and external) dichotomous definition of (Zimbabwean) African women as good/bad, decent/indecent, and wild/tame This dichotomy has evolved through the generations and has been used as a form of social control for women at all levels when women assert their agency and contest domination by patriarchy, white supremacy and capitalism along with other forms of oppression. The colonial settlers as we explored in chapter two, branded Mbuya Nehanda a “bad” woman because she resisted domination and called on her community to do the same. During the colonial period, women, who exercised their autonomy and refused the harshness of “native reserve” life were branded “bad” women and policies to punish and contain them were drafted and implemented. In the post-war era, ex-combatants got the label when they were exercising their hard-earned right to freedom from racism and sexism.

In contemporary Zimbabwe, this label is utilized to stigmatize Afrofeminists and African women (and men) activists who remind

patriarchy that the *Chimurenga* is not over yet (McFadden, 1998; Gaidzanwa, 1992; Collins, 1998). With each generation, women have broken and transgressed social boundaries of female containment in this country. Some have done so overtly while others have been covert about it, and the most important issue here is that African women have and continue to validate their personal and collective agencies. The agency of our foremothers, our contemporary mothers, sisters, aunts and fellow women cast us (African women) as agents of social change in our society and not mere victims of patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism and other forms of domination.

It is important to validate women's agency where patriarchy and white supremacy will not see it because sometimes women are paralyzed by shock when confronted with such violence as seems to have been the case of the women's ministry when government "raked in" women. Because the party's leadership code on self-criticism among members specified that it had to be kept internal, it meant the leaders of the women's ministry, because of their socio-political location, could not openly criticize the government for its actions. On the other hand, the women polity expected the women's ministry to take a stand against the government's violation of women's human rights, because it was a women's

ministry that should have been representative of women's issues, therefore its first allegiance to women (Gaidzanwa, 1992; Jirira, 1995; Geisler, 1995).

Ultimately, caught between a rock and a hard place, the ministry did not issue a public statement on this matter, a move that stunned and outraged many women, who found it difficult to grasp how the ministry had on some occasions rallied women for street marches to congratulate the government when it enacted progressive laws such as the LAMA. It was incomprehensible to understand why when the same government violated women's human rights, the ministry was decidedly private about the matter, and for this we have to ask a lot of questions about the politics of state mobilized women and youth wings (Kazembe, 1986; Gaidzanwa, 1992; Jirira, 1995). Gaidzanwa's (1992: 115) analysis of this situation is particularly insightful as she notes that "... [this] event exposed the dependence of the women's ministry on the party and government on how the rights of women were to be interpreted and effected".

After that, it became crystal clear to the Zimbabwean women's movement that the ministry had just been set to placate "rabid" women while the Chimurenga memories were still "fresh". While

much of the documented evidence on the women's ministry overwhelmingly supports the assertion that the ministry was weak, the reality is that African women (and men in this country) were for the first time in a century or so heading public offices in a new social system. Women, more than men, had limited or no experience, skills, training and exposure to such public office and were therefore more vulnerable to patriarchal manipulation and public blame. This once again shows how deeply wounded Zimbabwean society was (and is) by the legacy of colonialism that divided the African community disadvantaging women in such profound and far-reaching ways. Usually such realities are easily forgotten as we slip into dominant patriarchal and racist modes of thinking that blame women (the/victim) instead of addressing patriarchy and white supremacy (the perpetrator) and the roots of such crises. As Van Allen (1972: 165) reminds us when she discusses Igbo women's agency in Nigeria, stating that even though

[i]n conventional wisdom, Western influence has 'emancipated' African women Westernization [has] not been an unmixed blessing. The experience of Igbo women under British colonialism shows that Western influence can sometimes weaken or destroy women's traditional autonomy and power without providing modern forms of autonomy or power in exchange.

The limited number of autonomous forms of political power for women after independence therefore ensured women's autonomy would be contained and controlled by various hegemonistic agendas before it percolated into the whole society and possibly transformed gender and other power relations in this country.

In the women's ministry as the years went by, the resources shrunk in relation to the general population of women and the development programs and projects in waiting. Over time, it became impossible to effect systematic and systemic change in women's lives through this ministry because there was neither the political will, the political space nor the resources to effect such social change (Batezat and Mwalo, 1989; Gaidzanwa, 1992). By 1990, as SAPs finally became a reality and a staunch Marxist Robert Mugabe bowed under the weight of the IMF's economic prescriptions, cut backs and massive (male) worker retrenchments became the order of the day. In the government's own house so to speak, the restructuring saw the dissolution of the ministry of women's affairs, reducing it to a bureau/department, ironically in a newly created Ministry of National Affairs, Cooperatives and Employment Creation. A lot of the rank and file women working within the ministry saw and understood what this restructuring meant for women, and they knew that a lot had changed in

Zimbabwe, yet so much had remained the same in terms of gender power relations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we traced the gains, opportunities and challenges that independence brought for Zimbabwean women. Independence did bring about a certain level of positive social change for African women, the most visible being the institution of the women's ministry. It was a ministry charged with the responsibility of ensuring that women's issues would be an integral part of national development policies, programs and projects in a "new" society. Concomitant with the institution of this ministry, the government established legal structures to ensure that African women would not be discriminated against when they entered the public arena. These and other positive contributions not discussed here while very important contributions to the advancement of Zimbabwe, it is clear that most men in this society have over the last century deeply internalized patriarchal "superiority" and the "inferiority" of African women.

The same "educated" men who not so long ago so eloquently articulated the maxims of the fathers (sic) African and Western socialism today want to put a lid to the issues of women's agency,

empowerment and calls for social transformation that entails (their) power sharing. What is also clear from this case study is that the state, if based on patriarchal, sexist and hegemonic assumptions as it has been thus far, cannot be tasked (nor trusted) with the role of creating spaces for women to realize their full potential as members of this society.

What is most striking from this case study is that even though the inadequacy and/or lack of skills to operate in a new social order disadvantaged African women, they claimed the authority of their experiences and asserted their agency, calling for social change at independence. The fact that society on the one hand viewed female ex-combatants negatively while glorifying male ex-combatants on the other is one that is not to be brushed aside as cultural conservatism and/or male chauvinism, but one that has to be interrogated even deeper and further. The state's "clean up" operation while undeniably misogynous, is also to be conceptualized and theorized as an important socio-political indicator that informs us that African women in this country were a political force that a patriarchal society was not ready for because it threatened phallogocentric notions of African socialism and renaissance.

As we have explored thus far, Zimbabwean women have a long history of personal and collective agency that is informed by their location in the socio-political, economic and cultural structures of their society at different times in the history of this country.

Tapping into these experiential bases gives us the opportunity to theorize Afrocentric feminism(s) grounded in African women's own life experiences, which will give us the impetus to strategize for sustainable social change and transformation.

Endnotes

¹ Léopold Sédar Senghor. "African Socialism: Address Given to the American Society of African Culture", pp. 342-353. Julius K. Nyerere. "One-Party Government", pp. 555-558. Kwame Nkrumah. "The Need for a Union Government for Africa: Speech at Cairo Summit Conference, Organization of African Unity, July 19, 1964", pp. 559-572. C.L.R. James. "The Rise and Fall of Nkrumah", pp. 573-579. All articles above In Molefi K. Asante and Abu S. Abarry. 1996.

² "Unskilled" is used in quotation marks here because women's reproductive (and productive) social roles are usually taken for granted as "natural" therefore unskilled. This discounting of women's work amounts to their not being remunerated and the life long teaching, learning and mastery of these skills seen as only "normal". If these skills are not learned skills then why do men (and the rich) not engage in them in the same manner? For an excellent critique of the notion of women's unskilled labor and phallocracy embedded in (capitalist) national and international accounting and economics, see among numerous others; Fernandez-Kelly, 1997; Sen and Grown, 1987; Waring, 1990.

³ This political move of reconciliation could also be seen as a move that clipped the radical edge out of nationalist politics, yet another argument could be that what choice did the new government have, the war had been long, brutal and too many lives had been lost. Another possible factor in this reconciliatory move, was that the Lancaster House Agreement as discussed in chapter two, made it the most logical route to avert a destruction similar to what the Portuguese had done to Mozambique at its independence. And Zimbabwe could not afford anymore

damage, thus this reconciliation was strategic damage control by the new government (ZIMCORD, 1980; Martin and Johnson, 1981; Mandaza, 1987).

⁴ Please note that here I make reference to the final official report that was published. It is my belief that women did network and make contacts for themselves, and for their ministry in the informal settings, as this tends to be the general trend globally, that women organize from and in the margins. It is quite mind staggering actually, considering that racial injustice and colonialism that African people had endured and overthrown through a bitter war was being addressed here, yet all other forms of domination that privileged black and white males were not made reference to (Courville, 1993).

⁵ There was a boom of cooperatives just after independence. A substantial amount of the money raised from the ZIMCORD conference and through other means, destined for rural and community development, was put into cooperative groups of one kind or the other, some argue modeled on Tanzania's Ujamma. The returns from this investment from a capitalist perspective were largely disappointing, because the working class and peasantry did not possess the skills that would ensure the maximization of personal interests for personal profit. What is interesting about some of these evaluatory studies (and otherwise) on the co-op movement in Zimbabwe that seek to understand "what went wrong", is that rural communities are usually presented as not having been "skilled" enough to run successful business ventures. The dominant Westcentric literature gravitates towards the presentation of the "failures" of co-ops as a problem of the "underdeveloped" who cannot be relied upon to have an enterprising spirit. Issues like these are important to investigate a little more from Afrocentric perspectives not so much as a *to-prove-them-wrong* project, but as a way of trying to understand some of the "hidden" root causes of "underdevelopment" and the poverty trap that much of the South finds itself in. Much of the Real World is endowed with abundant natural resources that ironically maintain affluent lifestyles in the North and for a few elite in the South through the unfair terms of trade that place the North at the center, and the South at the periphery of global human development. Cross-cultural research should be encouraged in development, because from the "failures" of development in the South it is obvious that by and large the South and North are all in a learning process. Radical social transformation only takes place when all interested parties are willing to learn and share their experiences simultaneously as learners and educators. For insightful articulations on some of these issues, see among others: Sen and Grown, 1987; Auret, 1990; McMichael, 1996.

⁶ This was a ministry run by women from top management level to most of its rank and file posts in the bureaucracy. While it was disappointing that only a few women had made it to the top brass of national political leadership, it was a fascinating development for women in Zimbabwe to see women rise from being considered "jural minors" to "equals". As shall be explored later, this gesture

though genuine, did not take time to show that it was a phallogentric façade to de-politicize the women's movement.

⁷ It is important to keep in mind that colonial codification of African customary law by and large homogenized the category of woman across cultural/ethnic grouping. This officially obliterated the cultural diversities of African social collective and the political spaces women had in these collectives.

⁸ *Gogo* is the Ndebele term for grandmother *MaSibanda* is her family ("maiden") name. In Ndebele culture, women are always called by their "maiden" family names even when they are married, have or do not have children. Such realities, even though of themselves might seem insignificant, are important starting points in the investigation of the homogenized "Zimbabwean women" in today's society where the law – Western and Customary – treats women in the same dehumanizing manner despite cultural differences.

⁹ This of course is not to join the post-modern "difference" bandwagon, but is a call for the celebration of diversity, a tapping into those aspects of African culture that positively affirm womanhood and femininity. It is also important to point out that women such as *Gogo MaSibanda* are the exception rather than the norm. Many younger married women tell horrific stories of how their in-laws and particularly elderly women like mothers-in-law, elder wives in polygamous marriages and status females within patriarchal families mistreat them. This abuse usually boils down to the advancement of patriarchal control, for like any oppressive system, African patriarchy has over the past one hundred years reinvented itself and ensured that the oppressed police each other on behalf of the oppressor. Thus instead of "cultural" female "solidarity" based on "traditional" checks and balances, a "new" phallogentric ideology has emerged with no social checks and balances to counter it. Why I discuss this at length here is that such practices in my experience have had and continue to have negative effects on the national development plans because women are termed "culturally conservative" and therefore are not willing participants in development. For instance, a lot of women in rural and urban areas describe how women "tell" on each other to men when a development project or program is instituted and women decide to participate without the "permission" of male familial or community figure heads. These policing actions, whose roots are embedded in a culture of fear, and the politics of patronage from colonial times to the present have eroded African women's political power which was "...based on the solidarity of women as expressed in their own political institutions – their 'meetings', their market networks, their kinship groups, and their right ...to force and effect their decisions" (Van Allen, 1972: 165). These issues will be further explored in chapter five.

¹⁰ bell hooks, 1992 - "Malcolm X: The Longed-for Feminist Manhood", see also the essay entitled "Spike Lee Doing Malcolm X: Denying Black Pain" in the same book.

¹¹ Many African women (on the continent and Diaspora, and some progressive males) have written and spoken out against the leadership crises we have had as Africans and Black people wherever we are, where we find ourselves being caught between a rock and a hard place (of race and gender) in a patriarchal and white supremacist environment. African women should not and will not be made to choose: domination is domination. The same men that call women who resist domination (racial) traitors or westernized (and white washed blacks), fail to acknowledge their own hegemony as betraying African values, values based on an ethos of care for life Collins, 1998; Thiam, 1978; McFadden, 1998; Williams, 1992; Davis, 1996.

Four: Investigating the Politics of Women, Gender and Development

Introduction

As explored in the previous chapter, the conditions that induced the collapse of the women's affairs ministry were simultaneously internal and external in as much as they were historical and contemporary. However even though the ministry as a social institution for women had its shortcomings for a variety of reasons, it has to be acknowledged as having been the grooming ground for the formation of some of the autonomous women's organizations that Zimbabwe has today.¹

I shall begin this chapter with a general overview of the contemporary women's movement and briefly explore some of the issues that they rallied around as they formed varied organizations. In order to appreciate women's agency and learn something from their organizing in the 1990s, it will be useful to take a closer look at yet another women's space, this time an organization outside state jurisdiction, the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Center and Network (ZWRCN).² ZWRCN will be presented through a descriptive narrative form, charting the

organization's vision and mission statements, organizational objectives and strategies for change. I shall conclude by critically analyzing the gains and challenges this organization (and the broader women's movement) made and encountered as it sought to impact broader national development policy on the issues of women, gender and development in this country. What is of importance in this chapter is the tracing of contemporary women's agencies as they organize in their own spaces, spaces which are however not immune to varied social, political, economic and cultural influences.

Women Mobilizing and Organizing Women: An Overview

The preceding chapters contextualized and historicized African women's agency in the socio-political economy of Zimbabwe from pre-colonial times, to the late 1980s and in the early 1990s. As highlighted in chapter three, the institution of the women's ministry was a radical idea by the standards of the time, but over time it found itself constricted and unable to fully represent women under patriarchal state auspices. Yet it had been a space where some women had learnt and/or consolidated their understanding of the importance of making women's issues an integral part of any international, national, regional or community Afrocentric

development policy. It was thus from these ranks that some of the leaders of the contemporary Zimbabwean women's movement emerged as the following statements testify:

'I was not conscious of gender issues until I joined the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs I then started reading more about what other women were doing and, when I looked at the top echelon of the Ministry, I saw only women. [T]hat inspired me to think that, if other women can do it, why can I not do it too?' (Getecha and Chipika, 1995: 10).

'My interest in gender and development issues can be traced back to the liberation movements of the late 1970s, which I got involved in. As we talked of liberation movements especially that of Zimbabwe, I got interested in the woman question within liberation movements. If blacks had a right to liberate themselves from whites, then women had the obligation to reject oppression by black men. How can the black man who was the oppressed yesterday justify his oppression of women today?' (Getecha and Chipika, 1995: 74).

The spirit of such women rallied together outside governmental structures to form women's organizations that would advocate for women's issues ranging from health, education, economic power to women's public political participation not only as supporters and mobilizers, but as leaders in their own right. One such organization to emerge in the 1980s was the Women's Action Group (WAG) which was formed as a women's rage group, after the government had rounded up women as discussed in chapter three.

By 1987, WAG was registered as a charitable and educational trust, its vision being:

- To promote the economic, social, education and cultural advancement of women in Zimbabwe and to promote women's basic human rights [so as to] achieve the advancement of women socially, legally and politically.
- To carry out projects which promote the rights and interests of women particularly by publishing magazines, health booklets and disseminating information on women's issues (SAFERE, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1997: 78).

WAG thus moved from being an ad-hoc pressure group to a social organization promoting public awareness on women issues in urban and later rural Zimbabwe.³ Its programmatic activities have evolved over the past decade, and to date the organization has quite a large (subscribing) membership spread around Zimbabwe. It also publishes a quarterly magazine called "SpeakOut/ Taurai/ Khulumani",⁴ and has a Health Information Project aimed at collecting and disseminating women's health information and conducting workshops on women's health in Zimbabwe (SAFERE, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1997: 78-79).

