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THINGS COME TOGETHER: REREADING MALE REPRESENTATIONS OF
MOTHERHOOD

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Abstract

Things Come Together: Rereading Male Representations of Motherhood

This thesis presents a challenge to the approach that has been used to read representations of motherhood by male writers. The way of reading that has been used has led to accusations by female critics that the representations are jaundiced, a feeling that pervades the special issue of *African Literature Today* that focuses only on women's work.

The introduction to the thesis outlines arguments that have been presented about the need to write from a point of view of experience, an approach that is meant to exclude male writers from writing about motherhood. The approach is also an attempt to prescribe to male writers how they should write about issues concerning women. It will be argued that the authority of experience argument as well as the accusation that male writers are insensitive in representations of women ends up limiting the way people read. The reading will be restricted to a realist reading that does not encourage an extrapolation of the deeper political meaning that may emerge out of male representations of motherhood. The thesis will stress that my reading of male writers' representations has drawn out diverse and complex meanings.

To show the diverse ways in which males have used motherhood to produce some political undercurrent, five texts, ranging from precolonial to postcolonial Africa will be used. The analyses attempt to show using these texts by different male writers, that individual texts always exceed the limitations that can be caused by unimaginative reading.

INTRODUCTION

Reading Beyond the Ending

The editorial of a special issue of *Women in African Literature Today: Volume 15* states that

African male writers are either unable or unwilling to present woman in her totality, and have therefore resorted to the use of stereotypes; ...their treatment of issues that most deeply concern women - issues such as polygamy, childbearing, motherhood, the subordination of the female to the male - has been jaundiced. (1987:2)

The editorial goes on to argue that the female has been presented as 'cosily' accepting her lot in relations between the sexes. This particular issue of the journal is devoted not only to "African women writers" but also "to the presentation of women in African literature." The conclusions that come from various contributions by women writers in this volume are that "the cause of womanhood has been inadequately served by African male writers in their works."

That the work of African female writers has been neglected is indisputable. It is evident even in the fact that their work is only given a platform in the fifteenth issue of the *African Literature Today* series. However, as this thesis intends to argue, this neglect in publishing their work does not mean that African women have been written out of literature. Representations of women, especially those of motherhood, have not always been as stereotypical as is alleged by some feminists. Sander L. Gilman's work on stereotypes proposes that stereotypes emerge when "self-integration is threatened." He also says that they arise out of fear of the other, out of the desire to control. Gilman perceptively adds though that stereotypes are always undergoing change. This is an important perception

that warns against reading representations as fixed, static and always bordering on the stereotype. The assumption that male writers have depicted motherhood in a stereotypical good/bad mother dichotomy is retrogressive as it masks any possibility of considering how other male writers have used motherhood to create literature that is enriching and provocative, at the same time writing women into history. Even where it appears that stereotypes have been used, it is possible to find alternative meaning from the stereotypical representation, if reading is not restricted to only identifying the stereotype. I would like to propose here that in most cases it is how a work of art is read that produces stereotypes, not how it is written. An unimaginative way of reading will fail to extract any other meanings that the text may be conveying.

According to Cheryl Walker in her essay "Conceptualising Motherhood in Twentieth Century South Africa" (1995) debates on motherhood have ranged from attacks to praise to ethnocentrism. Attacks, praise and ethnocentrism regarding discourses of motherhood are trends that have been debated among white feminist scholars. While some of them have attacked motherhood as a male construct, others have praised it as a potential liberatory force. All the debates, however, have been limited in that they take white women's motherhood as normative of world motherhood. The dominant themes in this ethnocentric movement have been those of motherhood's collusion with patriarchy. It has been argued that black women's political activity has been flawed by black women's emphasis that they fight as mothers. An example is the 1950s marches against pass laws in South Africa, which are argued to have been organised by women claiming they were protesting against oppression as mothers who wanted freedom of movement. The

collusion with patriarchy debates ignore women's own mothering practices and social identity as mothers in favour of political discourse. On the other hand the difference debate that discusses diversity among different groups of mothers "ignores the historical evidence for overlapping meanings and common cultural influences among black and white women in the twentieth century" (1995:417). Walker further states that what is disturbing about most of these debates is that they regard motherhood as a patriarchal institution, and mothering as a role imposed on women by men. She argues that the two positions are reductive as they do not take into account the historical complexity of motherhood.

When Walker proposes the need for a closer look at history in determining the different meanings of motherhood, her proposal becomes concerned with the real life mother. This approach is useful as it points out the fact that motherhood has not been a monolithic and homogeneous institution. This non-homogeneity of the concept of motherhood is important for my work on representations as it enables me to look at how historical disruptions can produce corresponding mother discourses. Representation is influenced by different social discourses of motherhood. I would like to stress here that I am not arguing that representations of motherhood are diverse because motherhood in the world is diverse. I am arguing that representations generate different meanings depending on which other discourses or contexts on uses of motherhood are used to read a text.

In this thesis, I will argue that the use of motherhood in representation certainly opens up different and new ways of reading about woman and the world. However, representations

of motherhood do not only have to be used by women, who can experience motherhood biologically and socially. This will be reducing the discourse of motherhood to empirical exclusivity, claiming that experience is knowledge. A claim of this nature reduces the possibility of new knowledge and analysis emerging as it advocates an acceptance of what someone who experiences says as the absolute truth. Making the use of motherhood exclusive to women is also assuming that every woman or mother will read and understand the text in the same way, but differently from every men that reads it. This assumption is based on the premise that there is one way of reading that is determined by gender positioning. It also presupposes that work by female writers will not produce female stereotypes and work by males will not produce male stereotypes.

