

Emasculated by the Crisis: Representations of the Struggling Fathers in Selected Contemporary Zimbabwean Literature

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Abstract

The political turmoil and socio-economic comatose of the past decade in Zimbabwe has had a toll on the social transformation of the Zimbabwean society. The astronomical inflation, the incessant shortages of basic consumer goods, jobs etc has changed the face of the evolution of cultured masculinities, exposed the vulnerability of the male father figure and consigned him to the fringes of the everyday struggle to provide for his family. The gap between the traditional male breadwinner and the hopelessly inept father figure produced by the extraordinary constraints of the last decade in Zimbabwe has over the years created a fertile ground for creative imagination as writers grapple with the nature of the "Zimbabwean problem", the multifarious forces shaping the humanitarian crisis and the human responses to the dystopian situation. This paper looks at the destabilizing impact of the problematic political and economic situation on the male father figure's capacity to effectively deliver on his traditional and cultural responsibility to sustain a family. We contend that the contemporary Zimbabwean narrative particularly in the short story genre reflects and refracts on the complexities of negotiating a crisis situation and represents the "emasculated" state of the male father figure rendered helpless by forces beyond his influence.

Introduction

The "Zimbabwean crisis" of the past decade in the new millennium (which best manifests in the world inflation record for countries not at war) changed lives, social and cultural codes in the most remarkable of ways. For the ordinary family unit as was for the larger extended family, the day to day chores revolved around a fixed locus of survival mechanisms and stop-gap measures in resistance against the ever threatening tide of starvation and extinction. In such excruciating circumstances, the male father figure's culturally assumed role as the family breadwinner and caretaker came under acute exposure as the crisis hit hard on the hinges supporting the father's capacity to sustain his family. The father's vulnerability and susceptibility to the crisis is rendered all the more problematic by the very fact that the economic and political forces informing that crisis are well beyond his spheres of influence. Slowly but surely, the challenges of everyday life loosened the father's grip on the citadel of his familial authority and exposed him to opposition from the disgruntled members of his family. The sons, realizing their father's maladroitness in responding to the newest form of threat to the family seize upon the opportunity to show their intent to take over the reins of power.

This paper explores literary representations of "fatherhoods" under siege with special emphasis on the dynamics of the familial change process; the political and economic circumstances informing the father's ineptitude and the reactionary tendencies of the endangered father. It seeks to add valence to grammars that seek to communicate this fluidity in the public sphere and thereby also show the "multi-voiceness" of literary fictions. This form of communication through imaginative literary texts has become an alternative discourse in articulating disclosures aimed at making accessible certain elusive realities which are often difficult to pin down during moments of accelerated change like the one we are witnessing in the new millennium. Therefore by managing to "freeze moments", there is an ability by the fiction writers to open fissures which allow for a wider and closer scrutiny, thereby enriching our understanding of our present realities and the unavoidable transformations we must register in our social and literary interpretation of life.

Feckless fathers

The socio-cultural identification of masculinity with the breadwinning act spans historic milieus and transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. Breadwinning fathers evolved with the capitalist notion of paid labour where the father's biological and physical superiority over his female counterpart put him at the forefront of capitalist exploitation as a petit earner, consequently propelling him to the apex of the familial power hierarchy as the family's guardian. The father, a *de facto* leader of the family institute is therefore identifiable first and foremost by his capacity to provide the basics of his family's needs. In Zimbabwe, the father's occupation ranged from paid work to self-help small to medium business enterprises. The economic cataclysm of Zimbabwe's past decade, however, disrupted whatever earning opportunities were open to the father - from the agriculture sector where many lost jobs to the land reforms, to the industries where companies (most of which were owned by foreign investors) closed shops, leaving many without alternate means to livelihood. Entrepreneur fathers were not spared in the meltdown as they too succumbed to the dwindling income in their traditional clientele. The changing fortunes of the father called for a change in the family system, particularly its status quo and this reduced the father's life to one long struggle against the odds threatening his traditional reign on the family. The father's new struggle stems from his defiant conservative spirit that is inimical to the imminent change in the familial status quo and one that constantly spurs him to endeavour the herculean to save a role assigned to him by age's long traditions. When fatherhood delineate ability in a man to provide the basics of his family needs, an emasculated father easily comes to be identified by his inability to provide - the distinctive mark separating him from real able fathers.