Another group that African women formed in the early 1990s came out of community theater as women's "*response-ability*" to sexism within the realm of community theater. Women within this space

knowing the importance of theater to African communities, asserted their agency and organized themselves to call society's attention to social problems from a feminist and women's perspective. This group was:

The Glen Norah⁵ Women's Theater Group

A member of the Zimbabwe Association of Community Theater (ZACT), the group [was] a result of the Women in Theater Conference which was held in 1990 at the University of Zimbabwe and attended by women theater artists from Jamaica, Zambia, Botswana, Tanzania, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Created mainly as a full-time women's group, the Glen Norah Women's Theater Group tries to use theater to articulate women's issues, especially those which touch on the role of women in the country's socio-economic development. Up until then, men headed most theater groups and their attempts to include women's issues in their plays were always from a man's point of view. The Glen Norah Women's Theater Group intends to try to show women's problems and issues from a women's point of view.

Who Is To Blame? is a play about unemployed women school leavers in Zimbabwe. It traces the life of a rural girl from her studies to employment. Her friend's brother tries to rape her as payment for assisting her to find a job. She becomes a prostitute, but in the end, she leads women out of prostitution to form a cooperative in which they are able to use their performing-arts talent to earn a ... living (Adapted from 'Women's Achievements', *SpeakOut/ Taurai/ Khulumani*, No. 19 (1992), pp. 18-19).⁶

Other urban *limelight* women's groups formed during the late 1980s and early 1990s were organizations like the Women's AIDS Support Network (WASN), Zimbabwe Women Writers (ZWW),

Zimbabwe Women in Business (ZWB), and Musasa Project a participatory training and research project (from the West) was by 1995 registered organization with a full staff compliment (Stewart and Taylor, 1997). As women's organization proliferated, most were by the mid-1990s, mobilizing for a Zimbabwe Women's Federation (ZWF) that would act as a national women's umbrella organization. The Federation was envisioned as a space open to all women from all walks of life, acting in a manner similar to what the women's ministry had been or was supposed to have been, but this time conceptualized, implemented and administered by women outside state structures (SAFERE, 1995).

The Zimbabwe Women's Resource Center and Network (ZWRCN)

Along with the aforementioned women's organizations, was ZWRCN founded in 1990, its " ... main objective [being] to enhance the position of women in Zimbabwe through the collection and dissemination of materials and information on Gender⁷ and Development issues (ZWRCN, 1995).⁸ As mentioned earlier, the founding members of this organization came directly from the ministry of women's affairs, and their drive for founding such an organization was informed by their experiences of the downsizing of the women's ministry. Policy makers the women rationalized

then, had cut back on the women's ministry because no one had provided them with information on the importance of understanding the material condition and social status of women in Zimbabwe, and therefore could not make informed policy decisions where women were concerned. Given such a (national) scenario, the women were convinced that creating a women's space and facilities were not only critical factors, but necessary conditions for social change on the status of women in this country (Jirira, 1995; Getecha and Chipika, 1995; ZWRCN, 1995, 1996).

Thus at its formation, ZWRCN's main constituency had been primarily policy makers, researchers, development planners and implementers, key decision makers, who were inevitably in the majority men. These men were seen as important gatekeepers needing to be informed (through the provision of information) about the status of women and gender issues in Zimbabwe, so they could use this information in the policy making, research, planning and development program and project implementation processes. Making information on the status of women and gender relations in Zimbabwe available to those in positions of real, relative and/or imagined power was therefore an important strategy at the time. The organization's concurrent constituency was "women" who would utilize the information (almost all of it in English) in a

variety of ways for their own “empowerment”. Thus like most aforementioned organizations, the history of the founding of ZWRCN was also urban based and middle-class.⁹

The organization started off small, with one staff member who was the program officer, the secretary, accountant, information officer, librarian and many other descript and non-descript responsibilities within the organization. It also had a board of directors, made up mainly of the founding members. Over time, the organization expanded rapidly, and by mid 1996, it had become a vibrant and prominent women’s organization with six dynamic programs (ZWRCN, 1997). This phenomenal growth over a short period of time brought in a lot of gains and challenges to an organization trying “ ... to invest in the confidence and security of women staff, in [an effort] to promote women’s empowerment in development” (Goetz, 1997: 19). This investment in women’s capabilities became very important in mobilizing social energy and synergy in securing spaces for women’s organizing for and among women themselves for socio-cultural, economic and political change in the country. This profile made the organization quite a social magnet attracting local media attention and (western) funding for its programs, conditions that enabled it to expand and diversify fairly rapidly. This diversification came with its own challenges too, particularly

those of leadership, succession, broad-based representation of Zimbabwean women beyond the urban middle-class category.

By 1995 a lot had changed in Zimbabwe, the Southern African region and globally, and it had become very clear that a bourgeois outlook to women's issues in Zimbabwe, while possible was neither revolutionary, viable, nor a political option that the organization could live with nor survive on. It became clear that to speak with, for and about Zimbabwean women, meant tapping into the heterogeneity of Zimbabwean women and the general society (including men). Concomitant with this reality was the recruitment of younger women into the organization, most of whom had not been in the formal women's movement prior to being with ZWRCN, and for some, it was their first encounter with notions of (Western) feminism, gender and development. The organization was at a crossroad, it was a time of reckoning, and quite a lot of changes took place administratively, programmatically and in the organization's overall vision and mission statements.

The change in the structure of the organization meant it changed from a "flat" structure to a hierarchical one (ZWRCN, 1996,1997). One way of interpreting this structural change is that much of society (including its leadership and staff) was used to a hierarchy,

and would respond to a hierarchical structure in a better way, and ZWRCN would make the hierarchical structure a means to an end (Stewart and Taylor, 1997). On the other hand it can be interpreted as the reality of what happens when a group (or a society) goes through turmoil; among other reactions and responses to a crisis, reversion to the “familiar” is usually the most comfortable. For in the “comfort” and “convenience” of a hierarchical structure everyone “knows their place” and this ensures efficiency and productivity. Another reality is that those that funded the programs wanted a clear delineation of who did what, when, who reported to whom, and in order to have this, a hierarchical structure was not only desirable, it was a necessity. Yet still, it could have been a combination of the aforementioned factors and more, that necessitated the hierarchicization of this organization at that particular point in its history. After all women were only becoming “feminist” leaders for the first time in this society with few indigenous and socially acknowledged role models.

*Gender and Development Programming: A Shifting Terrain*¹⁰

As of December 1996, the *Vision* of the organization had expanded from one oriented toward “empowering women” through providing policy makers, planners and researchers with information on

women and gender issues, to one that sought: “To assist women reach/realize their full potential” in the Zimbabwean society (ZWRCN, 1997). The orientation was visibly women centered and open ended allowing the organization the space to explore avenues for social change in the ever changing development environment, nationally, regionally and internationally. A change in the vision statement also meant an expansion of the mission statement reflecting the need to:

... improve the position of women [so as to] ... transform society. [T]his [would] be accomplished through the provision of information in the form of: Gender Training, Research, Lobbying and Advocacy, Publication(s) and Documentation. In pursuit of this mission, the ZWRCN upholds feminist values, which include:

- equity and equality between women and men
- participatory management styles and team work
- effective utilization of resources to ensure sustainability and, the delivery of quality services
- a dynamic approach that will keep the ZWRCN on the cutting edge of gender issues in Zimbabwe and in the Southern African region.

To achieve this mission, ZWRCN will employ, develop and retain feminist and activist staff committed to the organization (ZWRCN, 1997).

The organization’s ability to reinvent itself on many levels allowed it to be dynamic through its new and/or restructured programs aimed at making and/or maintaining ZWRCN as one of the “frontline” women’s organizations in Zimbabwe. It also meant that

ZWRCN realized the primacy of servicing women's consciousness raising so as to effect permanent social change.

Along with these internal "restructuring" processes were the external realities that capitalist notions of doing business in the NGO arena both in the South and North were facts that could no longer be ignored. In order to maintain the flow of funding, Southern NGOs had to fulfill or negotiate the fulfillment of some of the conditionalities funders were putting forward (Maclure, 1995; Atampugre, 1997). Thus ZWRCN, like many other NGOs, had to adjust its organizational and program objectives, including its programmatic strategies to reflect this "new" way of doing business. The new approach entailed elaborate planning and budgeting methodologies that each funding agency recommended as either the best, the most accessible, the preferred framework or tool *en vogue* among funders that would ensure effective and efficient development program planning, implementation, evaluation and overall management.

To meet these demands, the organization hired consultant trainers (planning methodology experts) who trained staff through various training workshops the different types of logical planning frameworks available. For example the Goal Oriented Project

Planning (ZOPP/GOPP), a framework of German origin, preferred by the Germans, the Dutch and some Scandinavians. The British and the Irish preferred the Logical Framework Analysis (LFA), while Canadians and Americans (USA) had their own. ZWRCN management and staff had thus to equip and/or acquaint themselves with these (and more) as measures for ensuring “efficiency and accountability” to the funders (ZWRCN, 1997). Thus while the vision and mission statements of ZWRCN were geared toward Zimbabwean women and society, efficiency and accountability was conceptualized in Western economic terms and oriented toward Western funding agencies. This engendered a conflict of interest(s) as staff was stretched thin trying to implement to the letter, what they had set out to do. Yet in real life unlike a laboratory experiment, they could not always control situations and sometimes had to change plans. This entailed a stressful process at the end of the year writing annual reports and financial statements, having to explain why plans had shifted. This was because (any) shifts in the annual plan had budgetary implications, where under or overspending were not quite acceptable alternatives according to most of these frameworks. Thus even where NGOs are credited as more open and less bureaucratic vis-à-vis governments, patriarchal and capitalist constructs still inform the *modus operandi* of these spaces.

Overall Organizational and Program Objectives and Strategies

In this section, I summatively describe ZWRCN's overall organization and programmatic objectives and the strategies it laid down to achieve these objectives. This will be followed by another concise narrative of the organization's programs charting the expansion of the organization from a documentation center to one that seeks to articulate women's agency and organizes for social change.

As mentioned earlier, at its formation, ZWRCN's main mandate had been the establishment of a resource center-cum-library. Through and from this facility, information on women, gender and development would be collected and disseminated to policymakers, researchers, planners, program implementers and women. From this one program so to speak, five others emerged at different stages. Initially these were conceptualized as separate units, and with experience, they were later reinterpreted and streamlined to become interdependent programs with more cohesion and union of purpose. In order to achieve this cohesion, the organization formulated overall organizational objectives extrapolated from the

mission and vision statements mapping out how the overall organizational goal would be achieved. These objectives were:

- To work towards the empowerment of women in the rural areas by making relevant information available to rural women and enabling them to find solutions to their own problems.
- To increase knowledge and understanding of gender issues through gender training.
- To create an enabling environment for rural community and urban poor women to actively contribute to policy issues, through participatory action research that can inform policy makers on women's issues and gender gaps in the country.
- To ensure the society is gender sensitive through the publication of gender sensitive, informative and educative materials.
- To acquire and disseminate information to policy makers and the general public.
- To ensure ZWRCN runs efficiently and effectively (ZWRCN, 1997).

These objectives were meant to be broad categorizations of how the organization strategized to fulfil its goal and vision of "assisting women [to] realize/reach their full potential" in Zimbabwe (ZWRCN, 1996: 1). These organizational objectives were then broken down into achievable (individual) program (and simultaneously collective) objectives that program officers would keep in mind and operationalize as part of an overall organizational strategy. These (program) objectives were:

- To hold gender sensitive induction courses for all staff upon employment and to hold two gender training refresher courses every six months for all staff and board members.

- To ensure that staff attend/participate in relevant staff development programs/activities, at least once a year.
- To ensure that ZWRCN is responsive to current topical gender issues, nationally and internationally, as and when they arise.
- To act as an agent of change through influencing policy-makers, politicians, researchers, communities, etc.
- To hold public workshops and meetings in which GAD issues are debated, every two months.
- To undertake two research studies a year to identify gender gaps, and use research documents as lobbying tools with policy makers.
- To collect and disseminate information, un/published on women and GAD, to cater for the urban poor and the youth.
- To hold a minimum of twelve gender training workshops, two per project, and hold back-up training activities for six organizations.
- To produce three news bulletins per year, and other educational material, and monitor that they are gender sensitive.
- To facilitate the usage and dissemination of GAD information to rural communities, youth and the disadvantaged, and to train them in gender issues (ZWRCN, 1996, 1997).

These objectives were arrived at through individual and collective efforts where each program officer looked through her own program, what had been happening in the past and how she envisioned its future. Her program objectives would then be linked to the other programs so that each program became unique yet conjoint with the others. This shift in thinking came out of a realization by program staff, that NGOs among communities and funding agencies were working as individual units (like corporate companies). Each NGO focused on its own individual goals and objectives and strove to meet its own deadlines, and while putting little energy and effort into a concerted (national) development agenda that would ensure activities were not duplicated. While this had its advantages, by and large it was disadvantageous because the premise of NGO work seemed to be

set from an economic perspective where maximizing individual (NGO) gain was more important than cooperative and collective efforts. This work ethic meant and means that “failure” rates get higher, with a few “star” NGOs, as each competes for funding resources and “clientele”. This however is not to say there is no national NGO umbrella organization in Zimbabwe, nor that this phenomenon is peculiar to Zimbabwe only; it is wide spread phenomena in the South and North as much of the literature attests.

Having worked out its organizational and programmatic objectives, ZWRCN stated how it was going to operationalize the objectives it set through the following strategies:

- Prior to the running of any program or project, a participatory needs assessment will be undertaken to understand the communities' needs as well as the necessity for the program/project. The needs assessment will create an opportunity for all stakeholders to distinguish practical and strategic needs.
- The duration of projects will be either long or short term depending on the needs of all stakeholders, so as to effectively implement each program and/or project.
- All organizational programs will be used as channels through which gender can be institutionalized. Likewise, activities such as: ad-hoc research, training, staff development programs and any other activity should/must have gender as its basis.
- A participatory monitoring and evaluation exercise will be an ongoing exercise held to assess the effectiveness of organizational activities. Alternative strategies will be implemented where necessary (ZWRCN, 1996, 1997).

This single-mindedness of purpose and the drive for operationalizing a national women and gender agenda was a remarkable sign of women's assertion of agency if given the space and resources to do so.

This being the case however, the reality that like most NGOs, ZWRCN's changes were also mediated by funders' drive is worrisome. When attempting to theorize and formulate grounded African feminist theory in this country, these factors sometimes constrict the process because the politics of "aid" reminds those searching for social transformation not to bite the hand that feeds. For instance, when the organization was founded, it had espoused a flat (non-hierarchical) structure, something that did not survive a crisis as there was a reversion to hierarchy and bureaucracy when the organization restructured. While this reversion can be considered a problem of the organization, Stewart and Taylor (1997)¹¹ contextualize this problematic when they discuss issues of structure and hierarchy in an organization they co-founded in Zimbabwe (Musasa Project) based on Northern assumptions that even the North was still growing into. I shall return to these issues at a later stage suffice it to say that sometimes rapid change even though necessary or positive can have negative results as too much uncertainty more often than not creates conditions for a backlash – a reversion to "good old" habits to ensure "stability".

The Praxis of Gender and Development Programming

Thus having laid out operational parameters, each program of the organization became a unit unto itself while part of a bigger whole. I now discuss these programs in more or less the chronology that they evolved from the original idea of a Resource Center to what the organization is today.¹²

The Documentation Center

This program was the original idea and main focus of a resource center when ZWRCN was founded. From 1990 to 1996, it had evolved with a clear programmatic thrust that defined it and fed into the other programs as a source of information, and in turn, the programs generated and/or collected information on behalf of the center. The work in this program centered on the collection and dissemination of information around thematic areas, themes that were agreed upon at annual organizational planning meetings to ensure a synchronicity in various program activities. The information acquisition entailed the collection and subscription to various national, regional and international journals and magazines that publish(ed) material on feminism, gender and development. Along with this, were the

acquisition and/or collection of videos, newspaper cuttings, books, gray literature and CD-ROMs among other audio and visual materials. The dissemination activities are done through a variety of ways, the most popular being visits to the documentation center by interested members of the public, researchers, students, and other NGO members. The Center's staff also package(ed) information as requested by various program officers for strategic groups like parliamentarians that need(ed) facts and figures at their fingertips on the status of women and gender relations in Zimbabwe and elsewhere (ZWRCN, 1994, 1995, 1996).