Most theory on motherhood has come from women (Adrienne Rich, 1979, Sherry Ortner, 1974, Nancy Chodorow, 1985, Evelyn Nakano Glenn & Rennie Forcey, 1994, Shulamith Firestone, 1979, Jeffner Allen, 1984, Cheryl Walker 1984, Ellen Kuzwayo, 1985 and Gertrude Fester, 1998 to name a few). Because these writers claim they are discussing mothering from a woman's point of view, their debates have excluded male viewpoints. Claiming that they are writing from a privileged point of view has channeled the reader into reading their work passively. It appears the reader is not given much choice but to believe what has been written by those who experience as the truth.

Because of the claim to knowledge through experience that has been emphasised by most feminists, i.e. women's truths, males have been accused of viewing motherhood in stereotypical ways on the basis that they do not experience and do not know enough to

write about it. Women have been claiming that they are telling their side of the story. As Molaria Ogundipe Leslie (1987) puts it, the female writer has a commitment to tell about being a woman and to tell it from a woman's perspective. In her paper on the role of the female writer she cites truisms about what it is to be a woman and then emphasises that a female writer's contribution about being a woman would be more "authentic" than a male writer's view. Molaria Ogundipe Leslie's view shows that there is a lot of oversimplification that derives from the experience debate. Experience is not individualistic and so this debate fails to realise that the truth that it advocates is not to be seen from just the female perspective. It is truth that is coming from interaction with other social members and is therefore being constructed from a point of view. It is problematic to accept women's experiences as authentic truths because they are constructed. Opening experiences to questioning helps to create more knowledge about them. Moreover, women's experience can never be the same. It will differ according to the racial and class position of individual women and therefore there should be room for wider discussions of motherhood rather than having one based on supposed truths. The call for people to speak about their experience in writing binds people into reading from the point of view of social reality and does not do much to encourage a more imaginative and critical reading of representation that could generate new meaning.

Diana Fuss (1989), Denise Riley (1988), David Schalkwyk (1990) and Joan W. Scott (1991) have dealt with the problems that can be caused by claiming authority in experience in a very illuminating way. For Riley, it is difficult to talk from the point of view of all women because:

'women' is historically, discursively constructed, and always relatively to other categories which themselves change; 'women' is a volatile collectivity in which female persons can be very differently positioned, so that the apparent continuity of the subject of 'women' isn't to be relied on; 'women' is both synchronically and diachronically erratic as a collectivity, while for the individual, 'being a woman' is also inconsistent, and can't provide an ontological foundation. (1988:1-2)

Riley's argument, I would like to suggest, can be applied to the concept "men" as well.

The category 'men' can be constructed differently in discussions of varying historical periods. When women at a particular period deal with men of the same period, there must not be an assumption that the men have been atavistic, while women have gone a step further to acquire new ways of relating to themselves and to the men. Any shift in women's behaviour results in a shift in the perception 'men' as well. There are some men who are re-evaluating their perceptions of the use of female characters in literature. Their efforts at regarding women as volatile significations that can be used to generate complex meanings are paying off in work that uses motherhood as representation. Being able to recognise how male writers' texts are producing various meanings out of the use of motherhood will encourage a politics of discursive integration in feminist theory. This integration will no doubt elevate the level of the discourse.

Integrating feminism with other discourses will promote a synthesis that will encourage a more critical evaluation in reading representations. Reading will go beyond locating the 'natural' roles assigned to women and men. Exclusivity, as Fuss points out, leads to itemisation and ranking of oppression. Fuss illustrates her argument by using a classroom situation. She suggests that if experience is made the basis of knowledge, some people will be told to shut up because they have not experienced. She adds that a claim to authority of

experience treats identities as fixed, and it censors speech. Taking into consideration what Fuss has concluded, I argue that there will not be any need to unearth any knowledge about the role ideology plays in shaping experience as well as to the fact that experience is determined by relations with others. It is as a result of this interaction and not because one is gendered or racialised first that relationships are formed. Joan W Scott elaborates this argument when she writes:

When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured - about language or discourse and history - are left aside. (1991:25)

Evidence of experience may be used to contest given ideological systems rather than to reproduce them. It can be used to produce new, and alternative knowledge. Allowing texts by men to deal with issues concerning women will deny the status of experience as an unquestionable ground of explanation.

Moreover, for every experience, there are different perspectives of viewing and David Schalkwyk (1990) is perceptive when he says that getting people to write down your experiences for you may change the nature of those experiences. It may actually make you view them in a different light. Experiences are formulated out of language, and language is not private. Those who have not experienced can use language to discuss other people's experience.