Edward Chinhanhu's short story "These are the days of our lives" in the short story anthology *Writing Now* presents a definitive emasculated father bearing the brand of the nation's near socio-economic annihilation. Unlike his "fatherly" heyday of full employment with cautionary earnings to sustain his fatherhood, Freedom appears in the greater part of the short story a helpless and vulnerable victim of circumstances

whose cynicism about any prospects for a return to his old self is apparent in his constant nostalgic hallucinations about the good old days when he would frequent the local beer hall to share a drink and a thought with friends. Jobless and without any other means to support his family, Freedom weans himself from masculine pride and the embarrassment of approaching other men for help to feed his own family and become the father that a real man must be. The price that Freedom pays to keep alive the dream of an able father actually tatters the image he is striving hard to preserve. Freedom's exit plan from the quagmire of a failed fatherhood entails a personal declaration of his ineptness and his own reassignment to the domain of dependence. This effectively wears down what remains of his masculinity and fatherhood as circumstances compel him to surrender the very foundations of a persona he is trying to revivify.

Driven by the perturbing sight of his sickly wife and his starving children, Freedom sends himself on an errand around old meeting places with the hope of "run[ning] into an old friend fortunate enough to be still employed" (Chinhanhu 63). The old days however fail to save Freedom's direful situation as the beer halls he visits in search of "good Samaritans" are devoid of any patrons – apparently because people are financially insolvent to maintain their drinking habits. Freedom's presence at the beer hall which houses many memories of his former balanced self makes him a double-edged victim of both the past and the present. Memory torments him as it presents a mirage of a dream once lived but one that is far removed from the material reality of his present predicament. The lifeless beer hall confirms his greatest fears that prospects for a sudden turn of fortunes are a pipe dream; "Nonetheless it was here that Freedom and his friends used to meet every afternoon after work and sometimes at lunch as well for a quick one. In spite of himself, he nearly smiled at the recollection of those golden days" (64). The torment of the inconsistency of then and now, between self-sufficiency and dependency adds woes to Freedom's own declining physical posture, his waning and starving body that, like his wife's is fast crumbling to AIDS. Freedom's disappointment at not finding an old friend to help his cause means that he cannot salvage the least of what remains of his fatherhood and his realization of this simple fact awakens him to his total emasculation and deficiency of any effectual apparatus of defence.

Named for the irony of his reality, Freedom is never free from the socio-cultural and economic burden of life in a society undergoing a change process for the worst. The most painful and embarrassing feeling that Freedom lives with is his constant awareness of his defencelessness, his incapacitation to confront the forces behind the ghastly demands of everyday life. He has in the process lost all manner of control, including his own health as the incurable AIDS ailment joins forces with the equally "incurable" economic pangs to deny him his once glorious position as his family's proud caretaker. Seeking a moment of escape from his perpetual victimhood, Freedom goes deep within himself in search of something to rejuvenate his mind-set and invite prospects of the dawning of a better father. Finding nothing to bolster his waning optimism, Freedom relapses into the despondency of glumness,

considering himself, momentarily, "lucky" to be out of employment and therefore without any money in a bank where he would have to join the cumberingly long queue to access it; "he skirted the queue, thankful at least that no money meant he didn't have any in a building society which could be closed down by the government" (67). Freedom's infinitesimal and eerie moment of "victory" is gagged in its track by his abrupt encounter with men worse than himself in their mêlée against forces of mannish extermination. First is the "mad beggar [who] nearly knocked him flying" (67). Then, it is the blind couple calling out for help from "Jehova's people" (67). Lastly, Freedom witnesses a hideous struggle as a man and a dog battle for trash food in a bin. These more glaringly severe episodes in the lives of men no longer moves Freedom to any false sense of victory but instead reminds him of his own ineptitude for where the insane and the physically disabled men failed to provide for themselves and their families, he too cannot fare any better. Able bodied, sane or otherwise, the men are all perpetual ersatz fathers who falter on the proviso of the basic of requirements in their familial role – food provision.