The documentation center also produced (and produces)) its own publications like discussion papers, thematic bibliographies, and fact sheets on the status of women in various sectors of society. It also had a GAD database of individuals and organizations working in the gender and development field in Zimbabwe (Southern Africa, Africa and globally). Networking is an activity that the Documentation Center constantly did through its various activities, like participation in the Zimbabwe International Book Fair an annual event that attracts exhibitors from all over the world. The Center is also a member of the Zimbabwe Library Association (ZLA). The activities outlined thus far were continued; and by mid-1997, there was a move to diversify these activities in keeping with information technology

through the establishment of a women's (internet) café which would be a "safe" space for women to meet, interact, surf the net and do research (ZWRCN, 1996, 1997). The Center has thus moved from a library per se, to a space where various members of society involved in the women, gender and development field come to utilize the resources available for the advancement of women in Zimbabwe and elsewhere.

Publications

This program branched out of the documentation center when it became obvious that the organization needed to put more effort into publishing its own materials and particularly the news bulletin which had become popular as a source of information on topical women and gender issues in Zimbabwe. The news bulletin was also published thematically and by the end of 1996, the bulletin had

... new designs [and] a new name ..., *WomanPlus*. Both ZWRCN staff and Board of Trustees felt this name was appropriate, as it signifies the multiple facets of a woman ... as more than just her biological attributes, although [these are just as] important ... (ZWRCN, 1997: 21).

The program took over the publication of research studies and individual program activity reports and promotional materials.

These activities had been the responsibility of each individual program officer and while this had its advantages, it lacked a general organizational standardization needed to make ZWRCN documentation easily identifiable. To this end, the publication program put in place an editorial and style sheet policy, working toward a focused marketing strategy for the organization's publications. The publication program also coordinated the writing of several books by the organization like the *Zimbabwe Women's Voices*, a book published specifically for the fourth United Nations World Conference on Women that was held in Beijing, China in September, 1995.¹³ The book was produced as a representation of a wide spectrum of women's perspectives on varied gender issues in Zimbabwe. It received rave reviews as

... a stunningly designed book, consisting of research material, interviews, creative writing and photographs. The research gives it its authenticity. The photographs give it its credibility. The interviews and creative writing give it its soul (SAFERE, Vol.2, No.2, 1997: 72).¹⁴

However while well received, some questions arose around issues of research design and methodology. Whose agenda, and what conceptual and theoretical frameworks informed the research processes, and hence the information generated? Why did and does such critical work have to wait (and/or stop) because we are

not packaging our stories for international forums? What is knowledge for if it is not to set women and this society into a transformative motion? We should not be waiting for external dictates to direct what “stunning” material to produce when our great-grandmothers, grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters, and all “ordinary” women have so much under-valued knowledge stored in the granaries of their life experiences. It is important to create knowledge for ourselves because:

Knowledge, as we know well, is power. The powerful are always less curious than the powerless, and that is because they think they have all the answers. *And they do.* But not to the questions that the powerless are asking (Kumar, 1998: 2, emphasis in original).

It is therefore our turn to carry on the legacy of Mbuya Nehanda, and all our fore and contemporary mothers whose genius is denied recognition because their feet have deep cracks that can scratch bourgeois (and academic) podiums, their hands too calloused for white printed paper because they etch a living for themselves and their children on the margins of society. And as long as we produce knowledge to primarily showcase to the world, we are forgetting to keep the African tradition – *yokwetha inganekwane* – telling our children stories that will not only give them pride in who they are, but grease the engines of their souls and imaginations to

carry Blackness (and African womanhood) with pride and reverence so as to bring about social change and transformation.

However, it important to note that while these questions and issues are pertinent, they do not discount the valuable contributions of the documentation of women's lives in this country. What is important to understand is that in a space like Zimbabwe (as anywhere else), notions of theory and knowledge production are constructed and believed to be the toughest aspects of studying any discipline. Theory we are taught, is a privilege of a few (especially dead white males), of bright people, and therefore not an everyday experience for everyday people. Therefore mastering theory – read memorizing it – is a definite sign of a brilliant mind (hooks, 1984, 1994; Maguire, 1987; Collins, 1990; James, 1993; Asante & Abarry, 1996). Cutting through such intellectual (and spiritual) bondage means we continue to ask questions, to theorize so that our lives do not have to standstill while the “intelligent” and/or powerful are still drafting theories to “rescue” our sinking society.

*Gender Training*¹⁵

By 1993, it had become obvious for ZWRCN that collecting and disseminating information in the manner in which it was being done while effective, was inadequate to keep the uninitiated and uninterested interested in the women, gender and development discourses in Zimbabwe. As more (“educated”) people used the Documentation Center and kept abreast with international development trends, it became obvious that gender training had not only become a popular trend in development, but a useful tool of information collection and dissemination that the organization could utilize to achieve its goals and objectives. This, the argument went, would ensure that women’s and gender issues would be shared by a wider circle beyond the privileged few who could not only access the (mainly Western) written material, but could more or less understand the technical vocabulary of this information. Once started, the program grew and was in great demand from various sectors, particularly from NGOs and the communities they served. While the program (at first) did respond to most of the requests, it was also strategic and pro-active in its responses to gender training requests. It also planned on working with those sectors of society considered strategic and important development gatekeepers who however were most unlikely to

request training. These included the media, government departments and ministries and the private sector (the same old policymakers).

As the demand for gender training grew, it was obvious that the organization was not going to be able to cope with demand. Because of the nature of colonial (and Western) education, contemporary society is necessarily compartmentalized with specialized language per sector exclusive to those with training (and specialization) in the discipline. As ZWRCN ventured into different areas conducting gender awareness raising, analysis, planning, management and evaluation workshops, a new need arose. It became clear that in order to make the program sustainable over a longer period of time, there was need for sector specific skills that would enable the tailor making of training programs for varied groups. Responding to this need could have been done through an expansion of gender training program, that is, hiring more staff, but this was neither practical, desirable nor possible.

The most viable option was the idea of setting up a Gender Training of Trainers Project (TOT)¹⁶ within the program. The TOT project was set out to attract “experts” from various sectors like

education, the media, health, law among others, who would be trained in gender analysis, planning and management so that they in turn would train those in their sectors from an “insider’s” (gender) perspective. The project was divided into four groups; policymakers’ level, middle management, community level and training trainers – the last designed for ZWRCN program staff. Along with gender skills training, each group was to write up modules which would become part of gender training manuals that the organization was going to produce as part of the whole project along with videos and other audio and visual training materials (ZWRCN, 1997: 38).

This was a major project that the organization undertook, and it brought to the fore a lot of power dynamics among participants who represented a wide spectrum of Zimbabwean society (excluding children) who also had their views on women, gender and how the project was structured and implemented. For instance the inclusion of men (including one of the consultant co-trainers) was an issue that had been long debated in the organization. Many a training workshop recommendation/evaluation had been that there be male gender trainers hired by the organization to “convince” other men that gender issues were not just women’s issues, but social issues that needed not only the

attention of both sexes, but the political consciousness and will of society as a whole. The argument was valid on the one hand, yet on the other it posed a potentially negative co-option and technicalization agenda by those men (and women) more interested in making a career and money out of gender training more than the political project that (feminist) gender training was/is meant to be.¹⁷

This however is not to say that all men are gender insensitive and all women are gender sensitive. By no means, it is just an illustration of some of the issues that women (as a social category among other oppressed) groups have to constantly deal with in their attempts to challenge hegemony without being co-opted. Along with this power friction, was the fact that the design of the project necessarily mimicked and reinforced the class structure in Zimbabwean society. Questions were raised whether gender training should be adopted as an industry or as a political tool among others, to advance women's cause and social justice.

This brings to bear the fact that most gender training manuals that the organization was utilizing were Western derived (like most feminist and gender materials), and therefore conceptualized from Northern perspectives and locations using Southern case studies

and illustrations. Gender in these manuals is posed as primarily and almost exclusively the (power) relations between women and men, and do not usually factor in other critical development issues like power relations based on race, class, ethnicity and nationality *inter alia*. Such issues need to be addressed when discussing NGOism and development in the Real World, because sweeping such issues under the development carpet has the potential to and does derail strategies for positive social change. Those involved in the processes of advocating for that change, get bogged down in power struggles or decide to let sleeping dogs lie so the money can keep coming.

As discussed earlier when describing or outlining the theoretical frameworks that inform NGOism in the South, we established that development aid is a political issue and has to be acknowledged as such. As Stewart and Taylor (1997: 215) explain in their reflection on Musasa Project, Northerners' assumptions on how development is to be done in the South is sometimes " ... so deep-seated ... as to be invisible". It is this "invisibility" that needs constant probing to disallow the recreation of hegemony, because Northerners like Southerners are products of their own society and are (or can also be) trapped by "cultural conservatism":

Recent research ... has shown that the personal outlook and preferences of project officers in the North have a much greater influence on shaping projects in the South than have been generally recognized. Aid donors give aid on the basis of their ideas of what constitutes development, which spring not only from their own ideologies and system of values, but from their prejudices and fears (Macdonald, 1994: 18-19).

Thus other than its own program and projects, ZWRCN did also take up assignments and contracts from such institutions as the United Nations Fund for Population (UNFPA) to work on the development of gender training materials on *population issues* in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa. It also worked closely with what was left of the women's ministry (discussed in chapter 3) and other women's organizations in drafting a national gender policy. Eventually, the program got overwhelmed with requests and began charging fees for its services because the demand stretched the organizational budgets to unsustainable limits.

Research and Advocacy

This program, like gender training, grew out of a realization that in order to convince policymakers and other key development actors of the importance of women and gender issues, ZWRCN had to conduct its own research on the status of women in the local Zimbabwean situation. Consultant researchers (in the main) were

contracted to work on thematic areas and issues that were deemed either topical or long-standing on Zimbabwe's national development agenda. The gender dimension of Land redistribution was one such long-standing issue that needed a gender analysis, concomitant with the dominant social categories of race, class and ethnicity.¹⁸ Other research studies conducted were on issues such as *Culture, The Reality of Aid, Housing and Decision-Making, Zimbabwe Women's Federation and Women's Political Participation in the 1990s and Beyond*. Upon completion of these research projects, ZWR CN organized workshops to disseminate the findings among key actors and interested parties, using them as evidence for the need to change the condition and position of women in Zimbabwean society (ZWR CN, 1997).

The program's other thrust were the GAD Talks, which had been part of the documentation center speaker series when ZWR CN was formed. These were conducted around thematic areas (though some were ad-hoc), with a speaker or a panel to lead the discussion on analyzing the issues at hand and making recommendations on the way forward. Some of the topics debated during some of these talks were; *Culture – tradition, culture and religion; the culture of education; women and witchcraft*.

Advocacy on the other hand was a precarious business as the program officer in charge observed in the 1996 annual report. She remarked that:

Lobbying [was] an interesting but difficult activity to undertake. It often took time to forge working links [with other NGOs] when lobbying on an issue. These links would weaken and strengthen periodically within the protracted course of lobbying. This, together with suspicion by government ministries of NGO ... activities ... often made progress slow. When lobbying, the [program] ... often found that not all organizations had the same agendas – there were varying levels of commitment and willingness to work together or to look for particular change envisaged (ZWRCN, 1997: 29).

This reality is one that bedevils many a disadvantaged group's political agenda as they strategize on how to bring about radical social change. For instance on the Zimbabwean scene, the so-called politics of difference is one that manifests itself in negative ways as powerful (local and international) NGOs sometimes work against the interests of women's groups that take a radical stand on women's issues. The Catholic and other conservative (religions) groups for example can be women's allies when lobbying on issues like land. The same groups will seriously under-cut women when the issue of land is connected to control over one's body and sexuality in this era of a runaway HIV/AIDS pandemic. The Catholic movement and other hegemonic agenda bearers will insist

on issues that disenfranchise women, leaving them pinned under patriarchal structures of the church, the state, market and male defined households. And as long as women in this country (and elsewhere) have limited control over their lives and resources, their choices for themselves and their children are just as limited.

*Information to Rural Women*¹⁹

In acknowledgement of [rural] grassroots women's limited access to information, the ZWRCN and another local NGO, *Rural Libraries and Resources Development Program (RLRDP)*²⁰ in 1993 agreed on a joint program to disseminate reading material to rural women. The program [started off as] a pilot project [that ran] for a year and involve[d] six libraries which are located in different geographical [provinces of Zimbabwe with], diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds (ZWRCN, 1994: 1).

At ZWRCN, this program started off as a project administered through the documentation center, where staff in this program met with RLRDP at ZLA meeting, and together discussed the idea of working together to provide information on women, gender and development to rural communities. After the first year as a pilot project, it was evaluated and found to have been successful in participating communities. The project was subsequently upgraded to program status and attracted a lot of interest from funders and other well wishers. The Danish Development Agency (DANIDA, an

equivalent of CIDA) became the main funder of the program over its first three year span. From then on, both organizations got to know each other better and ZWRCN acquainted herself with rural communities and what their needs were vis-à-vis women, gender and development information. It is also important to point out that at the beginning of this project, ZWRCN had a Danish development worker (white woman) among program staff. From oral narratives, it is clear that at first there was an assumption in rural communities, that the “gender thrust” was hers – even though 99% of the program staff at ZWRCN (and 100% at RLRDP) was Black Zimbabwean – because “gender/women’s” issues (and feminism) were conceptualized as necessarily coming from the West. The program thus started off with ZWRCN collecting as much relevant information as possible and travelling with RLRDP to the libraries²¹ to deliver the material and talk to the community librarians on the community’s information needs and what could be done (ZWRCN, 1995).

Over time, issues arose over the relevance of the information and its meaning to communities, particularly to women who were the program’s “target” group. Among these were issues of literacy particularly women’s literacy. The literacy program instituted by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs in cooperation with ALOZ and

UNICEF in the early 1980s as discussed in the previous chapter, had over time lost its steam due to a lot of micro, meso and macro socio-political and economic factors nationally and internationally. Yet there was quite a substantial number of women (and men) who had accessed this national program at the time, and they found the skills learnt then, quite useful when the *Information to Rural Women* program came to their community.

Another issue that rural communities faced, was the fact that most of the material they needed was in (highly technical) English language, and there were very few if any books written in local languages pertaining to development issues that communities could easily access and utilize. Translation of texts was one alternative adopted as a strategy to solve this problem, and several titles were translated. However, the whole exercise while useful proved much more arduous than anticipated; a) because of prohibitive costs, and b) copyright issues were complicated by the fact that most authors or institutions that “owned” this material were Northern based.

The program however did manage to produce and distribute its own resources and booklets on eight topics specifically requested by the communities and was funded by the Australian

Development Agency. These were geared toward the utilization of locally available public resources in what was called a Social Dimensions Fund, a facility instituted by government as a safety net for those disadvantaged by the effects of SAPs.²² These booklets were guidelines on: *how to use the social dimensions fund for education, health, food, employment and training*, and also on *sources of legal aid for women, scholarship and training opportunities for women* (ZWRCN, 1997: 17).

Other issues that confronted the program were those of lighting in the libraries, poor eyesight (particularly among the elderly) and social attitudes toward the advancement of women. These issues were addressed (some more than others) over the program's three years, through liaisons with various NGOs, funding agencies and individuals providing various "free" services like solar lighting and eye treatment and/or correction (*inter alia*) to rural communities. Not all libraries got solar lighting, in fact, it started off as a pilot project within the program (coordinated by RLRDP), working with those libraries that had certain infrastructure that would ensure the proper installation and security of the equipment. Where this service was installed, it proved to have benefits beyond people going to the library to read at night, to community meetings and other activities.

There was a gender dimension to this of course, men accessed the resource much more than women because women stayed at home with the children, and in some cases feared sexual harassment and assault if they ventured out at night alone. In some communities, however, community members organized themselves into groups (women and men), and went to the library to read or for a study group for two hours or so in the evenings. On the issue of eye correction and treatment, a local Zimbabwean ophthalmologist, Dr. Guramatunhu, in collaboration with the Rotary Club of Zimbabwe, and the Zimbabwe Council for the Blind, offered “free” treatment to individuals and communities that needed this service. This included eye cataract removals, testing and provision of reading eyeglasses, eye ointments, information on general eye care and general personal and public hygiene (ZWRCN, 1994, 1995, 1997).

To deal with the attitudinal problems toward the issues of women’s advancement within communities and between the two organizations (whose vision and missions differed) a variety of approaches were employed to resolve these conflicts and work for positive change. One such strategy at organizational levels was to attend each other’s annual retreats, organizational development

workshops, and ensuring that in as much as possible and necessary, each organization talked about the partnership program at whatever gathering they attended locally, regionally and internationally. Another approach was to introduce gender training to the rural communities as a strategy for information dissemination. It had become obvious that a lot of the communities had problems relating to the material, which for the most part was written in English by “gender technocrats” who had and have invented a whole new gender (technical) vocabulary.