Speaking about unquestionable experience ignores what Len Doyal & Roger Harris propose in their book *Empiricism, Exploration and Rationality* (1986). In this book, they

argue that in a society people are trained to assess the behaviours of others. This training leads to an ability to evaluate social activities that the evaluators do not themselves perform. In the case of gender, it does not mean that if people belong to the traditionally privileged gender group they do not see the necessity of writing beyond the limited spaces allotted to different genders. This recognition, I argue, can liberate the female writer from reading with the perception that male writers represent motherhood in a static way from their privileged position. Discarding this perception will enable the female reader and any other reader to see how representations of motherhood can be read laterally in ways that can produce new textual meaning. More importantly, reading broadly will give readers the freedom and power to evaluate and comment on writing that is supposed to exclude them.

The argument and the sources I use above should not be read as a failure to acknowledge difference. Of course there are vast differences between the experiences of different racialised and gendered groups, but that does not mean that there are no intersecting similarities. To dismiss experiences of other groups of people as inapplicable to others as Cecily Lockett (1990), does about French feminism on South African feminism is rather reductive. Lockett argues that South African women need reason and rationality in order to be able to participate actively and positively in the current feminist debates. They do not need the erotic pleasure Irigaray and Cixous promulgate. I would like to argue that Western feminism has provided some useful insights and grounds for contestation for African and black feminism. In the same way, male representations of motherhood should not be dismissed outright as misogynist. This claim is made on the grounds that males

know nothing about female experiences, a claim that is summed up by Barbara Christian (1986), who writes,

...since a woman, never a man, can be a mother, or a daughter, that experience should be hers to tell, and since we all come from mothers it is striking that these stories have remained secondary in a world literature. (1991:xx)

Christian's "we all come from mothers" seems to ignore the fact that men also come from mothers because here she is referring to daughters. She also does not consider that coming from the same source, men might have their own perception about motherhood that will be interesting to hear. That is why I am suggesting a more radical reading of male representations in order to find out how far they refute or reinforce the concept of woman as fixed and predictable. I argue that some male writers have regarded woman with value as a linguistic and cultural sign, with the maternal metaphor creating complexity of meaning with many political undercurrents.

Some male writers' representations have exposed the inadequacy of the blanket accusation by Juliana Makuchi Nfah - Abbenyi that:

One facet of (the) male (literary) tradition that has come increasingly under attack has been the subservient image that the African male writer has given of African women. They are portrayed as passive, as always prepared to do the bidding of their husbands and family, as having no status of their own and therefore completely dependent on their husbands. Such representation has promoted what Deidre Lapin has suggested as the "classic and inescapable image of wife - mother at the core of the feminine literary persona." (1997:4)

Abbenyi's commentary shows that there has been a myopic reading of the work by male writers, which I suggest, comes out of what is expected from male writing. The prediction of what all male writing is like has blinded readers to the complexities that abound in the

maternal metaphor. Alternative meanings cannot be extrapolated if prescriptive reading is done on male writers' work or if they are told what and how to write.

A call to exclude men from participating in feminist issues could be dangerous as it is separating feminist discourse from universal academia. Cheryl Walker warns against a 'women's history that forms a separate study different from the history of the society in general when she writes:

Women do not form an isolated and homogeneous category that can be studied apart from society as a whole, any more than men do. Just as women need to be drawn into a more equal participation in the economic, social and political institutions of our society, so, too, 'women's history' needs to be integrated into our general histories ... (1982:viii)

Integration of women's history into general history can be done by anyone, especially in representations that deal with different historical epochs. The male writers that I have selected to work on for this study have already acknowledged women's history, and they have already integrated it into their literature.

Unfortunately, not many female writers and critics have acknowledged the diverse and complex ways in which motherhood has been handled. This could be, as already suggested earlier on in the argument, as a result of the prescriptive assumptions imposed on male writing. As a result, male writers are expected to write in a certain way and the reading of their work fails to go beyond that expectation.

This thesis will try to offer a more radical reading of texts in which different black male writers represent black motherhood. It will argue that these writers have gone beyond

viewing women as pitiable and content with their position as the underprivileged. Either thematically or structurally, these writers have developed radical images of gender that exceed the expectation of misogyny that they have so much been accused of. Structurally, an attempt has been made to show how their signature has been put on the creativity that they inherited from their mothers. This comes out through the fusion of the genre of story telling and written literature.

Thematically, the writers I will look at have shown that a society that regards its women as part of an important whole has great potential for finding meaning in its existence. The women are active historical players and putting them at the margins of narrative is suppressing their potential for successful transition. Most importantly, motherhood has been used to generate many levels of meaning. The female body has been used aesthetically to create and expose socio-economic and political imbalances of power in different communities. Historically, women have always created, (See Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 1984), with their wombs, with their hands and with their mouths; telling stories, so it is fitting that the male writers whose work I am studying have made mothers the metaphorical centres for their literary creativity.

The most challenging thing about my reading of the works I am looking at is that I find them discouraging the separatism that has been promulgated by most African literature written by women. I aver that, for these writers, integration is the solution to escaping writing in binary poles, which has been the pitfall of much literature by black women. Cases in point are Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1980), Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough*

(1981), Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke* (1982) and *Destination Biafra* (1982). In these novels, the common trend is that the heroines are made to castigate men because of their economic independence. These heroines feel that they can do without the man's financial support. This conclusion is reductionist in suggesting that women find companions in men for financial support. It also ignores the greater patriarchal political weight that can overpower women as will be shown by one of the novels that I will look at.