Escapism is an option when life threatening forces cannot be surmounted but for Freedom, giving in to the dictates of such forces is as good an option as any other belligerent ones. Pessimism dictates Freedom's mentality. As he walks past Yeovil Cemetery, Freedom pauses for a moment to admire the dead and the "restful". His cynic momentary wish for death dissipates as it suddenly dawns in him that without a funeral policy he could not afford the send-off worth his troubled life on earth; "his own funeral would be a disaster. He had no funeral policy, no money to feed the mourners and not even a decent home or yard for them to sit in and mourn" (68). This confirms the sealed space for any manoeuvres a man can architect to redeem his lost place as the head of the family. Freedom's two last ditch attempts to save his threatened fatherhood are as futile and painstakingly bitter as the earlier ones. When Freedom finally comes upon a queue for mealie meal – the staple diet, he almost feels at ease for the first time in a very unfortunate day. Spurred by the prospects of obtaining the priced and scarce commodity that is every father's jewel, freedom loses himself and engages in "light, excited conversation...in spite of his hunger" (69). Freedom however, misses out on this golden opportunity to reinvigorate himself for the most smarting of reasons – "the party card" – the green access card for scarce commodities instituted by opportunist politicians seeking political mileage from the situation and the people's desperation. The psychological angst at the narrow miss forces in Freedom the most evident sign of his challenged manhood – he weeps; "stinging tears welled up in his eyes as he headed for his sister's home" (69). The pilgrimage to his sister's home in search of help marks Freedom's total surrender of all "manly" traits and an act in the reversal and re-write of the traditional script. Mandy, his sister is a single parent sustaining her family on cross border trade. This makes Freedom's desperate call on Mandy for food aid all the more appealing and further confirming his evident "effeminisation". Seeking Mandy's hand in a matter that has his familial reputation at stake is a concession enough that Freedom has failed and where he has failed, a woman has and can succeed. Modernist myths of gendered dualisms of male breadwinners and female

dependants are thus effectively exploded as cultural familial roles are inverted.

Men succumbing to conflicting generational masculinities

The recurring theme in the story of men in contemporary Zimbabwean literature is the antagonism given rise by generational differences. Though subjected to the same debilitating socio-economic circumstances, fathers and sons- the "old men" and the "new men" exude antithetical interpretations of the problem space-time informed by their equally polarized and contrasting grasp of history. Without oversimplifying the conflict, it would appear that the "old men", guided by a memory of colonial oppression and the incineration of a heroic revolutionary war that dislodged settlerism are naturally conservative and would not agree to an explanation of the contemporary dystopian society in terms of a failure in the sustenance of that revolution. Such tendencies to valorise a monolithic and fixed interpretation of history create citadels of hegemonic power to be appropriated by the major participants in those historical moments. The "old men" become subconscious participants in the gendered constructions of a hegemonic "patriotic" fatherhood. This is a hegemony literary presented as thriving on the technical exclusion of the "new men" who are deemed to be products (as compared to "old" makers) of national history.

What the story demonstrates is that in their struggles to influence the forces shaping the material realities of their lives, the "new men" challenge the paternal authoritarianism of the "old men" founded on exclusivist fundamentals of portions of history dominated by the "old men". The "new men" are spurred on to subvert the old men's self proclaimed legitimacy and overseeing role by a consciousness of the material futility of the present. It is the disillusionment informed by the inconsistencies of revolutionary rhetoric and their abject material circumstances that drives the "new men" to imagine alternative nationalisms and to forego the ideological coaching of the "old men". The emerging men simply see a malfunctioning system of the old (manifesting in the economic cataclysm) and quest for a different moral compass that is removed from the antiquated blue prints of the older generation. In refusing to make use of the counsel of the "old men", the "new men" are in effect delineating the adverse reality of their space-time as a product of forces incompatible with the prescriptions of what they perceive to be archaic nationalist ideologies of the "old men". Challenging the misappropriation of history for political expediency translates into challenging the clandestinely instituted hegemony.