While the invention of a new language is an essential strategy for oppressed groups as they expose the fallacies of domination and create new spaces for social transformation, it can also be disempowering if it is inaccessible and alienating for those it is meant to emancipate. The invention of such a language becomes a tool of oppression and the inventors the oppressors and/or upholders of the status quo. In spite of this reality, the gender training strategy did become a successful undertaking, it was conducted in local languages and where gender or other concepts and terms could not be translated from the English language, new words, phrases, idioms, proverbs, et cetera, were invented.

Disallowing the limitation of the English language (and Western culture) meant that communities discussed the political meanings

of women and gender and development from their experiences, from a communal perspective and were aware that change would not be instant (like coffee), yet it was (and is) inevitable.²³

The *information to rural women* program also had a bi-annual newsletter of which 99% of the articles were from program participants across the country. Program officers (one from each organization) visited the libraries frequently to follow-up on the relevance and use of materials and also to get an update on the (information and other) needs of the communities. As time went on, the program did attract more members to the various libraries, and had spin off effects on other projects like study groups, the generation of local “women and gender” information by communities through various Afrocentric methods other than the written word, like storytelling, drama, poetry and dance. By the third year, the program had been through a lot of upheavals but for the most part, it had been an excellent learning experience for both organizations, the funding agency and especially the communities involved.

To complete the program, an exchange program was undertaken, with libraries pairing up across the country, corresponding and ultimately visiting each other to learn how other people (of different

cultural and socio-economic backgrounds) were utilizing rural libraries and the program for community development. From a ZWRCN perspective, this program was one that drove home the fact that in order to be more “grassroots” and representative of “Zimbabwean women”, it needed to diversify and work more with women in the rural areas and the urban poor. Women’s agency was not limited to social location, it is a state that women assert at all times in their lives as they negotiate and demand social change for the short and long term.

Linking Parliamentarians With Civil Society (Linkage Program)

This new program instituted at the end of 1996 into early 1997, as a by-product of various desk studies that culminated in field research on women’s political participation and the winds of “democracy” blowing from the North to the South. The original research concept was based on the question of why women did not vote for women, particularly in the general election of 1995, where a lot of women were candidates for parliamentary seats (Chigudu and Tichagwa, 1995).²⁴ After lengthy debates and deliberations, it was agreed that the original conceptualization of this program that focused on public office was rather narrow and

... asking why women did not vote for women limited and distanced the overall issue [of power dynamics within society]. Thus the research took on a broader perspective and was renamed 'A Greater Role for Women? Political Participation in the 1990s and Beyond' (ZWRCN, 1997: 42).

The program moved from being focused on an assessment of women's political participation in party politics to one aimed at cultivating a culture of female representation in parliament, public offices and all other decision making spaces in society. The program also aimed at nurturing those women already within decision making positions in parliament and elsewhere so as to foster a culture of female agency and gender equity (and equality) in leadership at all levels of society. This program was particularly timely in that the representation of women in public office was regressing from what it had been at independence (ZWRCN, 1995; Made and Matambanadzo, 1996). With cutbacks on the rise, women (more than men) were likely to lose their jobs as competition for resources and power got stiffer – women are the last to be hired and the first to be fired.

Women's Empowerment – Who Pays the Price?

Before concluding this chapter, I shall briefly turn to an area often overlooked and/or under-rated when discussing women's (and

other NGOs) in this country and elsewhere; that is the issue of power, diversity and work ethics. Often, "... many women's organizations, try to run organizations the way [most] women run their households [in this capitalist age], stretching money to its limit and overworking. [When] this happens, the burnout syndrome among ...staff is a common phenomenon" (Yasmin, 1997: 207).

Because of the overwhelming sexism that most of our patriarchal and white supremacist and (increasingly) capitalist societies are built on, those at the bottom of the social, racial, and sexual ladder(s) have to always put in an extra effort to do better than the "best". In as much as Black people in this country, region and continent and elsewhere have to always put in extra due to a lot of structural barriers, Black women have to go even another extra mile. This then means that African women's organizations become stress-spaces instead of spaces of spiritual creativity, spaces of pleasure, affirmation and challenge. As we all carry our social baggage to the workplace, we go on about our "feminist" and "gender" business using the same implicit and explicit methods used to manage patriarchal bureaucracies and social institutions. Usually the unpacking of this (social and other) baggage is ignored until a crisis point. When that happens, everyone gets "shocked"

that a women's space can be just as "dis-empowering", yet it is not the women's space that is dis-empowering, it is our social construction of this space as first time leaders, managers and participants in female spaces in a hundred or so years, and in a "new" social order.

Issues of power not well addressed – as explored in the last chapter – can and do have negative repercussions for oppressed groups, especially when these are grounded in other realities other than our own. For social change to be meaningful and power sharing to be a reality, it means we have to invoke our heritage and the authority of our experiences so as to create new power structures that suit our contemporary society. This translates to differences becoming edifying realities and diversity and multiple representations a necessity in the processes of social transformation. These issues painful though they might be to deal with, they are necessary in the processes of social transformation and as Lorde (1979) reminds us:

Interdependency between women is the only way to the freedom, which allows the 'I' to 'be', not in order to be used, but in order to be creative. Advocating mere tolerance to difference between women is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. For difference must not be merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities Only then, does the necessity

for interdependency become unthreatening ..., [only then] ... can the power to seek new ways to actively 'be' in the world generate as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters (in Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983: 99).

Concurrent with the issues of power and difference that women's organizations as potential points and spaces for engineering social change need to address is the question of the sociological male, that is, " ... must women become men in order to succeed?" (Rao and Kelleher, 1997: 133). The drive for "excellence" and women's empowerment sometimes seems to drive most women activists to a *proof-that-women-can-do-it-also-highway*, where slowing, stopping, let alone turning around is not so much an option, and the most viable way out is to increase speed and catch-up.

This scenario translates to an increase in external yardsticks to measure "success", and in patriarchal societies, there are many waiting for African women to "fall" so they can say *we-told-you-so*. Women's empowerment in women's organizations in this country need to be internally focused in as much as they need to be externally focused. Women's organizations need to chart new ways of theorizing ancestral and historical past so as to have the agency to *response-ably* hand this legacy to our youth. It means defining the schooling and education of our young women's become a priority so we can break the negative cycles that keep reinforcing

the negative material condition and social position of African women generation after generation in this society. Images of African women's lives, poverty and misery have to stop being statistical information that "confirms" the need for Western "aid" to Africa and the South (McFadden, 1998; Kumar, 1998; Esteva, 1994). This "need" sends hordes of Western students and graduates of international development (among other disciplines) out to "Lend" a Hand to Africa ..., to "teach" our elders "organic" farming, "recycling" – in a word show us how to "develop".

Another issue that most contemporary women's organizations in Zimbabwe have to deal with, is the meaning of feminism from an African and Afrocentric perspective. Looking feminism in the eye and defining it for ourselves facilitates the ownership of African feminist epistemology and knowledge production processes so we can guard jealously the rich legacy of our ancestors and foremothers. We have to contest sexist and racist arguments about female agency and activism as "imported" ideas by reminding hegemonic agenda bearers that we learnt and continue to learn how to assert our agency in our own community. Yes, we do share information with other cultures – *ukuhamba kuzala inkosi-kazi* – but first and foremost, we learn(t) agency and resistance against domination from our elders' laps, our

communities' cradling, our country's *Zvimurenga* and our ancestors' genius. Thus female agency in African women's organizations in this country need to sink their roots deeper into the legacy of our ancestors, so when we flap our wings and engage diverse cultures and global women's movements, we carry our rich heritage with reverence and pride.

Conclusion

We have thus far continued to weave our basket, in as much as we have collected valuable nuggets of African women's agency from pre-colonial times to the contemporary women's movement. The "success" of most women's organizations like ZWRCN are very important elements on women's and the social psyche as it nurtures the reality that African women can and had always been active in public and private spheres in this society, a right that colonialism took away and shattered. As contemporary women's organizing shows us, there are many ways of bring about systemic change, it takes personal and collective political will to assert our agencies so as to make contributions to national development policy that will radically correct women's material condition and social position in this country.

From ZWRCN's case study we see a women's organization diversifying its programs to become more inclusive of the heterogeneity of Zimbabwean women. Though there is still more work to be done in certain areas, such case studies are encouraging as they foster social dialogue among Africans (and other) women to continue searching for and theorizing for social change from African and Afrocentric perspectives, while building bridges at regional and global levels.

Theorizing feminism from our own local context should therefore be possible in such spaces, and they will be more meaningful if we begin to sink our roots deeper into our fertile past, letting our wings glide and guide us into the future, tradition has to be kept yet we do not have to be traditional about it. The ancestors have to be libated, they have to be called back into the community so our community can heal and be whole again. Their lives have to continue to inspire us, their spirits to guide us so we too can assert our personal and communal agencies to create new visions for a transformed society, and to summon the courage to resist any kind of domination.

For African women and feminists from all walks of life, our path is clear, female agency is about social revolution in the same manner that the *Chimurenga* was for our African (nationalist) agenda.

Mbuya Nehanda and other (female) luminaries envisioned a self-defining and determining African people, and it would be to *kill the ancestor*, not to honor this legacy. Female agency in Zimbabwe is as homegrown as any form of resistance that this country has ever seen. We therefore need to keep harnessing this energy so we can stand on our feet and march into the next century fighting and rejecting patriarchal, capitalist and white supremacist agendas that eat at the very soul of our people today.

Endnotes

¹ The literature on NGOs generally and women's NGOs abounds, see among numerous others; Sen and Grown, 1987; Goetz, 1997; Karl, 1995; Macdonald, 1994; Dias, 1994; Maclure, 1995; Hoogvelt, 1997; Atampugre, 1997.

² I chose this organization for various reasons; a) I was a program officer in this organization, and was able to rely on my own reflections as a research resource; b) I have more access to written material on it than I do on other organizations and c) while the women's movement in Zimbabwe is not homogenous, ZWRCN fairly represents the pulse of the contemporary (mainstream) movement in addressing women, gender and development issues in this country. However, this is *not* an "insider's" scoop on the organization. It is an attempt to understand African women's agency, how they organize, what makes it work, what the challenges are, and how to theorize these own experiences so as to find home grown solutions to problems facing women and the general Zimbabwean society. Thus my presentation is not the whole truth on the organization and the processes it has been going through. This is part of my truth and retrospection on it from my perspective as a former program officer responsible for two different but interrelated programs during my tenure in the organization. It is also informed by my current location as a student of international development and women's studies (in the West – Canada) who has interacted intimately and intensely with (White) Western feminist, gender and development, literature over the past two years. And of course hindsight is the best thing that happens to most of us, when we evaluate our past. Sometimes some of us tend to be hard on ourselves, however, this does not mean that we do not value ourselves, it means we are

trying to make sense of what seems so crystal clear from where we stand right now, which we could or did not see then. That, is precisely what education means and should mean, that is, more than just schooling – book knowledge – but coming to theorize – making sense of my life and that of my community. For to create theory is “... to begin always anew, to make, to reconstruct, and to not spoil, to refuse to bureaucratize the mind, to understand and to live life as a process – to become ...” (Paulo Freire qtd. in hooks, 1994).

³ It should be noted that WAG like most limelight women’s organizations in Zimbabwe was initially an urban middle-class women’s grouping, and also included white women (descendants of settlers or those from the NGO sector). Over time the organization has expanded and includes a substantial representation of working class and rural women.

⁴ ChiShona, SiNdebele and English make up the three official languages of Zimbabwe as we discussed in the previous chapter. However, official and business transactions are by and large conducted in English in all social sectors. There are other cultural groups that make up the population of Zimbabwe with their own languages like the MaTonga and the VaVenda to mention but two.

⁵ Glen Norah is one of Harare’s oldest townships – as they were called in the Rhodesian era, now they are referred to as high-density suburbs. There has been intense debates about the meaning of suburb because of the squalor that remains characteristic of these particular urban spaces across the country and defy reason in contrast to what used to be sprawling White only (now class based) suburbs. For an insightful articulation of the issues on race, color and class in Zimbabwe (and Southern Africa) and urban spaces, see among others; Mandaza, 1997; Sithole-Fundire, 1995.

⁶ I adapted this from a “Women and World Development Series” developed by the UN/NGO Group on Women and Development. This particular volume was prepared by Karl, (1995). This series – “Women and World Development Series – while commendable, has been under intense heated debate with Third World (and some western progressive) feminists arguing that dominant Western feminism should let the Third World speak for itself, that is, let Third Worlders represent themselves. See among others Mohanty, 1991; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983.

⁷ *A Feminist Dictionary* defines gender in the following way:

Gender is often used as a synonym for *sex*, that is, biological maleness and femaleness. However, it is also used, particularly by contemporary writers, to refer to the socially imposed dichotomy of masculine and feminine roles and character traits. Sex is physiological, while gender, in the latter usage is cultural. The distinction is a crucial one, and one which is ignored by unreflective supporters of the status quo who assume that

cultural norms of masculinity and femininity are 'neutral', that is, directly and preponderantly determined by biology (Mary Anne Warren, 1980, qtd. in Chervis, Kramarae and Paula A. Treichler, 1985).

"Gender and development considers women's condition of *economic* inequality, and their status vis-à-vis men in the same cultural strata; it also considers men, collectively and individually, but it focuses especially on women because of discrimination against them. However, GAD does not assume that all women everywhere are the same and have the same problems: a GAD analysis attempts to incorporate questions of class, caste, and ethnicity into a gender based perspective" (Macdonald, 1994: 15, my emphasis).

⁸ While I have by design chosen to shy away from the Westocentric and Western "classic" literature on women, gender and development for reasons outlined in chapter one and two, at this point should mention that most of the women's organizations were founded on three mainstream women, gender and development theoretical frameworks. These are the Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD) and the Gender and Development (GAD) frameworks or schools of thought. Western funding agencies also played a key conscious and or unconscious role in reinforcing or introducing these "schools of thought" to the Zimbabwean situation as this came along with male(main)stream development models of economic development.

⁹ I should mention here that it was important to have middle-class "educated" women also being in the forefront of women's (organizational) development, because in most social movements, it is those equipped with various skills, particularly "education", social class and political clout that become leaders of various movements. The men who had accessed (colonial and Western) education, and were therefore able to read broadly and learn of various revolutions around the world, thereby giving them the tools to strategize for bringing about social change in this country led nationalist politics. What has been problematic with middle-class based initiatives (across the board) more often than not, is that issues initially articulated from their social location, sometimes are not representative of the masses, and if they are, the issue of power is often played down as though it does not matter. Sweeping such issues under the movement's carpet usually makes up for schisms as the leadership seeks to consolidate its control, while the masses wonder what happened to the people's movement.

¹⁰ Some 1996 and 1997 citations I am leaving broadly paraphrased in this section because I am citing from "gray literature". This is information from workshops I was part of, and contributed to their compilation(s), hence my citation style in this section.

¹¹ Stewart and Taylor, 1997.

¹² Please note that the organization is still in operation, and description of programs will be presented in past and present tenses, and this might be confusing at times for the reader.

¹³ ZWRCN was the Southern African Regional Focal Point for the Beijing Preparations, and had the Secretariat headquartered at its offices until early 1996 after the regional report back workshops had been done.

¹⁴ Getecha and Chipika, 1995. Please note that there have been ChiShona and SiNdebele translations of this book, an exercise I participated in as a translator with another program officer and a team of consultants. Another popular book published by ZWRCN in the same year was a research study that analyzed the gender dimensions of urban planning and housing in Southern Africa with varied case studies from Zimbabwe, Zambia and Lesotho, Sithole-Fundire, 1995. The organization also produced a video documentary *Fatima: A Family Investment*, based on the life story of woman entrepreneur carpenter, a field considered as primarily for men.

¹⁵ Gender training has been defined in many ways:

It is a tool, a strategy, a space for reflection, and a site of debate and possibly of struggle Gender training is also an instrument of institutional learning, a way of systematizing experience of gender-related issues in an organization and making it concrete, especially if it arises from practical experience Gender training makes people look critically at the work culture of their institution ..., it can provoke discussion and analysis of theoretical and strategic issues such as what we mean by 'development' itself (Macdonald, 1994: 31-32).

¹⁶ This project brought with it a lot of issues, which though painful at the time seen through the lenses of hindsight, were important growth phases for individuals and the organization as a whole. The most important issue that emerged was power dynamics between staff and management as staff felt overworked – at a broader level – and not being valued for our work and that the management style was not as participatory. The mistrust and division among staff made negotiating differences and diversity rather slippery terrain, because open dialogue and critique of each other's work was more often than not taken negatively. This led to a lot of bottled up emotions seemed to burst to their seams during the processes of this project. It was a time of painful organizational development, some which might never be appreciated, because management felt betrayed by staff whom they felt were pointing fingers at them (in 'public'). What had been the missing link was a culture of openness and agreeing to disagree between staff and management. On the one hand, one can understand the shock and the pain management experienced, particularly by the founders who had all along thought they were available and open to staff members.