While Emecheta and Ba propose that education will liberate women, Nwapa strongly believes that economic independence, no matter how it is achieved, is the milestone to women's liberation. What all three writers have in common is the declaration that men are the enemies and that women must live alone to be happy, and support each other through their friendship. Even without men, all the heroines have children whom they can support, so motherhood is still very important to them. The concerned writers however emphasise the significance of making their heroines choose whether they would like to mother or not. These novels show that motherhood and mothering do not necessarily have to be tied to wifehood. An autonomous future without men such as is proposed in these novels, I argue, is a very utopian one because women will always have different relationships with men whether it be as brothers, fathers, or sons. Despite their oversimplified solutions to gender inequality in Africa, I find the above-cited works of great importance as they expose the typical nature of relationships between individual men and women.

It seems that the main objective of these works is to depart from what they call the "biased male perspective", what some critics like Mineke Schipper (1987) and Florence Stratton

(1994) have called “the mother Africa trope”. These two writers and some others who have looked at the development of the male literary tradition in Africa have concluded that males have continued to endorse the image of the suffering woman who should be content with her lot. This woman, it has been claimed, wants to preserve the traditional past, like Lawino in Okot p’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino*, (1966). Lawino is used to express male disappointment, possibly fear, at the changing position of women due to industrialisation. The representation of a female figure like Lawino can be traced back to the negritude movement where writers like Leopold Sedar Senghor valorised the purity of the black woman whereas some of his compatriots were admiring the beauty of the white settler women. A polarised version of the admiration of a white settler woman over the ‘black beauty’ African woman can be read in Ferdinand Oyono’s *Houseboy* (1966), where the house worker Taundi praises everything that his ‘madam’ does and fawns on her like a little puppy. Mariama Ba has claimed that this figure of the African mother is conflated with Mother Africa. I agree with her observation and would like to add that this confusion was inevitable during the negritude movement because men were trying to come to terms with nationalist struggles and the efforts to reassert their precolonial privileges in a patriarchal world. As a result, they may have felt the nostalgia for the nurturing they received from their mothers as little boys amidst the hardships of colonial tyranny. They may also have felt threatened by the women’s demands to be treated with equality, or their decision to beautify themselves like the white woman whom the males were setting as the standard of beauty, like Clementine in Bitek’s lament.

What the above female writers emphasise is that male writers have been biased, stereotypically, in their representations of motherhood. One ought then to read these male writers' works more closely to see if their objective is only to portray mothers as passive bearers of burdens and nothing more. Could nothing original, textually, come out of these representations? To answer this question, the first section of my thesis will be an analysis of Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue*. I have chosen to begin with this text because even though it is closest to the model that female writers criticise, it exceeds this model because it uses the relationships between mothers and fathers and sons as a critique of racial relations in apartheid South Africa. I will aver that the familial relations in the black township are significantly influenced by the economic infrastructure that favours the comfort of whites over blacks. Motherhood is used in this text to show the different faces of oppression that can be created out of a racial ideology, and how this oppression affects males and females differently.

Chinua Achebe has been consistently accused as being one of the chief perpetrators of women's subordination. His main adversary is Stratton, who claims that his novel "*Things Fall Apart* legitimises this process whereby women were excluded from postcolonial politics and public affairs through its representation of precolonial Igbo society as governed entirely by men." (1991:27). I will argue in my second chapter that this thematic reading of Achebe's novel derives from the misogynistic nature expected to be characteristic of male writing, and therefore masks the other ways in which Achebe significantly uses women in a way that compensates for their subsidiary role in their society. Moreover, *Things Fall Apart* can best be read as an exposé novel, one that

exposes the position of some groups of women in precolonial Africa rather than hiding their condition by creating a token female heroine. A token female heroine is what Stratton seems to be advocating when she writes

By failing to imagine either a sister for Okonkwo, a female nationalist hero, or a female counterpart for Nwoye, a woman in revolt against Umuofia's definition of her gender, Achebe alienates Igbo women from history. Alienated from history, women are relegated to 'tradition' their inferiority naturalised by the ahistorical identity Achebe has constructed for their gender: woman as passive object, acted upon, never acting in her own right...What we have, then, is a story whose concern is wholly for men and their dilemmas, one in which what happens to women is of no consequence. (1991:36)

Stratton's criticism is clearly prescriptive, and it blinds one to the significance that the women have in the novel, as tools to help show the transition of Achebe's community from precolonial to colonial times and administration.

That women have a historical significance in *Things Fall Apart*, it will be argued, is brought about by Achebe's use of folklore to develop his main plot. The story telling task the mothers have in his novel is significant because it historicises the transition from oral to written literature. Orature is an important tool in writing for early and contemporary African writers. I will make the submission that the stories are a powerful allegorical tool to the protagonist and the values of society.

Paired with *Things Fall Apart* in the second chapter is Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi*. Plaatje's foregrounding of the domestic and the romantic earned him a barrage of criticism from Mazisi Kunene (1980), who is disappointed with the romantic episodes in what he considers to be a historical novel. This criticism alone warrants a closer look at gender in

the novel. My interest in this novel, which is also the reason why it has been paired with *Things Fall Apart*, is its preoccupation with precolonial society and the turmoil that was caused by foreign encroachment on autonomous communities. Whereas Achebe's strength has been his structural foregrounding of motherhood to help construct his themes, Plaatje is strong in his emphasis on the female voice, point of view, as well as presence in the making of history. He presents an alternative society to the one Achebe paints, and one that prepares a way for Chenjerai Hove's interrogation of national discourse in, as I show in chapter three. My emphasis in the discussion of *Mhudi* will be on the way in which women's lives are also transformed by the changing social, economic and historical climates, making women's history a part of general histories.