Mary Ndlovu's short story "Hands" in the anthology *Short Writings from Bulawayo III* reveals these familial (and national) conflicts that arise as a consequence of the generational lacuna between a father and his son. Ndlovu, Bongani's father is a veteran of the war for liberation who prides himself for his double edged paternal "achievement" - first as a father to his family and also as a "revolutionary father" who helped birth a new independent nation. Ndlovu, a fanatic of the liberation war who spends most of his energy daydreaming about his heroic war-time antics contends that independence is the most prized gift that he has bequeathed to his family and the "nation family" at large for which all beneficiaries (starting with his

own son Bongani) should remain forever grateful. Ndlovu's obsession with the past makes him a victim of memory, who is losing touch with the contemporary demands of the obtaining social, economic and political situation. In failing to appreciate the discrepancy of revolutionary rhetoric and the wretched circumstances of his son, Ndlovu demonstrates the contradictions and ambiguities that reside in many revolutionary dialectics. Ndlovu's worldview is warped by the high premium he places on the revolutionary struggle which blurs his better instincts. He will be the last to admit the futility of the independence project even in the glaring evidence of his economically emaciated and disintegrating family.

Ndlovu's gift to Bongani's generation (an independent nation) proves inadequate to the contemporary demands of life and this forces all (but Bongani) of his children to abandon his "gift" and live a life of perpetual economic refugees in foreign lands "struggling in Johannesburg, denying their pedigree, paying any money to be seen as South Africans, not Zimbabweans" (Ndlovu 37). Bongani, Ndlovu's only remaining child deems his father's "gift" of independence to be the seal of his eternal submission to the whims of his father's nationalist tastes. The "I fought therefore I am always right" mentality displayed in Ndlovu's temperament puts him on a collision path with Bongani who is exasperated by the constant urge for him to remain ever indebted to his father and the war veterans likes of him at the crest of the national office. But for Bongani and his siblings in flight, their economic ineptness is a sign enough that the present and the future as authored by their father is as undesirable as it should be challenged and changed. Bongani comes to view his economic victim-hood as a direct consequence of the shortcomings of the politics of his father's generation and excogitates the exit plan with a consciousness of the fact that the only conceivable way of saving his generation is to fight to have it in control of the national polity. Bongani joins the opposition party as a measure and a commitment to become an agent in the change process that demands him to politically renounce his own father - an avowed supporter of the revolutionary party that Bongani holds accountable for the economic quandary.

Ndlovu's conservative inclination towards the perpetuation of the political status quo and the institutionalisation of liberation war heroism as the prerequisite for political leadership informs his vilification of his son's opposition politics. For Ndlovu, Bongani becomes a thankless enemy of the family and the nation at large because he dares challenge his paternal father who also doubles roles as a revolutionary "father" of the nation. Memory is the object holding father and son asunder. The father's constantly re-lived war experiences and the ideological indoctrination that went with it underlies his support for the perpetual reign of his comrades in arms while Bongani's own memory is crammed with the recent experiences of joblessness and inflationary prices of basic consumer goods. Bongani, as his mother MaNgwenya concedes is intractable in pursuit of what is good just as his father was obstinate in pursuit of majority rule; "the boy is the same as you [Ndlovu]: headstrong and brave. We need to find out what he is doing and why. My guess is you will find he has not strayed as far as you think" (39). Hers is an ingenuous and subtly presented

interpretation of the situation, which she articulates with a femininely voices wisdom.

For his part, Bongani views himself as a self-styled neo-liberator whose opposition politics is sure to extricate his generation from hectic policies of the old generation as he says; "things are all wrong. Your generation messed everything up – no food, no jobs, no rights to anything. We have to fix it" (39). Ndlovu on his own part is too revolutionarily brainwashed to conceive of an alternative to the revolutionary path of the liberation struggle and curses himself for failing to make Bongani the ardent revolutionary disciple that he is. Ndlovu instead takes Bongani's opposition to his political allegiance for betrayal and considers him a threat to his familial reign and also to the national interest; "Who was Bongani fighting? Liberators. No, that could never be condoned. Selling out to the British..." (39). Thus Ndlovu demonstrates a myopic conviction that criticising the revolutionary leadership translates to supporting the liberation veterans' enemies. Bongani's incarceration at the mere act of voicing his disillusionment is indicative of the authoritarian turn of fatherhood both at familial and national scales. This dictatorial masochism manifests in the father's predisposition to enforce his son's submission at the promise of punishment (imprisonment) if such submission is not rendered.