On the other hand, because of the nature of the job (a common issue in very many NGOs) there was always so much pressure to meet external and internal deadlines. Everyone therefore concentrated on output and a centralized leadership style that did not quite allow for the development of shared leadership. Commenting on the rupture of this organizational culture in her opening remarks of the 1996 annual report, the then director of ZWRCN observed that 1996 had been a year of “ [i]ntense brainstorming on the future of the organization The diversity of opinions, while enriching debate sometimes created internal tensions. However, ... ZWRCN emerged stronger and clearer about its mission, its working methods and its accounting and operational procedures. 1996 was hectic, challenging and yet very fulfilling year, with more achievements recorded than in previous years” (ZWRCN, 1996: 6-7).

These issues are very thorny but necessary to discuss when attempting to theorize women’s agency as they organize for social change in Zimbabwe. For very insightful discussions on women and leadership, see among others, Goetz, 1997; Yasmin, 1997; Rao and Stuart, 1996.

¹⁷ *The Politics of Gender Training**

At this juncture, I am going to summarize an article on what I think is an important issue to the meaning of power relations and co-option in the arena of gender training. This might appear like a detour, but it is a very critical issue to take note of as it presents a quintessential case study of power politics in the field of development, and GAD is no exception. The piece is a reflective essay by an African woman who had more than ten years experience as a trainer of gender trainers based in the Netherlands, in Europe. She chronicles the events of one such workshop held in 1993, Amsterdam, Holland, at the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT). The workshop was geared toward trainers in various non-governmental organizations and funding agencies around the world of varied backgrounds involved in national, regional and international development of one kind or another. This particular workshop attracted forty participants (thirty-eight diverse women and two African men). The aim of the workshop was to facilitate the sharing and learning of the theoretical frameworks, methodologies and practical experiences in the field of women, gender and development from a diversity of perspectives represented by participants. The methodology of the workshop was participatory, the facilitator and participants took responsibility in running the workshop, though the final workshop responsibility rested with the facilitator.

As a start, participants were grouped together in three different groups as follows: Africa, Asia and the Pacific; Latin America and the Caribbean; and North America and Europe. The last group however objected to the name given to their group, arguing that although women in that group were situated in North America and Europe, their work was international and therefore called themselves “the global group”. What was obvious to the two other groups, was that “the global group” exhibited insensitivity and white supremacist assumptions pitching only that group as international/global and the other two, regional therefore parochial.

Some of the participants in the two groups were from Europe or North America (including the facilitator) or based in the North for many years, yet had no problem identifying themselves as from Latin America, Africa, Asia or from the Pacific.

Though the other participants resented these assumptions, none openly contested these (including the facilitator) setting a trend for many more such incidents that would get swept under the carpet during the three weeks workshop. Along with this overt claim to “global” work, power relations surfaced as it was obvious that those of the North were privileged by race and financial resources and could make claim to Western feminist methodology as god’s gift to development theory, policy and practice. Also, women of the “global group”, came from agencies that funded some of the projects in the South (hence the silence on the power dynamics?). Apart from North/South relations, differences in the other two groups did also emerge, as gender, race and class (among other diversities) informed the actions of participants within these groups. What seemed more interesting at these levels (*vis-à-vis* the larger group dynamics), was the openness to acknowledge the presence of these differences, and even though resolutions were not always reached, at least there was a general consensus that these issues needed further interrogation. As the workshop days ticked on, the feeling of discontent among participants grew. Those of the North took the workshop as an opportunity to attempt to use women of the South as sources of data for their current or forthcoming missions, research projects and/ or consultancies. This reality effectively eliminated notions of sisterhood and mutual sharing, as those privileged by location and race became researchers and those not, the objects, subjects or informants of the powerful’s interests.

During the last week of the workshop, some women gathered the courage to openly discuss the resentment that had accumulated over the two weeks (some of which were posted on a bulletin board that served as daily reflections or evaluations of each session). This exercise brought up a lot of anger, resentment, frustrations and pent up emotions from both sides, feelings that had accumulated and gone without address for two to almost three weeks. This served as a good venting exercise which had the limitation of time in that issues could not be brought up and discussed in depth and worked through as part of the sharing processes of bringing about social change in development practice at personal and collective levels. What emerged as the most contentious issue was that feminist theories of development and research thereof, had become something synonymous with Western feminists/women going to the South to do research and where it was collaborative, they would be the principal investigators. Women (and/or people) of the South had become producers of raw data, material that informed a log of the gender and development theories and methods in the field, and had made big time “gender experts” of certain women/feminists within the field (and in the publishing arena). By the end of the workshop, participants acknowledged feminist theories and action should not only talk about, but also

actively practice and affirm the battle to dismantle patriarchy concomitant with dismantling all other forms of oppression at regional and global levels.

The author concludes by reflecting on how gender training in development has become a technical job that does not take much training as anyone can learn the techniques without understanding the feminist theories, debates and methodologies that inform women and gender training methodologies in development practice. Thus Women, Gender and Development (WGAD) has become another neo-colonial manifestation as most of the workshops and particularly the research and written material is developed in the North for and about women of the South, whether these workshops or courses take place in the South or in the North. Feminist strategies in development have thus reproduced rather than challenged domination by reinforcing hierarchical and patriarchal relations. The author concludes by stating that "... it is a big failure on the part of the feminist movement that the field of development is dominated by status quo adherents, who aim narrowly, if at all, at cosmetic reform" (p. 63). While this scenario seems all gloom and doom, there is continued effort(s) to make gender training a mainstay in development practice. As different Southern (women's) NGOs work harder at gender sensitizing their communities and societies, they are developing indigenous gender training material that is applicable to and is immediately useful to the communities they work with, and becoming "experts" themselves in the process. There are efforts being made toward collaborative work on a South-South basis, and also on equitable South-North relations and learning experiences on the issues of women, and development as it has become apparent that no one has all the answers to the crises that engulf the world today.

* Matlanyane-Sexwale (1994).

¹⁸ The land issue is still unresolved nineteen (19) years after independence. It has increasingly become a heatedly contested political issue again as the white community who hold the majority of the fertile land and the government lock horn and use it as a politico-economic tool to hit at each other strangling the poor (particularly rural women) in between. The IMF has since overtly joined in this debate, and it is not a brainy exercise to understand what this means for those caught between. There has been a lot written on the politics of land in Zimbabwe, see among others; Gaidzanwa, 1988; Moyo, 1987; ZWRCN, 1995, 1996).

¹⁹ Like the gender training program, I am describing this program in more detail, because I was program officer for the program, and some of the experiences from these programs, inform my discussions in the next chapter. I am also doing it because of the unique collaborative nature of this program with another NGO's program (see next footnote).

²⁰ RLRDP is an NGO founded in the early 1990s with the aims of improving the standard of living of rural communities through the provision and dissemination of books so as to enhance literacy and development consciousness in these

communities. Headquartered in Bulawayo (Zimbabwe's second largest city), RLRDP's network has spread to various provinces of Zimbabwe, and operates as a membership network open to all rural libraries that (have to) voluntarily approach the organization to join its network. I shall not go into the details of this organization, suffice it so say that this organization was very important for ZWRCN because it is an organization focused specifically on rural communities and has many innovative activities that foster use of local resources and talent for rural community development.

For example to solve transportation problems for book exchange among libraries, it launched a "Donkey Cart Mobile Library" in one region of the country where donkeys are in plenty supply and are a form of draught power and/or transportation. Thus by cooperating with RLRDP, ZWRCN on the one hand benefited accessing rural communities with minimum costs while RLRDP benefited from having access to information on women, gender and development an area that the organization had not focused on before. The organizations learnt a lot from the cooperation, and would be interesting to study, particularly on issues of NGO cooperation, cost sharing, integrated development programs and conflict management for development among other issues.

²¹ Most of these libraries were located in (primary/secondary) school libraries and this had advantages for both the schools and the communities in terms of security. However, there were problems in some schools where school heads and/or teacher librarians were at loggerheads with the community and/or community librarians on other community politics Some communities however strove to build their own libraries separate from the school facilities, so that the library became a community space for varied functions and activities.

²² It would be interesting to study why a Social Fund got established when many men were being retrenched from the public and private sectors, and yet women (as a category) had all along been without such a resource while not formally employed and operating in the "informal" sector.

²³ See Lorde, 1979.

²⁴ 1995 was election year in Zimbabwe, and the (ZWRCN) News Bulletin focused on the issues of "Women in Politics", and even had a Special Edition focusing on Women members of parliament (MPs) who did not make it back to parliament or those that ran as independent candidates, and most expressed frustration at the lack of resources (including information) and support from both the powerful and the voters. Also, the deep-seated social perception of defined "rigid" gender roles seemed to be an inhibiting factor for female representation, as most of society held the archaic colonial notion that women belonged in the home. (ZWRCN, 1995; Chigudu and Tichagwa, 1995; Getecha and Chipika, 1995).

***Five: Contesting (Mis)Representation and the Social
Construction of “Dis-empowerment”: Celebrating Rural
Women’s Agency***

African women (and children) in rural spaces as seen from the “outside”¹, remain for the most part “invisible” and/or trapped in notions and images that remind one and all that Africa is still a “Dark Continent”. Yet in order to get a glimpse of, let alone to understand the location of African women in rural spaces, those of us that label them have to work harder at questioning the tools we use to measure their “invisibility” and “dis-empowerment”. It also means that in as much as we think they need our “help”, we need their “help” in opening another “footpath” toward our mental de-colonization (wa Thiong’o, 1986). Celebrating the agency of African rural women means we have to begin to see through the eyes of women who negotiate the harsh terrains to which colonialism condemned our foremothers. Celebrating the agency of African rural women means we have to perceive contemporary African reality through the eyes of those who pay for each “development aid” package we receive with their very lives.

In order to preserve, validate, build and celebrate an African and Afrocentric feminist ontology and epistemology in this country, we

need to shatter the blinders that colonize our minds defining us Africans, particularly rural women as “objects” of research (Meena, 1992). The ubiquitous development literature from the West about the South (books, journal articles, videos, among other media) speaks volumes of the politics of patronage perpetuated by the West toward the South. This literature more often than not obscures our vision from seeing the colonizing reality of the dominant Western theories on women, gender and development among others. What is often not acknowledged is that Western theories of development are built on the experiences (case studies) of (especially rural) women across the continent and other regions of the Real World. As McFadden (1998: 113-114) candidly reminds us:

... [African] rural women are symbolically represented as home, backward, without autonomy or voice and outside of the public realm. Because of these stereotypes, women who live in rural areas are othered and do not benefit from many of the symbolic and actual public gains that we have made as women in the recent past. We often hear the question of how to extend the benefits of women’s activism to women who live in the rural areas. Rural space is conceptualized and treated as private space What is hidden in this picture is the actual autonomy of rural women, especially when they are left in charge of the home and community while men migrate to the cities. The strength of African women raising food and providing for rural families is perhaps deliberately hidden by these patriarchal [and western] images. The work and leadership of women [who] maintain livelihoods and communities has been

rendered invisible by institutionalized structures, practices, language, 'culture' and social statuses of patriarchy [and white supremacy].

Creating Afrofeminist knowledge therefore necessitates that we (Africans) contest this (mis)representation not only of our people, but also of ourselves as African women as Real World people. It means we have to redefine the meaning of "empowerment" and female agency in African rural and urban spaces.

Tradition as A Tool for Social Change

Understanding women's agency and experiences in rural locations, therefore, calls for a re-examination of some of those often misrepresented experiences that on the surface give a "dis-empowered" façade to those of us with *too much schooling and little education*. My own experiences of this reality comes from watching and communing with my own blood mother, grandmother, *omama omdala, omama omcinyane, obabakazi, odadewethu ...* – and "other mothers" – who from their lived experiences have educated and keep educating me to look at their "dis-empowered" realities with different eyes.² I have to say it has not been and is not an easy process, it is a "nervous condition"³ to be in. For decolonizing the mind of necessity entails a re-education, a re-orientation, a going back to the roots so as to retrieve one's ancestor, one's tongue and

idiom, and that involves a lot of joy and pain. The pain comes from realizing how traumatized one is as an “educated” African, and most importantly how traumatized and vandalized Africans (are and have been) as a race in this country, continent and planet. Yet there is the joy in knowing that the spirits of our ancestors have refused to die, have refused to let us grope alone in the darkness of “development” and modernity. And indeed as Biko (1996: 29) affirms, “ ... it is difficult to kill the African heritage. [T]here are still some cultural traits that we can boast of which have been able to withstand the process of deliberate bastardization”.

As shall be shortly discussed, the failure to see “reality” from the standpoints of rural women in different spaces means those of us that enter these spaces with explicit and/or implicit mandates for conquest, tread all over their “invisible” structures of resistance, thereby demeaning their agency. For instance, when I worked with an NGO in Zimbabwe I had the opportunity to work with some international development and/or women’s studies graduate students from the West who came to Zimbabwe to do research on women, gender and development. More often than not, when we entered the rural spaces, they had “checklists” through which by to “measure” women’s “empowerment”. Seeing women – *vakadengezera zvirongo / bethwele inkonxa* – carrying water

containers on their heads was (is) a “sign” of women’s dis-empowerment that individualized and privatized water sources would solve. What was (is) often missed in this analysis is that going to the well for rural women has more than just a basic needs function. Going to the well has functions and symbolic meanings that include the strengthening of women’s networks, it breaks women’s isolation as they meet and share information on various issues about their families, community and beyond. It also can be a point of tension (especially where the resource is scarce), and a space where women learn and acquire conflict management and conflict resolution among other skills. Not seeing these “invisible” structures as development policymakers, planners and/or those from the city and/or a “developed” country means we make recommendations for “development” programs and projects that sometimes actually undercut rural women’s power structures, agency and ironically even (rural and community) development.

Individualizing and privatizing the water source(s) while it can bring some benefits – and is a “visible” and “tangible” “development” sign – it also has the problems of increasing women’s isolation, domestication and the privatization of their experiences and knowledge (as women and) members of a larger community. Individualizing resources in development, therefore,

unless buttressed by other socio-cultural and politico-economic buffers, it can and does destroy the richness of what community means from African and Afrocentric perspectives.

This is not to say African women in rural areas know “everything”, therefore their knowledge is superior to any other, nor that they should not benefit from technological gains and advancements made thus far. What it means is that we have to question the way Western centered, urban oriented and phallocentric dominant notions of “empowerment” and “development” are constructed. These induce in the “empowered” a “blindness” and/or insensitivity to diverse types of agency and “empowerment”, especially those that do not fit the dominant standards of agency. It is important, as we examined in chapter two, to replace women’s sources power and influence when new “developments” are introduced into a society, because failure to do so is actually the root cause of women’s dis-empowerment than fetching water from a well and carrying it on one’s head.

“Nervous Conditions”: The Insider as Outsider⁴ and Vice Versa

Through the following story (case study) I am going to look at certain types of rural women’s agency that speaks volumes of what

it means to be an outsider/within (Collins, 1998). And this by no means is the generalized or generalizable type(s) of rural women's agency, African rural women's genius defies definition, and therefore my experience described here does not mean that most African (rural) women would assert their agency in the same manner given a similar situation because Africans

... experience a situation ..., [that is], they allow both the rational and non-rational elements to make an impact on them, and any action they may take could be described more as a response of the total personality to the situation than the result of some [isolated] mental exercise (Kaunda, quoted in Biko, 1996: 28).

Once, when I was working as a gender training program officer, a colleague and I were co-facilitating workshops in a certain rural district in Zimbabwe. Our first training workshop was attended by a substantial number of people including the local leadership – chiefs and other political leaders. The start of this particular workshop was like many others. We were introduced to the community and in turn we introduced our individual selves and our organization to the community and thereafter got down to the (gender) business of the day. Our first session for the day was going to be on the definition of concepts like gender and development among others, and this was going to be done through discussions on gender and sex roles in the household. The idea

was to facilitate the discussion for the understanding of how these social and sexual divisions of labor happen at the household level, and get translated to community and general society levels usually disadvantaging women and yielding undesirable “development” results.

The session started off as usual, or so we thought, but by the second half-hour of the session, my colleague and I held a quick “emergency” meeting to think of ways to make the workshop work. Being sensitive to group dynamics, we had sensed from the start that either we were in the “wrong” direction, we had missed something or the group was taking its time to size us up. By and large the “participatory” nature of our methodology did not seem to interest or impress the group, and moreover, the presence of the local leadership (especially the chiefs, three of them) could have been an “inhibiting” factor, especially for women – or so we thought.