A critique of nationalism and its concept of time are the main focus of the third chapter, which is an analysis of Chenjerai Hove's *Bones*. I will argue that by using women and motherhood to symbolise the state of the country during colonial rule and the spill into independence, as well as a predominantly female point of view as commentary on the gender inequality that is evident in these periods, Hove suggests an alternative and more radical tool than that of the family as a figure of national unity. He envisages the family as being invented, and ultimately being as imagined and invented as the nation. Motherhood becomes a useful tool because represented in a multi-faceted and dynamic nature, it symbolises the volatility and gendered nature of the concept of nation. At the end of his novel, Hove seems to suggest that women have to fight for a place in an independent Zimbabwe as they will become the forgotten heroines.

Chapter four is an analysis of Nuruddin Farah's *Sardines*. It is important here to note that this novel is the second part of a trilogy, and should therefore be read in relation to the theme of the first novel. The first novel, *Sweet and Sour Milk*, is concerned with exposing the fear that a tyrannical patriarch imposes on his family, to begin with, and how this tyranny extends into the larger community. At the end of this novel, the males of the novel fail to tackle the dictatorship because the General can easily get them killed. It is not surprising therefore that in *Sardines*, Farah tries to analyse the possibility and the potential that women may have in saving the country. But as the title suggests, when packed in a tin like a sardine, saving a country becomes an impossible task. I will argue in this chapter that although Farah champions the cause of the nuclear family as the ultimate liberator of a nation, he does not idealise its potential. Farah's perception of the limitations that the family has as a revolutionary force is revealed by his use of a flawed protagonist. Medina's limitations emerge out of her inability to see the complexity of the political situation in Somalia and how she may be able to contribute in changing the authoritarianism. Her inabilities are used by Farah to show how the General can easily manipulate families. The General can use and discard families and manipulate them to further his own gains. Family members can also use emotional blackmail against each other thereby remoulding the significance of the family according to will and circumstance.

Although Farah is interested in the fate of women in this oppressive and repressive state, he nevertheless dynamically portrays the tenacity of the forces that are against them, and emphasises the need to be cautious and not be openly critical of the regime. His portrayal questions the female writers' claim that education and/or economic independence leads to

the liberation of women because he manages to show that although a woman might have both education and material wealth, her life is decided by those who are in power, those who rule. This power nexus between the individual and the state is reproduced at family level, where, I argue, Farah looks at various mother daughter relationships to elucidate how even intimate relationships can also be those of love, power and control. This argument will be developed through an analysis of the mother daughter pairs: Medina and Ubax, Idil and Xaddia, Fatima and Medina, and Ebla and Sagal. I will show how these relationships are a revelation of the struggle between traditional and modern times. In this struggle, tradition is used in some instances by some mothers to manipulate children and in other instances by patriarchy to tie women to a past that domesticates them when they are moving forward in time, and venturing out of the homestead.

The above chapter outlines have suggested the differing meanings and symbols of motherhood, women and the family that can be extrapolated from male writing in various transitional stages in Africa. The works that I will look at will show that representations of motherhood can emerge as strong sites for metaphorical and allegorical meaning because of the dynamism and volatility that can be discovered through them.

It is clear from the chapter outlines that the representation of motherhood by male writers has neither been monolithic nor static. This volatility prevents me from having a working definition of motherhood. I cannot cram motherhood into a neat definition. This will be reducing its complexity and volatility. My study of representations will show that motherhood is something that cannot be pinned down metaphorically or literally because

of its complexity. Motherhood can grow, diversify and develop over time. Sometimes motherhood in texts is blurred when the authors do not want to make it the centrality of a female character's life, such that the character only exists as a woman, even when she has children. That is why in the thesis woman and motherhood will be used interchangeably.

A realisation that a rigid classification and categorizing of theorists can polarize perspectives and rigidify conflicts has made me avoid using such an approach to their work. There are vast differences in approach between Stratton, Kunene, Molaria Ogundipe Leslie, Christian and Nfah-Abbenyi, but I have chosen them in this section not for their different perspectives but for the issues that they raise. It is hoped that this approach will give the reader an insight into the context in which criticism of male writers' work has been made and spare him/her of the constricting frameworks of evaluation that reductive taxonomies construct.

It is enticing in my conclusion to carry out a speculative analysis of the direction that the representation of black motherhood may take. Questions about the importance of the family for women will be raised. I will also try and establish whether motherhood is still an important subject for male writers.

The choice of texts has been geographically diverse, drawing from different regions of Africa. This is necessary as it foregrounds the heterogeneity of trends in African literature written by males. Male writers' texts in different parts of Africa have shown volatile representations of motherhood that have produced new and thought provoking meaning.

Representations of the mother that are produced by the writers have some political undercurrent that is closely linked to the historical period and setting of the particular country the writer is writing about. The chosen writers have produced canonical texts. These texts have received much attention, and consistently, most of them have been criticised for falling short in terms of transformation regarding the way women are portrayed in literature by male writers. Choosing these texts and finding silences, spaces that have not been discovered as yet within them, becomes an exciting challenge.