Violence underlies Ndlovu's reaction to every form of challenge to his familial authority. It is a predisposition informed by a doctrinaire allegiance to liberation ideology where violence became the cornerstone of the struggle for social justice. Long after the well meaning violent campaign against the life threatening forces of colonialism, Ndlovu still enlists violence to quash opposition to his supreme familial role while his political party uses violence to "discipline" his intransigent young son into "nationalist" patriotism. Ndlovu shows a violent temperament in his intent to coerce his son and MaNgwenya to share his "nationalist" prism and start to perceive saboteurs to the nationalist cause in the place of ineffectual bearers of the national office. It is however, the "disciplining" of Bongani through penal imprisonment that reveals the revolutionary fathers' intrigues to stifle all forms of dissent to their vile rule. Ndlovu's violent threats to Bongani's obduracy are acts in the construction of a "commandement" – an authoritarianism analogous to settler authoritarianism (Mbembe 103). Achille Mbembe argues that the postcolonial establishment lives with an affinity to consolidate its hinges of power through an epistemic reign over the public sphere; "state power (1) creates through administrative and bureaucratic practices its own world of meanings – a master code that while becoming the society's primary central code, ends by governing perhaps, paradoxically the logics that underlie all other meanings in that society" (103). Ndlovu employs his cultural familial supremacy over Bongani to oblige him to recognize the liberation war as the foundation for legitimacy to the political office. For Ndlovu, Bongani can only be his son when he adheres to the revolutionary path blazed by him. Ndlovu becomes the *de facto* moral compass and bonfire of patriotic conduct with a mandate biologically and culturally acquired through his fatherhood.

Bongani can only become his father's "good son" when he reverently submits to his

father's tyrannical "commandment" and political orientation, his self-serving blue prints that effectively macerate Bongani's own resistance to closure. Bongani is held at ransom, unable to pursue alternatives to a familial and national masculinity that thrives on his victimhood. Ndlovu paradoxically calls for Bongani's constant fealty; "the revolution takes time and needs to be supported, not challenged" (38). The conception of revolution is misappropriated to sustain a hegemonic expediency. Ndlovu is in fact instituting a "fetish" self (aspiring to be made sacred, Mbembe 103) thereby establishing an undisputed autocracy founded on the notion of fathering. As a consequence, the absence of such loyalty in Bongani attracts from Ndlovu the threat for the sternest disciplinary action a father can give – he will disown him; "I'm now ordering you to stop all this [opposition politics] if you want to live under my roof... I can't have my own son denying my life's work" (Ndlovu 40). Tyrannical fatherhood given rise by a centuries old patricentric tradition is thus established as the catalyst to the antagonistic relationship between father and son. It is a patriarchal tradition steeped in the contemporary urge to give history anteriority in the production of both the political and the cultural spheres. It is a fatherhood founded and sustained by an authoritarianism that violently censors voices of dissent and project its own master narratives as the blue prints to cultural and political conduct.

Macho-men under siege

Perhaps the most visible sign of the economic cataclysm in Zimbabwe's last decade is the high rate of unemployment. The International Monetary Fund estimated a catastrophic 90 % rate of unemployment at the end of 2009 (Zimbabwe: IMF revises growth rate par. 16 <http://allafrica.com/stories/201004260117.html>). The twin major productive sectors, industry and agriculture suffered the brunt of a combination of poor political strategy and western economic sanctions and were forced to lay off thousands of workers. Industry and agriculture, formerly dominated by western multinational investors were immensely affected by the sudden anti-western indigenisation policies of the ZANU PF government which best manifested in the so called Fast Track Land Reform Programme in which the government expropriated white-owned farms for black resettlement. Western governments, led by the USA and Britain counteracted with a list of "restrictions" meant to punish the "rogue" Harare administration for perceived gross human rights violations and the dearth of the rule of law. The USA in particular crafted the Zimbabwe Democracy Act which restricted USA companies and investors from doing business in Zimbabwe. The ensuing industrial and agricultural recession impacted negatively on the employment levels in a country grappling with world record inflationary levels.