My colleague and I agreed that almost without exception the group was rather “lethargic” and soliciting contributions and participation was a teeth pulling experience. As we discussed, we traded various hypotheses about the group’s “irresponsiveness”. One of the incidents we remembered was that before the workshop

began, there had been some (uneasy) discussion over whether women would sit on the chairs and/or benches, or would sit on the floor even though there was enough space for everyone on the chairs and benches. The argument (mostly by women) was that they would sit on the floor, because it was tradition. Some women objected to this, and said if benches were available (most of the men were seated by then), they would sit on the benches because even in their homes they did sit on benches/chairs. What was also striking was that we (my colleague and I) were offered chairs, even though we were women, the argument being we were visitors from the city ..., therefore we were a different kind of women. We alternated between the floor and the chairs, but it was a “*nervous condition*” and position to be in.

As our little “emergency” meeting went on, my colleague and I weighed all these issues, trying to determine what had gone or was going wrong. Failure to resolve the issue right from the beginning, experience had taught us, would mean the whole five day session was going to be stressful, a flop and/or salvaged at the last minute all of which were undesirable. At some point as we discussed – the meeting lasted two minutes – something from a previous more or less similar circumstance occurred to me; *we had breached protocol*. We (as workshop facilitators) had not traditionally greeted the chiefs, and officially acknowledged their presence,

thanking them for taking time off their schedules to come and spend time with part of the community at the week's workshop. At the next session, I had to "creatively" graft in this tradition so that it would not seem like it was an afterthought, on our part, but an integral part of the session, and the rest of the workshop.

I began the next session, recapping on what we (the whole group) had covered in the last two sessions. I then announced that at that point, we were going to ask the elders - *kuti vatitungamirire mukukwazisa midzimu ne vakuru vakanga vadai kutitsika* - to lead us in greeting our ancestors and their representatives among us.⁵ That said, there was one of the most amazing group (body language) responses I have ever experienced. There was collective sigh, almost like the group all along was holding its breath hoping nothing and nobody would snap, and it was mind-staggering just to realize how much we had missed in an hour. At that point, the most senior chief's aide (male) stood up went to the center of the room (we were sitting in a circular form), sat on his heels and started to clap rhythmically. All of us followed suit, he praise-sang to the ancestors - while the clapping continued - the women punctuated the clapping with ululation and the men responded in

kind, punctuating the clapping and ululation with appropriate intonations.

At some point, the sound of the clapping changed – the aide was addressing the chiefs at that point – reciting poetry that spoke of each chief’s ancestry and invoked the ancestors through the chiefs, to bless the meeting and make it an experience that would edify one and all.⁶ When he finished, the clapping got louder so did the caller-response ululation and intonations. That done, there was a moment of silence, then chiefs in turn clapped, thanked the ancestors, for bringing the visitors to their community. They blessed the gathering, expressing hope that the workshop deliberations would come as a blessing to their communities. The whole exercise did not take a long time, yet it made such a profound difference to the group’s mood; I will never forget the expressions on people’s faces and their enthusiasm to get on with the workshop after honoring the elders. From then on, the workshop took flight, developed a life of its own, and it was just mind-boggling to think that those were the same people, who an hour earlier had been so “un-responsive”. A five to ten minute ritual irrevocably jolted our minds, and to some extent did bring us back to our African reality. We asked questions like; for whom is development meant and whose tools were we (schooled/“educated”

Africans) using to “help” our communities “develop”? It was a humbling moment.

At break time my colleague and I looked at each other in disbelief. We traded impressions and thoughts on the ritual and wondered if we had reinforced patriarchal values and would henceforth have a hard time discussing women’s and gender issues after such a (“patriarchal”) exercise. While the exercise had shaken the ground we were standing on, it was obvious that somehow, it was difficult to simply dislodge our strongest colonized impressions that it was such “antique” traditions that “slow” the development process in most rural communities, with chiefs so “bent” on asserting their patriarchal power. With such overt patriarchy, we questioned, what spaces and options did women have in such rural communities?

Hence, we decided to carry out an informal survey, particularly among women, to assess their perceptions and perspectives on such rituals and traditions, so that their responses would also inform our training methodology for the week. The kinds of responses I got from the women I talked to (though some were expected and “typical”) not only took me aback, they set me re-thinking the location and values for which an African development

practitioner and/or academic advocates. One woman, Mai Takavarasha⁷ shared an insight that particularly struck me, she said:

Nhai mwanangu, kana imi vakadzidza muchirasha kana kuramba chivanhu chedu nezhira yakadai, munofunga kuti isu vana mbuya nana mai venyu vasina kudzidza tinozoriwanepi simba nomukana wokusara tichidzidzisa vanun'una venyu izvo zvamuya kuzotidzidzisa?

My dear daughter, if you who are 'educated' lose or reject our culture in such a manner, where do you think we your 'uneducated' grandmothers and mothers will get the strength and courage to pass on the message or the lessons you have come to 'teach' us to your siblings when you are gone?

This statement stayed on my mind as I battled with the varied meanings of her wisdom, and suddenly I was uncomfortable at the confirmation that Western colonial schooling/education and now "development" had inverted and was still inverting African social systems. With colonization and the rape of our society, children now initiate(d) elders into rituals of "modernity", and the richness of our elders' knowledge gets buried under the "debris" of "illiteracy" and "non-education".

Another woman – Mai Chikwanda – simply shrugged her shoulders and said; *"Mainini, vakuru vanoti rinonyenga rinohwarara, rinosimudza musoro rawana* – My sister, our elders teach us that

patience pays. They say if you want something badly, you quietly work hard at it, and once you have it, its yours, they cannot take it away from you, then, and only then can you stand and ‘make noise’ about it”. Yet another said, *Ukaona munhu asina nguvo achikupa chipfeko, kana kuti munhu ane nzara achikupa chekudya iwe nyumwa* – be suspicious of a naked person that offers you clothing or a hungry person that offers you food. Meaning, if someone comes showing concern about your plight, yet they themselves are in a desperate situation, critically question their ‘generosity’ and motive(s)”.

I got more insightful, sage and sometimes depressing responses from varied women present (and so did my colleague), but the most common thread was that – rural people and rural women in particular – definitely understood where they were located. For some, cultural change was inevitable, and it was supposed to be organic so as to be less stressful on the community. For others, change was slow, they needed “development” urgently, yet others insisted that since culture was and is dynamic, and we were “developing” anyway, “ ... *hatifanirwi kungorasha chivanhu chedu mwanangu* – we should not just trash our culture my child”. And as it was from much of the insights, most women in their own way told us loud and clear that the sheer fact that they were at such a

meeting was something not to be taken lightly. It was strategic for them; and even if they had not been physically there, they said they had their own ways of finding out what transpired. Thus for us to get into their community and “trample” on and over their “invisible” sacred symbols meant that we still had as much to learn about “development” as seen through African rural women’s eyes (Dubisch, 1993; Flora, 1992; Little and Austin, 1996; Cohen, 1985).

Long after the workshop – which turned out to be very exciting, tense, fun, challenging and eye opening – I revisited a lot of cultural practices discussed during the workshop (and my general development work experience) in an effort to understand whether African rural women had any space in African societies. What became clear for me then and especially now in retrospect is that we had under-rated the authority and leadership of chiefs – custodians of culture as discussed in chapter two. This is not to endorse patriarchy, massage the ego of those who lord it over others nor accept uncritically social structures that perpetuate women’s subordination. This is to critically look at the reflection of what colonization does to the mind of those “rescued” by (western and Westocentric) education and development and consciously and/or unconsciously seek to trap others into “modernity”.

One has only to ask oneself, if those chiefs were modern day leaders, in whatever modern day social institution, would we have entered that space without officially acknowledging their presence according to the etiquette of the organization? Our breach of African etiquette redefined our social reference points, the schooled have become the ones with the “most” “knowledge” and therefore *de facto* leaders. The wisdom and experience of our elders and “ordinary” community members has become obsolete, the give and take between elders and the young now an “old-fashioned” idea, because in a “democracy” all people are equal, and that is “development”. Those of us who are “educated” have accrued a debt to those that “taught” and continue to “teach” us “development”, and we have to service the debt by parroting the wonders of Western and Westocentric development frameworks at the expense of our people’s indigenous knowledge and genius.

Because of this debt, local (and international) development researchers and practitioners spend time trying to ram foreign concepts down rural communities’ throats, instead of taking these opportunities as rare African and Afrocentric learning opportunities to be with our elders recording parts of our history from their perspectives. Our mothers’ geniuses in such spaces are

relegated to “illiterate” and “uneducated” female talk, yet it is from the wisdom of some of those very same rural mothers (and women) that I write these lines. They taught and educate me on the meaning of passion from the scripts of their lives, scripts they share with an intensity that defies reason, and not to acknowledge their agency is to miss the forest for the tree.

Rural women’s agency is under-rated because their agency filtered through the eyes of the “outsider” reads as “dis-empowerment” and therefore in need of “development” and “aid”. What most of us “educated” and “developed” people forget is that most rural women are better off in that for the most part they do not have illusions about their material condition and social position. Therefore our treating them as though

... they [do] not know that sexist (and racist) oppression exists until they voice ‘*feminist*’ sentiment [is to assume the arrogance of a colonizer on a ‘discovery’ mission]. [We] believe that we are providing [rural] black women with ‘the’ analysis and ‘the’ program[s] for liberation. [We] do not understand, cannot even imagine that [rural] black women as well as other groups of women who live daily in oppressive situations, often acquire an awareness of patriarchal politics from their lived experience, just as they develop strategies of resistance (even though they may not resist [in ‘familiar’], sustained or organized [forms] (hooks, 1984: 10).

Thus coming face to face with African culture, and/or any culture for that matter, one is reminded that traditions within a culture can also be tools for social change. What is important for those of us who fight for social change through diverse Afrocentric strategies, is to remember that not everything needs to be torn down (deconstructed) in order to be liberating. What is important are the processes through which we arrive at those liberating experiences, and to constantly and consistently ask ourselves through whose eyes and by what measurements is the liberation we are fighting for filtered? When drastic change occurs in a society and in women's lives as we explored in chapter two, there is need to replace the lost with something new, so that women do not become marginalized and be the ones to constantly invent "survival strategies" (McFadden, 1998; Sachs, 1996; Van Allen, 1972; Abwunza, 1997).

Therefore, going to "do development" in the rural areas (or the Real World) means we have to *genuinely* go African and Afrocentric so as to open doors for dialogue with rural women positioned in different social locations. Instead of focusing on advancing Western and Westocentric notions of development, we have to question what right the West has to dictate our definitions of "development". For indeed it is most surprising that the West

speaks a lot about democracy, the right to freedom of choice, expression among other freedoms, yet those same freedoms are denied African and Real World people when rights, choices, and freedoms are conceptualized from standpoints other than the Western. In societies such as ours, rights, choices, freedoms, have a collective basis and the individual's rights and freedoms do not come before and/or supercede that of the group unless individual rights and freedoms ultimately benefit the community, that is, go beyond the (private) individual. It is this drive for individualized agency that Mbuya Nehanda resisted, and this legacy should not be left to die. It is the agency of our mothers, aunts, sisters, grandmothers, elders, peers, youth and children that has to be understood and documented from where they are located so we can begin to theorize for grounded sustainable social change.

Because those women and that community (my colleague and I went into) were African, they related to us in "familial" terms – *mwanangu, muzukuru, vakoma, mainini, vatete, muoora ...*, they personified our struggle as women in this country, and if we (African women) were to be agents of change, those of us that are "insider-outsiders" have to remember that:

For Black women as a collectivity, emancipation, liberation, or empowerment as a group rests on two

interrelated goals. One is the goal of the self-definition, or the power to name one's own reality. Self-determination, or aiming for the power to decide one's own destiny, is the second fundamental goal. Ideally, oppositional knowledge developed by, for, and/or in defense of Black women should foster the group's self-definition and determination (Collins, 1998: 45).

Experiences such as the one we just explored, remind us that Afrofeminism is a collective experience, and therefore my personal agency ceases to have my personal claim because it is an agency constructed by the reality of my (African) society – *esintwini umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*.

The agency of contemporary rural African women like those experienced in the foregoing story, reminds us to honor the spaces in which they live as sites of rich knowledge, sites of struggle, and sites of the story of African people. Most African women in the rural areas as we explored in chapter two and three, experienced the *Chimurenga*. They told their stories; they know what struggle means. For outsiders to assume that “development” is what they need is to wear the arrogance of the “rescuer” and the “rescued”. I have realized and continue to realize with pain, how NGOism in Africa, unless informed by Afrocentric perspectives, ends up being neo-colonialism of Africa in the same old fashioned manner of the

days of David Livingstone, Cecil John Rhodes and Christopher Columbus (Philip, 1991; Bannerji, 1995).

Engaging and utilizing African and Afrocentric frameworks in development theory, policy and praxis therefore means making African philosophies the starting point in any development program and project for Africa. For instance, the concepts of individual and collective identities differ between African and Western societies. Once I was holding a training workshop, in another part of rural Zimbabwe, and we (the group I was working with) were discussing the meanings of gender in an African setting. The elders who spoke, usually prefixed their contributions with *"We think/suggest ..."* instead of *"I think/suggest ..."* unless their contribution was an isolated personal as experience, usually outside their communities. At first I asked (as though I did not know) what or whom they meant by *"We"*, and they would say – *"... sematauro atinoiita mazuva ose mwanangu / ... nje ngokukhuluma kwethu kwansuku zonke mtanami – ..."* *"We"* is used in the ordinary (African) use of the pronoun in everyday language, my child".

At first I insisted that all of us during workshop discussions use *"I"* to distinguish *"individual"* opinion and ideas from those of the

“group”. But each time that happened, we would lose the richness of the (African) language and the communal theorizing that these sessions tended to be as we tried to assimilate the (English) language of the gender training handouts (even though adapted) were written in or translated from. After a couple of attempts, I realized that something was fundamentally wrong with that kind of approach. It was taking away our language and the people’s cultural comfort that enabled the critical debating of issues while we tried to assimilate the “gender and development lingo”. What it boiled down to, was that the approach I was supposed to foster during these workshops, essentially meant colonizing my people’s language and replacing it with a technical alien language. This language would take more time to learn, to understand and begin to use in our speech, thereby sidetracking us from debating critical issues and in the process also inventing our own, thereby contributing (as creators) to the wider and diverse gender and development discourses available.

It is therefore disrespectful of rural African women’s agency to go into their spaces wearing ethnocentric development lenses, and fail to acknowledge that we are “educated” because they paid and continue to pay a high price for our “education” “employment” and “field experience” through their own lives. Those of us that yearn

for an Afrocentric social transformation have to be strategic in using tradition as a tool for change, while at the same time refusing domination, because if African community is conceptualized as women, children and men, we have to transform those structures that dis-harmonize community. Patriarchy – male dominance – and white supremacist capitalism disharmonizes society. And as we saw in earlier chapters, men (and women), who assume positions of power with no positive role models, reproduce the same oppressive structures that they fought and fight against in the first place, unless they assume positions of power with a de-colonized mind and soul. My personal and communal experience of patriarchy has and continues to make me realize that while patriarchy unequivocally privileges men, it also damages them in unspeakable ways. Most men get trapped in status quo modes where they cannot even allow themselves to squeal with joy or weep deeply, because it is unmanly to do so. This usually translates to important “development” decisions that might be read as unmanly if they prioritize social and human development over economic and military development.

Conclusion

The assertion of agency by rural women in Zimbabwe reminds those of us that think we do rural women a favor with our “activism” that we are in this business of fighting patriarchal and capitalist domination together. And being in this process together as individuals and collectivities necessarily means that until women’s freedom is universal, one or a few women’s freedom counts for nothing in the grander scheme of feminist activism, nationally, regionally and internationally.

The condition and status of women in rural areas vis-à-vis the larger “development” agenda informs and reminds us of the richness, diversity and dynamism of the women’s movement in this country. When women chant: *kurema kwazvo, kunoda madzimai* – (the weight of social change) can only be handled by women – it is a call to go beyond the parochial meaning of these lyrics to a broader call to transformative social change through female agency.

As women sing:

Hazvina mhosva nyangwe
Zvorema
Takamirira zvakaoma.
Kurema kwazvo,
Kunoda madzimai.

It might get burdensome and
Heavy
Women only can handle it.
The weight of (social change) can
Only be handled by women.⁸

There is need to be reinterpret these lyrics as the celebratory ululation of African women in this country honoring the legacy of our foremothers who have taught us spiritual and socio-cultural resilience. The lyrics should remind us that the struggle is as public as it is private, it is as personal as it is collective, and it is as inclusive as it is exclusive to those that seek sustainable transformative social change locally, regionally and globally.