The focus of this study is African literature because of the relatively strong background that I have been exposed to in African literature. In my previous study of this literature, where the studies dealt with representations, it was always concluded that black male writers were stereotypical in their representations of women. Taking a different approach and embarking on a more extensive examination of these representations and accusations became a matter of scholarly challenge for me, hence the birth of this study.

Chapter One

Writing About Motherhood and the Family, Talking About Race Relations

On the surface *Down Second Avenue* (1959) appears to fit the much-criticized model of the stereotypical depiction of motherhood by male writers. It seems to present a too idealist and static view of motherhood. In this chapter I contend that through this seemingly simplistic representation, the text offers an allegory of racial oppressive systems using what the writer knows best, his family and his mothers. In a racially divided state where the economic infrastructures are highly unbalanced in favor of minority white people the status of black motherhood and families, I argue, becomes the reflective indicator of various sociopolitical and economic imbalances. Mothers' weaknesses and strengths help the narrator elucidate the ways one could cope with the odds of an oppressive state system. The allegory achieves a double effect because apart from commenting on the conditions of living in a racist nation, it also subverts the conventional idea that motherhood is monolithic, natural, domestic and does not have any meaning besides the one derived from its biological aspect. The mothers' different displays of strengths are used to show how the author survives the psychological repression that the Apartheid State would otherwise impose on him especially as an educated black person growing up in the slums. The ghetto will always remind him that education is of no use if he does not belong to the privileged racial group. The narrator's situation is typical of that of many black intellectuals during the South African Apartheid era.

The strength in adversity that Mphahlele attributes to his mother characters is not without precedent or foundation in the South African context. Other writers have testified to the contribution of the black woman and mother in South African communities. In the beginning section of her autobiography *Call Me Woman*, Ellen Kuzwayo (1985) opens with a letter that she receives from a female prisoner friend who jokes about the oppressive laws that have separated her from her two year old child and husband and placed her in jail. Kuzwayo is filled with awe and admiration and treasures the letter which to her represents

...the strength, caliber and outstanding personality of many black women - women who have been detained under extremely brutal and frightening conditions but who have emerged like tested steel, their character and courage somehow untouched by bitterness and deep seated frustration. (Kuzwayo, 1985:5)

Kuzwayo's comments are important because they give credit and show appreciation to the strength of some women who have used their resilience to sustain the struggle. This strength however, is very ironical, as it does not automatically liberate women from the oppressive gender inequalities in their communities. Desiree Lewis (1990) has engaged with this contradiction when she writes that

Although women may remain trapped in gender ideologies, their families and communities rely on and often prescribe their adoption of 'masculine' roles. For the black woman to inhabit masculine arenas is not necessarily an index of liberation, it may actually entrench rather than challenge patriarchy. (Lewis 1990:539)

What Lewis describes is often a very pertinent problem in liberation struggles when women are expected to sacrifice the struggle for their liberation in favor of that of the nation. Zoe Wicomb (1990) notes how "women's political activity are at odds with husbands' expectations within the home" and warns that

Where the visual degradation of woman is presented as part of the discourse of liberation, we are necessarily drawn to the pragmatic meaning of such liberation. The 'revolutionary' text reads as the opposite of its semantic meaning, as a pretext for domination, since coercion of women to participate in their own degradation, which is also what our silence on the issue amounts to, cannot be called a *national* liberation. (Wicomb 1990:44)

Wicomb uses 'visual degradation' because the context within which she is talking is that of women dancing lewdly on stage before a speech on the new South African constitution by a male revolutionary. Ironically, the same constitution symbolises freedom from oppression and yet the dancing women's disempowerment through lack of instrument is very prominent. I would like to substitute 'visual degradation' with 'scriptive degradation' in order to make an argument about how some literary representations that take up issues of liberation demean and besmirch women's contribution to national liberation missions. The dismissal of women's contribution can be a very easy task because writers may feel justified that national liberation is a masculine affair that does not have much to do with women, hence it should be about men's contribution and heroism.

It is against this background to the precarious position of women in literature on national issues that I wish to discuss the use of motherhood in Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue*. My discussion will take cognizance of the way the writer makes use of his representations of motherhood emotively, without restraint. This approach enhances the meaning that the mother characters carry, as the writer's representations take on a personal front. The apartheid setting creates the kind of relationship the narrator has with his mother figures, and not much falsification is needed to convince readers of the material deprivation that overwhelms their lives.

Writing in a repressive state where works of art are censored imposes certain limitations on the content and style of the work that can be produced by writers in that political atmosphere. Nadine Gordimer (1984) in an essay that contributes to the collection, *They Shoot the Writers, Don't They?* (1984) proposes that when "freedom of expression, among other freedoms, is withheld, ... creativity is frozen, rather than destroyed" (1984:134 - 5). In the same collection of essays, Andre' Brink points out how the fate of the black writer was worse than that of the white one under the censorship laws. According to him, though, censorship was a failure since most of the banned work was read abroad. I would also like to add that because of the censorship laws, writers found other ways of evading the banning of their work. Brink mentions that one of the ways to evade censorship was to start writing in English, apart from Afrikaans, as this would ensure that the work was readily translated into other languages. Mphahlele's way of writing in this autobiography, I argue, is one clever way of evading censorship. The Publications Act 42 of 1974 states that work would be regarded as undesirable "on the basis of the inclusion of an offending part, ridiculing one group of people to create racial hatred" (Louis Silver, 1984). Mphahlele's life story does not contain any open ridicule, and can easily be classified as desirable work.