In a traditional and patriarchal Zimbabwean society historically sustained by paid labour, it is employment that empowers the man to discharge his traditional duties proficiently. The ability to work and to earn maintains the man's clout and identity as the family's breadwinner. It is therefore paid work that holds in balance the family unit and allow for normality in the course of the family's life. Consequently, the absence of employment threatens the man's capacity to deliver on his roles thereby

threatening his hegemonic domination. A man out of employment and without any other means of financing the family's everyday needs is constantly aware of the shaky ground upon which his manhood stands. He is also too aware of the veneer of opportunity for other members of the family (wife and children) to take charge as they desperately seek to negotiate the predicament bedeviling the family thereby undermining the man's authority.

Ethel Kabwato's short story "The Breadwinner" (in the short story anthology *Writing Now*) dramatizes the grievous impact of the changing family roles where a husband loses his job and the wife retains hers. The short story presents a scenario awash in the Zimbabwean public sphere at the height of the economic downturn. After losing his job, Ted feels a certain inadequacy which makes him see his wife's every other move as a sign of her conscious takeover of his traditional breadwinning role. Despite the fact that Rudo's assumption of Ted's "masculine" duties is spontaneous and inevitable (she is the only family member still in employment), Ted watches helplessly as Rudo's new roles encroach into his manhood. Rudo's financial capacity passes her for the "man" of the house as she begins to dominate Ted in decision making, particularly "muscling" him out of his connubial favours. Rudo's new responsibilities as the new family's keeper, feeding and clothing Ted, tags him with a dependency status that effectively makes him a servant of Rudo's whims; "She had also paid Ted's membership fee at the local sports club. Did she want him to learn to play a game – golf, for example or did she need him as an escort, the man she had not thrown out though he contributed nothing (139). Rudo's emerging chauvinism forces a mental and psychological destabilisation on Ted whose derelict masochism is only warming up to the reality of his joblessness and dependency on his wife. Rudo's financial health apparently propels her to the helm of the familial regime as she begins to direct the course of the family's everyday life. Ted's financial vulnerability on the other hand effectively reduces him to an unwilling puppet coerced by circumstances to dance to the decibels of Rudo's puppeteering. Ted becomes Rudo's extension, an accessory at her disposal to "escort" (139) her to her realization of her opportune moment to conquer him. Rudo, it would seem, has been waiting for this moment – when circumstances would force Ted to withdraw into his patriarchal shell while she emerges from her own subdued matriarchy.

The consequential loss of familial leverage on the part of the jobless Ted marks his dethronement while ushering in Rudo's crowning moment. Ted's newest dependency on her purse contrasts sharply with her newly found independence from him. That independence however proves fatalistic as it turns out to be the object of the love lost between the two partners. As Ted struggles to come to terms with the new family regime, particularly Rudo's tyrannical disposition, he monologues; "Maybe if we didn't share the same bed I'd sleep. If you just let me be myself, I'd sleep. If only you'd let me go, I'd sleep. For close to three years Ted had endured the silence that followed her rather casual 'goodnights' as she turned her face to the wall" (137). Rudo takes her newly found iron fist to the bedroom where her domineering attitude and denial of Ted's intimacy effectively "castrates"

what remains of his sense of manhood;

"Rudo began carrying a book to bed. She would slip between the sheets and flip through the pages, mocking Ted, shutting him out. Ted had never been a bookworm. He was practical. He could fix anything, any gadget. But he couldn't fix his wife... no children. No sex. That is why he felt he hated her now (138).

Where the marriage counsellor Selwyn Hughes takes a patriarchal husband for a "loving leader" (25), Ted proves to be a hurting and hating follower of Rudo's dictates. The typical patriarchal male chauvinism and accompanying female voicelessness is reversed by the passage of Rudo's evolution. Buoyed by her capital muscle, not only does Rudo find her voice but she also finds herself empowered to and willing to coerce her husband into withdrawing his own voice; "He suffered in silence" (137).