Rural women's agency encourages those of us jaded by utopian activism that "shouting" is not always the way to induce a response, but "shout" we must when and if we have to. Empowerment is that which one feels at the core of oneself; empowerment is that which we feel as the transformative energy stirring us deeply at the core of ourselves as individuals and collectivities to act in bringing

about positive social change for women, children and men in this society and elsewhere. African rural women's lives remind those of us cushioned by real, relative and/or imagined privileges that agency is that ability to respond, to create dialogue, to resist domination using "appropriate methodology"⁹ according to our abilities and social locations. The ability to adapt and value the diverse types of agency in this society will make us begin to acknowledge the diversity of the African women's movement as we connect and mobilize with other women's movements globally.

Endnotes

¹ I use "outside" here to mean as seen from the ethnocentricity of the colonized mind wherever it might be located; see also, Piscitelli, 1996.

² On the notion of "other mothers", see (among others) Collins, 1986, 1990.

³ I adopt this subtitle from Tsitsi Dangarembga's (1990) classic novel "Nervous Conditions". I consider it a brilliant work by an African woman writer from this country (Zimbabwe), on the subject of the colonization and de-colonization of the mind.

⁴ For an excellent review of the "Insider-Outsider" locations see (among others); Collins, 1998.

⁵ Women in African in pre-colonial (Zimbabwean) societies were also chiefs (Bourdillon, 1982). But with colonization, this role has now almost exclusively become male terrain, and does spark heated political debates when women assume this post as was the case when Chief Sinqobile Bahle Ngwenya was installed Chief in a Matebeleland South District. See; www.zimsite.com

⁶ See also, Gelfand, 1977; Bourdillon, 1982.

⁷ All name used here are pseudonyms.

⁸ See also, Muchena, 1996.

⁹ Christiansen-Ruffman, 1985, 1997, 1998; Maguire, 1987; Mbilinyi, 1992.

**Six: Theorizing the Soul and “Witch” of Zimbabwe’s
Afrocentric Development**

At the end of every ritual, in true African tradition, we celebrate the arrival of the ancestors and thank all those that participated in the ceremony (Matthews, 1998; Asante and Abarry, 1996; Bourdillon, 1982). In keeping with that tradition, you (dear reader) and I, shall end this thesis by celebrating the Spirit of Mbuya Nehanda and my ancestors who have honored us with their presence as we experienced and explored African female agency in Zimbabwe. I celebrate The Spirit of Mbuya Nehanda who crept into my dreams, walked and talked with and to me, convincing me that this project had to be African and Afrocentric in its feminism, especially if I were contemplating making her an integral part of it. In Western and Westocentric realities, such a claim is a sign of mental unwellness and of a superstitious African still “trapped” in the primitivity of Africana “voodoo” and “witchcraft”. Yet in spiritually and intellectually un(and de)-colonized minds and spaces, it is only logical to commune with those that have gone on, those that left us a rich legacy of resistance and personhood. It is on the strength of this legacy that we stand on academic (and other podiums) to praise-sing our ancestors while contesting the politics of

subjugation and misrepresentation of African women and African peoples.

Throughout this thesis, we have focused on the Spirit of Mbuya Nehanda as personified by the medium Nyakasikana whose life is the most popularized, yet most under-theorized in contemporary Zimbabwe. In this chapter as we celebrate the coming of the ancestor(s) back into the community, we shall critically (albeit summarily) theorize her legacy and retell the source, soul and roots of contemporary Zimbabwe's development. Thus with this chapter I synthesize and conclude this thesis by celebrating Mbuya Nehanda the soul and *witch* of this country's development. She wove the magic wand that inspired and continues to inspire me (and other Africanas) to long for an African culture that honors life in its fullness and diversity.

Svikai Mbuya Vana Ndevenyu: The Ancestor as Philosopher

While it has been argued elsewhere by other scholars that calling Nehanda – (A)Mbuya – is feminizing and/or maternalizing a militant figure that she was, we have by the same token, to conceptualize her from other dimensions. The term (A)Mbuya denotes a cultural richness, a richness we kill when we just drily call her – Nehanda. As I have been emphasizing throughout this

thesis, when we talk of Western ancestors, we prefix their names by associating and/or naming them fathers and/or mothers of western canons that the non-Westerner and Westerner have to learn in order to be considered *learned*. For instance Socrates and Plato *inter alia* are considered the fathers of (Western) philosophy. However, they are portrayed as *the* “universal” fathers of philosophy that we all have to learn from as though there was/is only one type of philosophy on this planet earth (Asante, 1987; Asante and Abarry 1996; Coetzee, 1998; Collins, 1998; hooks, 1984; Morrison, 1993). Often emphasis is not laid on the fact that these white men were Greek philosophers, they are white Western ancestors that we all can and do learn from but do not as Africans have to make the center of our philosophizing and/or theorizing.¹ We should be theorizing our own ancestors and own lives, rooting ourselves, in time and space, yet transcending that time and space so as to be able to strategize for the future.

Thus when I talk of conceptualizing Mbuya Nehanda beyond the exclusively colonial and patriarchal dimensions, I mean an expansion of her teachings so that they inform our broad social theorizing beyond reinforcing the status quo. This way we desist from reducing her to one or few dimensions at the expense of understanding her as philosopher, healer, social conscience, social

scientist, leader, role model and community embodiment, among numerous dimensions that she personifies.

I argue this because freezing Mbuya Nehanda into a mainly militant mode – the most popularized view – denies her and our community of many of those critical reservoirs that recharge our idiom, and our agency as African women and as an African people. Not to extrapolate Mbuya Nehanda beyond patriarchal and imperial constructs is to “internalize the master’s language”; by so doing, we allow ourselves to be “rescued” by paradigms that want and force us to detest our ancestor as a BLACK WITCH. Colonial *conquistadors* as we explored in previous chapters, sought and “officially” subjugated African cultures by putting negative labels not only on our ancestors, but on our social and spiritual psyches so that internalizing the language of servitude would not only be necessary, but the desired sign of a “civilized” African (Matthews, 1998; Asante, 1987; Morrison, 1987, 1993).

Mbuya Nehanda’s (and other ancestors’) call that we “take up arms and liberate ourselves” means we have at this point in our story as a people, to go back to that radical politics of resistance that she (and they) personified. It means we have to look dominance in the eye wherever we are as African women and people, and refuse to

accept half a loaf as better than nothing, because half a loaf is not what is our due as a Black collective and as Black individuals.

Mbuya Nehanda resisted domination by Whiteness because she knew it was better to survive the scars of resisting domination than live in perpetual gratitude to the rescuer. Advancing Mbuya Nehanda's militancy as paramount in place of theorizing her other dimensions, means we minimize her genius and grandeur to colonial and patriarchal constructs of a sociological male who has to be violent in order to earn the patriotic (sic) medals of courage.

The genius of Mbuya Nehanda as philosopher and social scientist is clear today as we watch the mercury of our national debt (broadly defined) rise. We have to honor her lynched body by refusing to be relegated to a rescued people, a rescued nation, and a rescued continent. We have to be suspicious of those increasingly grateful for any and every morsel that the IMF, The World Bank, The EU, CIDA, USAID, Western TNCs, among other bilateral and multilateral development agencies, drop on our weary and "development" hungry society (and the rest of the Real World) from their First World tables. Mbuya Nehanda's call to "... take up [tools of social change] and liberate yourselves ..." is therefore still applicable today as the white supremacist capitalist and patriarchal traps we are in from the bottom up are such a stark

reality. We have to call her Spirit back into the community, we have to invoke our individual and collective ancestral Spirits to come and cradle our national and individual psyches so we can heal from the profound traumas of constant imperialism.

Svikai Mbuya Vana Ndevenyu: The Ancestor As Feminist Theorist

Praise-singing for the Spirit of Mbuya Nehanda, pouring libation for her, making her an integral part of a lived and living African and Afrocentric feminist epistemology, is a beacon of light to remind patriarchal and white supremacist stalwarts that Mbuya Nehanda was an African feminist whose feminism was lived, not abstracted. Those African women branded as “atypical, urbanized and/or westernized” in the women’s movement today, consciously and/or unconsciously learnt and continue to learn the lesson of agency and resistance from their own ancestry. Those that openly resist patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism and other types of domination are branded “firebrand” feminists; yet consciously and/or unconsciously these women (and some men) invoke the Spirit of Mbuya Nehanda. They carry on the torch that she fuels as we mobilize, organize, protest and work for social transformation in various ways in this society.²

Thus Mbuya Nehanda's call to resist colonialism has also to be conceptualized as having been informed by an Afrofeminist lens, because as we examined in chapter two, women in pre-colonial society were agriculturists and producers in their own right. The appropriation of land by the white colonial settlers meant that women's key roles in the socio-economic and political life of their society, was going to and did get irrevocably *vandalized and erased*. These roles were ruptured as the colonizer's Westocentric and Western notions of womanhood were used as yardsticks for measuring and defining femininity in this African society.

Research into the spiritual philosophies of Mbuya Nehanda and the African people of this land therefore need to be reclaimed in order to find clues for strategies of social change that suit our context. Development, capitalist style, necessitates the subjugation and exploitation of human life, especially of non-white cultures, women and nature. The life of Nehanda reminds us that for most African women "feminism" is a lived experience, not a theoretical abstraction that happens in the white ivory towers of academia.

Svikai Mbuya Vana Ndevenyu: The Ancestor As Role Model

Mbuya Nehanda a true, typical and atypical Zimbabwean woman stood up against colonialism, and yet many today conveniently forget this reality and favor those images constructed to reinforce imperial stereotypes of “dis-empowered” African women. Mbuya Nehanda’s role as a living force has to be explored, as her leadership role then and now, are deemed no longer meaningful as images of male heroes in the liberation struggle overshadow her female sacredness. Libating for and theorizing Mbuya Nehanda, the forgotten women ancestral figures and all the Spirits of Zimbabwe – through the written word among other forms of documentation – is a critical step in the construction, production, ownership and dissemination of African and Afrocentric “development” knowledge. Thus female figures of the past need to be reclaimed and studied in their proper perspective so as to cut through the colonizing missions of patriarchy, white supremacy and westocentric development. This reclamation debunks notions of African female subordination (especially of African rural women) that seem to prevail in development literature, and we have to remind ourselves and others that we have no better role model than our very own defiant African Woman Ancestor – Mbuya Nehanda.

Svikai Mbuya Vana Ndevenyu: The Ancestor as Leader

The life of Mbuya Nehanda – *svikiro*, a spirit medium – as we explored in this thesis was embedded in the cultural, spiritual, social, political and economic practices of her people. It was a life that had a holistic approach to community and social development, with little separation and compartmentalization of politics, economics and cultural practices in the social system. It was therefore not unusual in those days for Mbuya Nehanda to command the respect and “obedience” of both women and men in her society when she foretold the coming of the white settlers and called for resistance “by any and all means necessary” to avert the impending imperialism.

Gaidzanwa’s (1992) analysis of Mbuya Nehanda’s female agency in African politico-spiritual leadership roles highlights the spaces available for and to African women in pre-colonial society, and this reality should not be obscured in favor of those that down-play her leadership qualities and roles. While not all women (and men) were endowed with *husvikiro* – spirit-mediumship,³ the fact that this role was and is open to women in an African society, means

that women could, did, and do fully participate in the establishment, leadership and maintenance of (an African) community. Mbuya Nehanda's leadership has therefore to be a touchstone for our leadership (broadly defined) today, as we experience serious power and leadership crises across the social structure. Emulating Western and westocentric bureaucracies has meant that we have to rely on book knowledge and the schooled to lead us, thereby classifying who should, can and cannot lead, and who should be led.

Svikai Mbuya Vana Ndevenyu: The Ancestor as Mentor

Along with conceptualizing Mbuya Nehanda as leader, it is important to theorize the ancestor as mentor for women, particularly for young women. For if young African women in this country grew and grow up knowing that they have female role models that pre-date colonialism and the developmentalist era, they shall assert their African female agency with pride. This way, educating our children – female and male equally – will become our primary concern, reflected by our national, provincial and community development policies. Conceptualizing the importance of education (for the young and the elderly) this way, it – education – ceases to be a colonizing tool for social stratification, giving our

children and people too much schooling yet too little education. Instead, education will become a transformative process that liberates not only the individual but also the collective. Gabi (1994: 60-62) honors the tradition of mentoring the young through storytelling, when she creatively reinterprets the story of Mbuya Nehanda as mentor for the young in search of meaningful social change grounded in contemporary realities, yet guided by those gone beyond. She tells the story of an encounter between Mbuya Nehanda and Shingirirai, a young schoolgirl on her way home from school pondering on her history project. The encounter happens at:

The Secret Cave.

Shingirirai walked home alone from school very slowly. What the teacher had told her to do was impossible. She had no grandmother. How could she talk to her grandmother when she was dead? Who could she talk to? She had to write a page of her history project about an important woman in history. Grade Six was difficult. She sighed.

She realized she had wandered far from the path. Something was wrong. It was too quiet. She must have gone the wrong way. She stopped. The Baobab tree in front of her seemed – yes – to be smiling! But that's silly. Trees don't smile! Somehow she was not afraid. The smiling mouth in the tree grew larger and larger:

'Well there is no harm in going inside,' she thought to herself. It looked so inviting.

She stepped in and found herself in a huge cave. Gourds with clear, refreshing water hung from the roof. As she walked slowly forward, she heard singing from the back of the cave:

‘Mbuya Nehanda! Mbuya Nehanda! Mbuya Nehanda!
The water is boiling!’
... She spoke: ‘Welcome, my child. Sit down and eat.
While you are eating, I will tell you about myself.’
... Shingirirai looked at her again. She knew this
woman. She had seen her face many times – those
determined eyes. She felt her heart thumping. She
trembled with excitement. She was face to face with
Mbuya Nehanda ...!
... Her heart felt like bursting with joy. Here was her
homework being done for her. Mbuya Nehanda was
going to tell her about her life.
... ‘Yes, my child. I am Mbuya Nehanda, your
grandmother, and the grandmother of your
grandmother,’ she said smiling.
‘But, but,’ Shingirirai stammered, ‘but you died. How
can you be here ...?’
‘I have always been a fighter, like you,’ said Mbuya
Nehanda.
‘I am only a little girl. I can’t fight!’
‘Ah! My child, now you *are* fighting. Struggling to
learn is like waging a war....
... Remember, you are the new spirit!’ Mbuya
Nehanda said, patting Shingirirai on the shoulder

Thus educating African women for themselves and their
community is a necessity today as it was in pre-colonial society.
African education defined as a tool of social transformation sets
the community in a radical dynamic motion that allows for the
courageous search for solutions to problems that beset this
country and continent today. Conceptualizing Mbuya Nehanda as
mentor means that those women (young and elderly) that dream of
transforming this society can allow their individual and collective
genius to blossom without the fear of being put down as being too
“urbanized”, “westernized”, “feminist”, “rural”, “uneducated” and

“illiterate”, therefore not of this society and their contributions invalid. After all, Mbuya Nehanda was all and none of the above labels and stereotypes, and *she is our very own, un-colonized, ancestor who died a “pagan”*, to preserve the soul and meaning of community. The legacy of Mbuya Nehanda – and all those disremembered African female spirits and luminaries – have to be called back into the community to heal African women and to heal this decaying society that fought the Chimurenga “... to enter the white man’s world, not to preserve their own” (Vera, 1996: 87).

Affirming Mbuya Nehanda as a mentor for African self-representation, African feminism and radical African politics popularizes notions of feminism beyond the conceptualization of female empowerment as necessarily an individual experience. In this (generally Western) worldview, if I am empowered as an individual and can exercise my individual rights and freedoms, I am feminist. The rest shall experience their feminism when they are ready, and/or in this development era, they shall or may experience it when “aid” is and/or becomes available to help them get “empowered”. Utilizing Mbuya Nehanda as subject and tool of Afrocentric analysis de-colonizes such imperial notions of female agency placing feminism beyond the claws of those quick to claim frontiers or to denigrate as imitations of Western female

constructs. It places African and Black women's feminism as an everyday lived political movement in as much as the *Chimurenga* was for the average African in nationalist heydays – this time without the violence. Filtered through this lens, then, feminism goes beyond being the preserve of the West, a concept only the few privileged and “educated” African women can employ and articulate for themselves and/or on behalf of others. Theorizing Mbuya Nehanda through an Afrocentric lens defines Afrofeminism as a state, an everyday experience, and a site of resistance for those that deeply care about the well being of community and have the insight and foresight to alert the community to imminent imperialism of any kind.