However, a writer is always conscious of the need to be blatantly subversive in a situation where there is censorship. This context of control of the pen in an effort to suppress the mind could have easily pervaded the tone of Mphahlele's writing during the apartheid regime. Because of segregation laws, whites typically knew blacks as their servants and blacks knew whites as their masters. There existed the duality that Albert Memmi (1965)

writes about in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* where he analyses the interdependence of the identities of the colonized and the colonizer and concludes that the one cannot do or exist without the other.

In this situation of duality it is potentially impossible to write impartially about the other because it is easy to use only stereotypes. When stereotypes are used in protest literature, literature reproduces the hatred that is already felt between groups of people without necessarily illuminating new directions. On the other hand, if a writer desists from using stereotypes, s/he can create new and meaningful ways of perceiving ideas in a more enriching way. Mphahlele says of this enrichment when he discusses the role of literature in social change:

It is an exaggerated claim for literature that it can spark a revolution. There are surely more immediate irks that incite a revolution. All those irks that arise from a sense of deprivation and loss. People expect to be incited by the language of everyday usage, not the heightened form of expression and metaphor of the kind that make imaginative literature. By the time a writer has done composing a play, a poem, a story as a vehicle of political agitation, the revolution is under way. Literature may record, replay, inspire an on going process. As an act of language that renews, revitalises, it is a vehicle of thought and feeling that should increase by reliving experience. Literature is forever stirring us up. This is its own kind of revolution. (1984:82)

Mphahlele's own words could be used to explain how *Down Second Avenue* could be viewed as a product of an ongoing revolution. Mphahlele has experienced material and emotional deprivation as a child. He continues to experience emotional deprivation in exile. The text that he creates out of his experiences is perceived out of everyday life and language usage. The writing down of this personal experience, I argue, is what then makes the reader increase in knowledge and perception. This viewpoint explains how it is possible to continually find new and alternative meaning in works of art that have been in existence for a long time and have been reviewed many times over. It can never be claimed

that criticism on certain works is exhaustive as there is an increased ongoing quest for knowledge that calls for reinterpretation and reexamination of already perceived explanations. It is with this additional thought that I endeavor to analyze the complexities of motherhood and the family in *Down Second Avenue*, a text that uses the language and experiences of everyday life to comment on the larger social political scene.

Motherhood takes on a symbolically political meaning through Mphahlele's use of what Bernth Lindfors (1968) dubs Robin Hood Realism. Lindfors argues that most South African writers create heroes who are admired by their communities through their outlaw existence. They become heroes because they dare do what all the other people want to but cannot. It is this defiance of the criminal hero that does not require an explanation that shows that there is injustice and immorality in a state. According to Lindfors, writers who use this kind of realism are effective because they use a documentary manner of registering protest, which is implicit rather than explicit. The vivid description of slum situations itself becomes enough protest that will conscientize the readers without the writer preaching sermons or handing out propaganda. The documentary and impressionistic style therefore conscientises readers. This can be evidenced in the first half of *Down Second Avenue* where the narrator, who has a choice to select what information to put in his autobiography does not hesitate to include explicitly the details of the consuming decadence of his existence in the slums of Pretoria. The effect of this depiction of slum life is much more of an allegory than would have been if the writer were commenting directly on the injustices of the apartheid system. The depiction of slum life is effective as it exposes the white/black divide through the contrasting living conditions in the suburbs

where the narrator collects washing and the filth of Second Avenue where he lives. This divide is as a result of the stringent capitalist laws that thrive on racism to deprive blacks of ownership of property to ensure that they stay in a subservient position and continue to serve white interests (Jacklyn Cock, 1980).

Mothers play an important part in exposing the inequality between the black/white ways of living in the narrative. This is first evidenced by the dedication: "To Eva, my late Mother, Grandmother, aunt Dora, Rebecca...and Jenny who bullied me into telling her about them" (Mphahlele, 1959:9). It is evident from this dedication that it is as a result of the presence and absence of women that the narrator/author looked up to as mothers that he was able to write this narrative. Jenny also bullied him into writing about it and here I cannot help but emphasize the power of women to inspire others to give birth to new things, in this case the autobiography of Mphahlele. Eva's absence [she is deceased] is ironic because not only does it emerge in the dedication but it dominates the narrative as well even when Mphahlele writes about the days when she was still alive. She is accorded very little narrative space because she is mostly absent from the narrator's life, but it is this absence that gives her a lot of power of meaning in the narrative as will be discussed in the following section. Her absence also gives an opportunity to accord maternal narrative space to the other women who act as mothers in the narrator's life, introducing the idea that in some communities, biological motherhood is but one form of mothering. Social mothering is a supportive form of mothering that allows women to do other things with their lives if they have others to look after their children in their absence.