The metamorphoses of Rudo into a cold and callous partner is further informed by a modernist material culture which proportionate individual financial capital to their personal clout and social standing – as the Shona saying goes "*ane mari ndiye mukuru*" (decision making is the preserve of those with money). Life is fuelled by money – Ted, jobless and bankrupt survives at the mercy of his wife and that makes her his demigod – the final voice to the fate of his own life. Ted is pushed into a tight cosmetic existence where his every other move is sanctioned by his wife who wields the purse that sustains his life; "her voice haunted her long after she'd left for work. Nagging was just part of the course. Ted felt the tears in his eyes. She owned him. He felt she had the power to draw his last breath. How had he allowed this to happen?" (138). What eludes Ted in his own analysis of the chaotic turn to his life is the fact that his predicament owes much to wider political and economic circumstances that are immune to his pains and cries for change. Ted is a victim of a sickly economic dispensation that discourages entrepreneurship while it fails to raise employment prospects. It is an economic situation that "effeminises" the jobless and "musculinises" the employed. While Rudo sticks to imperative commands; "Attached is Z\$40. Buy cheese, kidneys, tomatoes and Lux soap" (141), Ted succumbs to the traditionally feminine household of cleaning the house, washing and cooking.

The apparent panacea to Ted's dilemma ironically lies in the object of his emaciation – employment. Ted, like Freedom in Edward Chinhanhu's short story "These are the days of our lives" is hopelessly conscious of the odds against his attempts to reclaim his place as the family's breadwinner. Paid work is Ted's last hope – the bridge to the resuscitation of his manliness. In a dream, Ted's father challenges him to find the bridge and cross over to his freedom; "If you're a man, you can cross this river" (139). The bridge of the dream unfortunately collapses with Ted's fifth step consequently denying him an outlet from a marriage that is fast degenerating into a matrimonial cesspit. As in the short story "These are the days of our lives", the economic victim seeks momentary solace in nostalgic anamnesis;

He heard the machines in the distance and even imagined the night-shift workers in blackened white overalls returning to their families, their sandwich tins tucked under their arms. He had been one of them until the day the big gates closed on him and his engineering certificates. He missed it all ... he missed the prestige that came with being part of the giant steelworks and he missed the money, of course. (140)

It is the dearth of "prestige" necessitated by lack of employment that psychologically macerates Ted and leads him to a deep antipathy of his wife. Rudo and Ted are financially diametric and this reality catches up with their matrimonial relationship. Ted's self-insufficiency creates an imbalance on his leverage over family matters. He is effectively confined to the fringes of decision making by Rudo whose financial power explodes the traditional patriarchal identities of the male family leader and breadwinner and the housekeeping wife. This topsy-turvy ness role is an abnormality of tradition that Ted's manly disposition is too proud to accept. But the economic odds are against Ted's struggle to recover his mannish ground and this leaves him bereft of options but to leave Rudo and the matrimonial home. Rudo's childlessness exhibits Ted's strangulated "macho-manship" and her money constantly reminds him of his place – he is the new docile and dependent "houseman". In jumping off the ship of marriage, Ted hopes to recapture his own sense of himself so stifled by the years he has lived off the matrimonial benevolence of Rudo.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis has demonstrated the illocutionary force of narrative in the creation, expansion and explanation of social changes and realities that shape our present day. By concentrating on struggling fathers, the paper implicitly brings about nuances regarding culturally and historically constructed closures which can no longer hold hence the need for disclosures through the short story and literary analysis. The father during these times of crisis and accelerated change is presented as a shadow of his former self, rigidly hanging on to the past which can no longer meet the present demands and challenges. So what remains to be said is that future research in this area may need to concentrate on interrogating and problematising the possibility of the fathers and mothers to work together and to explore the resilience and innovativeness which come as a result of male/female, young/old partnerships and the possibility for creativity and innovation. This transformation of fathers thus may be positively registered as signalling new beginnings and new discursive frontiers from whence new cultural values need to be registered and for that, art in the form of fiction plays an important role in the communication of these new realities.

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