As I mentioned earlier, despite the fact and reality that Mbuya Nehanda was a leader in her own right, patriarchal and colonial agendas have so constructed her to be perceived almost exclusively in militaristic (male) terms. This de-contextualized androcentric construction of African social reality ensures that those women aspiring for roles beyond their “gender” can be reminded that “only men are brave to die for their country. Therefore, those women that aspire to lead or challenge the status quo have to be (sociological) males or possess “special” qualities to qualify for

patriotic (sic) medals. Gaidzanwa (1992: 116-117) offers an insightful perspective on this reality when she observes that:

Symbolically, the re-domestication of women [in Zimbabwe] after independence was effected by the re-naming of the largest maternity hospital after Mbuya Nehanda.... Mbuya Nehanda was and is still renowned for her politico-spiritual role and *not* her role as a ... mother. The linking of Mbuya Nehanda with a maternity hospital rather than a political movement, partly reflects the ignorance and misinterpretation of Zimbabwean culture by the Zimbabwean politicians who were responsible for re-naming cities ..., and other structures. Despite the fact that ZANLA had invoked Mbuya Nehanda as a fighter during the war, the ruling party was also prompt in its conversion of Mbuya Nehanda from a political to a maternal figure! This [is] in spite of the fact that in Zimbabwe today, most people do not even know whether Mbuya Nehanda married or ever had children.

Gaidzanwa's foregoing eloquent analysis speaks volumes of the reality of our traumatized spiritual and social psyches as Africans in this country. The colonization of our society has gone so deep, and manifests how intensely we have internalized the master's idiom; we have internalized the social cannibalism that comes from and with western capitalism. That is, as Gaidzanwa points out above – and as we explored in the second chapter – ZANLA and many Africans invoked the Spirit of Mbuya Nehanda at the launch of the second *Chimurenga*, through *orature*. Yet once political independence was attained, we “discarded” her as we raced for

“modernity”. Thus all those of us that invoked her Spirit during the *Chimurenga* symbolize our assimilation of capitalism as we made a political profit out of her name and agency, yet did and do not give her the recognition that is concomitant with the contributions of those we call national heroes today (mostly men).

Svikai Mbuya Vana Ndevenyu: The Ancestor as Community

Embodiment

Mbuya Nehanda's legacy and genius should therefore not be forgotten nor allowed to be so constructed as to suit patriarchal and other oppressive agendas. Her Spirit should be called back – *senze umbuyiso – tiite madzokeso* – to the community where it belongs and has always lived, so her life can inspire us all, our youth, especially young women who should mature knowing that being African, Woman and Female in this society and anywhere else for that matter, is a wonderful state to be. Ancestors like Mbuya Nehanda remind us of our rich heritage; she challenged Whiteness because she had the political insight and communal foresight to know that colonization would not only be the appropriation of land. It would and did become more frighteningly the colonization of the community, of the spirit and of the mind, a reality that digs deep and eats at the soul of society today. By dis-

remembering our ancestor we have and continue to collude with imperialist hegemony that wants to ensure that her memory and agency is forgotten and/or demonized; and this demonization ensures that African people lose their idiom and agency as women and as a people, thereby reinforcing the white supremacist status quo. When the power and memory of Mbuya Nehanda's agency are obscured, it ensures the social control of women (and free-thinking men) who long for social justice and a loving community. This obscurity ensures that those who yearn for social transformation have no role models or icons to look up to in the larger contemporary white supremacist capitalist and patriarchal society we live in. The colonization of the mind and spirit has meant that those that assimilate dominant white capitalist culture not only imitate, but aim to be better than the natives of the culture and crave to be accepted as "one of them". In this developmentalist era as in the colonialist era, such *assimilados* remain nothing *but* imitators of the "master and mistress' way of life", are never innovators, creators and co-participants in the production of their own traditions and epistemologies (hooks, 1994; Collins, 1994, 1998; Kumar, 1998).

The legacy of Mbuya Nehanda therefore cannot and will not be left to slip through the development cracks in the name of "primitivity"

and/or “voodoo”. Rather it has to be constantly investigated and stretched beyond the icon herself into those spaces that gather dust as we (Africans) race to keep up with patriarchal technology and all the stresses that such sudden changes bring to many communities, and particularly to women’s lives. It is also a social obligation and responsibility for those of us African people that acquire contemporary social skills (like schooling) to use these skills for the libation rituals that will ensure the spiritual healing of our individual and collective psyches that are (constantly) traumatized by capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchy.

This way, we partake in our own spiritual socio-political, economic and cultural development by looking for new libation tools to venerate and theorize our ancestors while responding to the needs of our community in the here and now. Obliterating the agency of Mbuya Nehanda as an individual and representative of community is denying that Zimbabwe is what it is today – a free country despite the appearances – because of a woman, an “illiterate” “primitive” female “native” (who along with her male counterparts) was among the first to “choose” to die for Zimbabwe rather than to live under the yoke of colonization. As if being lynched was not enough, she assured her community before her execution that she would not desert us. Thus they took her body, but her Spirit

remains untouched, it lives among us. We, those of us that live today, have of necessity to carry and guard jealously her Spirit, a Spirit that left a legacy of lived, empowered, African female agency, an agency experienced communally and personally.

When Zimbabwe denies its young generation the (re)telling, reinvention and reinterpretation of this legacy in choice of some “modern” (western ancestral) development model(s), it does itself and its young a great dis-service. Doing so is to forget to keep African traditions (without being traditional); and as we all well know, those without roots are like leaves caught in a whirlwind; those without traditions are like driftwood in high rough seas. The lesson of Mbuya Nehanda’s life is one that transcends time, for it urges the African, the Woman, the Oppressed to refuse domination, to seize the “weapon” of the time and take action to change the situation. Put simply, Mbuya Nehanda’s genius should not be trapped nor frozen in “patriarchal” and “military” terms, instead, it should be constantly reinterpreted and meshed with our contemporary experiences as we search for clues to problems that beset our country’s “development” today. Zimbabwe has therefore to equip its youth, especially our girl children and young women with the African and Black Pride that Mbuya Nehanda lived and personifies. This way, they can and will aspire to give back to the

community and ensure the preservation of our African selves and our African community.

Elders in this society, and those of us that have accessed real, relative and/or imagined power, have an ethical obligation to our children and ourselves to give back to this society its power, its dignity, and its sense of community and identity. We have to share and teach each other and our children, our story and idiom as an African people so that the ancestor nourishes our life while we innovate for the present and preserve for the future.

Conclusion

Reconceptualizing and theorizing Mbuya Nehanda calls for the urgent re-evaluation of the under-rated and under theorized African and Afrofeminist epistemologies of Zimbabwean women from all walks of life. Clues for solutions to development problems affecting this community lie primarily in our heritage, as individuals and a collectivity. As discussed in earlier chapters, Zimbabwe/Africa might sometimes find it useful to adapt notions of development – and sometimes is forced to adopt notions and models of development like structural adjustment programs, SAPs

– to “solve” its own socio-economic and politico-cultural problems, these, experience shows us, are inadequate in the long-term.

While these notions can prove useful as cross-cultural sharing – and/or devastating in the case of SAPs – they should not be our “development” starting points. The global Western oriented and centered development project that we traced in earlier chapters as having started with “explorers” like Columbus and Livingstone, was never meant to be distributive especially to the ex-colonies. It was and is meant to consolidate Western hegemony, and it is from these imperial experiences that – in the footsteps of Mbuya Nehanda – we have to resist the continued expansion of slavery and colonization for white capitalist and patriarchal hegemony manifested in much subtler and sophisticated forms in the contemporary global development project.⁴

Thus when talking of western development frameworks for an African context, we have to first and foremost remember that these so-called “scientific” development theories and tools are Western people’s realities, informed and theorized by their ancestors and themselves from their own experiences and standpoints – it is the North’s “indigenous” knowledge. These frameworks and tools are therefore inadequate for our contexts and we have to necessarily create our own “indigenous” knowledge, a knowledge that comes

from and speaks of our genius as African women and an African people of this country and this continent. Indigenous knowledge, a buzzword in development circles has to be seen as nothing other than the epistemological bases of a particular people that live particular lives, in particular spaces and at particular times. Thus different people in different cultures gain their indigenous knowledge through long tried and tested observations and adjustments to new realities.

What is crucial to remember is that the West has “universalized” its “indigenous” knowledge through hegemonic and other means, and has in the process vilified African (and Real World) knowledge which it classifies as “indigenous” – upgraded from “primitive” – while its own is ranked as “universal” and “scientific” knowledge. Therefore, the ubiquity of Western, so-called “universal” scientific knowledge, has to be understood as nothing more than Western people’s indigenous knowledge and perspectives on social and human reality; it is knowledge embedded in Western cultures.⁵ Those of us that live in the periphery have accepted this Western indigenous knowledge and its tools of analysis, and use them – with some modifications – to analyze and create knowledge for our societies. Thus Western social knowledge – the way development is theorized, planned for and practiced – has become *the* panacea of

human and social development. The knowledge we now create in our African and Real World societies from this type of development is knowledge that affirms the Western status quo, and maneuvers our societies toward Western lifestyles. This cannot go on, it has to *stop*, and it has to *change!*

However, this does not mean that there can be no cross-cultural sharing of indigenous knowledges between Africa and other cultures, including the West. As Africans we should be reclaiming our ancestors, invoking the authority of own experiences as oppressed peoples and creating indigenous development knowledge, a knowledge that can transform society without the “mandate for conquest”. This way, we reach out to other cultures grounded in our heritage while respectfully learning from and of other heritages. Development knowledge conceived this way ensures that we begin to share knowledge in ways that promote equitable social transformation; it becomes endogenous knowledge that informs our strategies for local, regional and global social transformation. In such setting, it means desisting from creating dichotomies that vilify oppressed (and other) people’s cultures and knowledge, while reifying the oppressors’ cultures.

Discarding our own ancestors, discarding Mbuya Nehanda's agency before fully theorizing them is to constantly commit social suicide. The status and condition of women and children in this country reflect our vulnerability as a people to the dictates of those whose ancestors we have learnt and desire to venerate and whose culture we constantly crave to assimilate in order to gain acceptability. Yet, as experience teaches us, any self-loving and self-respecting society will share of itself and learn from others without having to mould itself like any other, other than itself. When all we do as a society is to be consumed by what we are not, and not who we are as a people, then we have a lot of libations to pour before we can summon the spiritual courage and political will to return to "...loving blackness as political resistance in everyday life" (hooks, 1992: 9).

Refusing to embrace contemporary African female agency and resistance for community development grounded in African women's lived experiences in this society, denies women the right and responsibility to learn from and about their ancestral, historical and contemporary female agency in this country, region, continent and the diaspora. By embracing and/or making western frameworks (we have been and are being schooled in) our starting points when theorizing our social realities means that we are not

contextualizing African feminist agencies. Instead, we reinforce Western hegemony by seeing “theory”⁶ as necessarily coming from Betty Friedan and not from Mbuya Nehanda and the contemporary living community of women who are statistically discounted by development indicators as dispossessed – read social liabilities. Faced with numerous social crises at this point in our story as a people, we need to turn inward and root ourselves in the legacy of our ancestors, we need to pour libation for our collective and personal ancestors so our African sense of being is restored, renewed and consolidated. This way, our perception of life and our contributions to national, regional and international social change is not propelled by the will to conquer but by the desire to build bridges and coalitions; so that:

Rhythmically beating like *ngoma dzebira*,⁷
 Resounding across the land.
 We shall ululate, kick the dust, march ...,
 And dance as we experience the return of the ancestor.
 We shall sit *emacancini* around the fire,
 Around the table, under the *musasa* ...,
 To feel each other's hearts as they throb and pulsate
 From and for the collective movement of African womanhood.

The ancestor(s) shall return and bring with her firewood to replenish
 The hearth of the African women's movement,
 So those of us alive today can keep cooking to feed our bodies,
 To feed our souls as we tell our stories from *kuruzeva*⁸,
 The valleys, the cities, farms, across the borders, seas, and

We shall each in our unique and ordinary ways,
 Sabotage and defy being defined by capitalism, racism, classism, ...
 We shall define who we are, wherever we are and choose to be
 As African, woman, one yet a multiplicity, as person and a people.
 We shall feel and know the individual and collective's
 Soulful orgasms of being African and Woman
 Orgasms engendered by the intensity of
 Our drumming, dancing, ululating, writing, speaking ...,
 And diverse libation rituals for social transformation;
 Rituals we perform as mothers, daughters, grandmothers,
 Aunts, lovers, sisters, friends ...
 Of and from this our land *Dzimba Dze Mabwe* - Zimbabwe.

We shall call ourselves African rural women
 Because that is where our roots are,
 We shall define ourselves African urban women
 Because that is where our roots and our people are, this is our land!
 We shall call ourselves African women
 Because these spaces cannot define nor confine our inner Spirit,
 A Spirit deeply rooted in the lives, agency
 And legacy of our ancestors
 A Spirit winged and propelled higher by the anguish of our mothers,
 sisters, friends, aunts, children...
 Whom we see patriarchy, capitalism, HIV/AIDS...
 Stalk, wrestle and increasingly snatch from us everyday
 A Spirit propelled wider by the sacredness of our calling.

We are rooted as we fly,
 We know wherever our souls soar, the ancestor cradles us,
 The ancestor nestles our community
 And reminds us never to forget
 That to be African, to be Woman is to be the heart,
 Pulse and soul of community,
 A heart and pulse that rhythmically beats like *ingúngu zombuyiso*,
 Resounding across the land.
 Let us ululate, dance, write, sing, organize, mobilize
 As we experience the return of the ancestor,
 The orgasmic return of the pulse of community ...

Endnotes

¹ For an interesting contestation of Greek philosophers as originators of “universal” knowledge, see among many others; Asante, 1987, 1990, 1996; Prinsloo, 1998; James, 1993; Kaphangawani, 1998; Gyekye, 1998.

² See also Collins, 1998, particularly chapter seven on “Searching for Sojourner Truth: Toward an Epistemology of Empowerment”; Walker, 1983; hooks, 1984, 1994; Hull, Scott and Smith, 1982.

³ Women are also spirit mediums of male ancestral spirits and vice versa.

⁴ For eloquent articulations of these issues and more, see among many others; Nkrumah, 1964; Nyerere, 1996; Biko, 1998; X, 1964; Mason, 1997; McMichael, 1996; Mungoshi, 1997; Asante, 1987; Gyekye, 1996; Philip, 1991, 1992; McFadden, 1998; hooks, 1992, 1994.

⁵ This however does not discount the importance and necessity of coalitions locally, regionally and globally, especially for the women’s movement (Miles, 1996). What I am arguing here is that as long as development is a *catch-up* project with *winner and losers* carved out, then those of us from the Real World will always be frog-marched toward “development”. And at the rate that capitalism is reinventing and solidifying its hegemonic position, it will take an Armageddon – or otherwise of the less violent – to equalize because in as much as the West talks about “democracy”, it is “undemocratic” in its development hegemonic agenda. The United States of America’s “famous” “democratic” constitution was written when Black people were still slaves in that country. The United Nations (UN) Charter of Human Rights was written when most people of the South were still being tyrannized by apartheid and were suffering direct colonialism by the same countries that drafted the UN Charter of Human Rights. And even more intriguing, as we explored in the second chapter, it is quite fascinating that the UN Charter of Human Rights was written in 1945 after the Jewish Holocaust, not the African Holocaust of Slavery and colonialism, and this brings to bear the racism and sexism embedded in the global development agenda controlled by the White patriarchal West.

⁶ A theoretical framework is:

... a system of ideas or conceptual structures that help us to ‘see’ the social world in order to understand it, explain it and change it It guides our thinking, research and our action ..., and provides us with a systematic way of examining social issues and providing recommendations for change (Connelly, 1996:46).

Put simply, a *theory or theoretical framework* is like a map to help the traveler plan the “best” possible route to take safely to their destination. *Concepts* become the landmarks (on the map) that affirm the traveler that they are in the “right” direction, however, this does not mean that landmarks are the same for every traveler, depending on their social location, the construction and/or perception of the map will be informed by this location. Thus the multiplicity of concepts as Connelly (1996) asserts, “... represent ... alternative ways of looking at the social world. It is possible [and inevitable] to have different assumptions about the same aspects of reality [because] different assumptions lead people to view issues and problems differently”(47). This being the case then, theory is of necessity an everyday experience one that one and all engage in constantly as life presents different challenges at different times in our lives Mbilinyi, 1992; Stanley and Wise; 1990.

⁷ This poem; ... *the Heart and Pulse of Community* ... comes out of the experience of writing this thesis. *Ngoma dzebira* and *Ingungu zomthethelo* (below) are ChiShona and SiNdebele for (African) Ritual Drums.

⁸ *Kuruzeva/Kumusha/Ekhaya* is the ChiShonalization of what used to be called the (Native) Reserves. Because of apartheid and the politics of dispossession, these spaces have assumed a new symbolic meaning for African people as a space of community, “culture”, personal and collective identity.

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