Apart from the dedication, Eva's absence is foregrounded in the first chapter of the narrative where the paternal grandmother has to look after Ezekiel and his siblings. The narrator tells us "My father and mother remained in Pretoria where they both worked, my father a shop messenger in an outfitters' firm; Mother as a domestic servant (Mphahlele 1959:11). The realism that Lindfors talks about is manifested here because as the narrator tells us about the absence of his parents, what he is doing is making reference to the segregation laws that caused family disintegration by controlling movement and denying black people proper living space. Because of the forbidding living conditions it is easier for the children to stay in the village. When they move to town, the five of them have to stay in one rented room because that is all they can afford. The information about what the parents are doing in town gives evidence of the racial demographics of that time. Black people could only do lowly paid unskilled jobs and that was the reason why they were separated from their families. They could not sustain a big family in the city on the low wages. Cock argues in another context where she discusses the relationship between the white female employer and her black female domestic worker, that these low paying jobs were necessary because they helped sustain the capitalist/racist state by making the black and lowly paid people continually depend on meager working wages. This dependence would help to internalize their inferiority and reproduce the racist ideology. Black children would grow up believing the only jobs their race would ever do were the low paying jobs, jobs that made it difficult to find time for political organization to fight for better working conditions or even to change the system because they demanded all the worker's time.

Eva's physical absence in her children's lives does not change even when she makes an effort to bring them to Pretoria so that she can be with them. When Moses leaves them, Eva continues working as a live-in domestic worker. The narrator explains that "She came to see us one Sunday in a fortnight" (1959:35). This line shows that Eva became a visitor to her own children, a situation that shows how the white world trivialized the black family. For Eva's employers, who know that she has children, they are more important and in more need of looking after than her own children. She therefore has to stay in and cater to their every need while her children suffer maternal deprivation. Cock, in *Maids and Madams*, justifiably explains this deprivation as a denial of a basic human right to experience family life, a situation that affects the women in more ways than one since their absence from home for long periods of time often prompt their husbands to take second wives.

Eva's status is always that of powerlessness, both in the white world and in the relationship between her and Moses. The way Moses treats Eva is influenced by the way he is maltreated in the white world as a worker and a black man. Moses is only a messenger, the job that most black males did. As Cock explains in her study, the reservation of unskilled work for black people was necessary as it kept labor cheap and unorganized and sustained black people's dependency on jobs that made them ultra exploitable for the capitalist advancement and material improvement of the Afrikaner race. Moses is a nonentity in terms of his identity in the white world. The narrator himself testifies to this insignificance and invisibility one has to live within to survive in the white world when he becomes a messenger. He is called by whatever name the white people want, and he is continually

being demeaned as happens to him when he is offered sandwiches that have been nibbled at by his employer.

I argue here that the white world as it is presented in the text imposes inferiority on the black man to legitimize and sustain its own ideas of racial superiority and to reproduce the dependency of the black person on white paid labor. This is what Memmi would describe as the remolding of the colonized to suit the needs of the colonizer, a process that consists of "negations". Because of these negations, the black person suffers humiliation, in the case of men, emasculation. According to Frantz Fanon (1963) who also studies the condition of black people under colonialism, the frustration that the black person suffers is transferred onto his own people by acts of aggression like physical abuse. This could perhaps explain why we see Moses trying to prove himself in his home, where he can assert some form of power to compensate for his powerlessness outside. This effort to create power and subvert the image of him that the whites have makes the black man end up reproducing his lack of power. By trying to exercise absolute power over the wife, Moses recreates the relationships between blacks and whites in the economic, political and social world. The description of Moses by the narrator has resonance for the description of the white people the narrator works for in the brief chapter entitled "Trouble with Whites". Moses

was unlikable. Like his mother, he couldn't laugh heartily. His facial skin clung too close on to the bones. There was something brutal and razor-like about the corners of his mouth; as there was about his limp and the back of his head. He was seldom in a mood to play with us. We kept close to our mother most of the time. (1959:25)

Moses is maimed, and this is symbolic of the limitations of his power as a man, father and husband. He does not laugh, but then what has he to laugh about when he is lacking in terms of physical wholeness and when he is daily humiliated working in the white world. The irony is that he becomes an exact replica of the detestable white employers that the narrator meets when he goes to work for the first time. He works for a lawyer who

was a tall forbidding colossus. A man I never again uttered a 'Good morning' to after trying a few times without success. Maybe it was because his ears were above me: he never seemed to hear me... I trembled all the time I cleaned his ink pots and the large glass on his table. Our eyes never met, so I came to regard him as a machine that generates power but only from somewhere on the fringe of one's awareness. (1959:137)

What can be noticed in the description of the lawyer is that he creates fear that manages to isolate him from the narrator. This shows that even though the narrator may not be aware of it, his education about the white world and its relations with blacks started at home, with the relationship between his parents. The fear that he develops towards his father and the lawyer inevitably manages to make the narrator turn more towards mothers and women in his life. His father and the lawyer create a distance from him and all he can turn to for inspiration and support are the women. What is interesting to note in the above quotation is that even though at the time of writing the narrator could explain theoretically the behavior of the lawyer, he employs some form of innocence when he claims that maybe the lawyer did not hear because his "ears were above mine". This as realism also has better effect since it leaves room for interpretation and does not sound at all like propagandist preaching.

In the white world, the narrator sometimes answers back to save his dignity and for this he had "white lads chasing [him] in order to beat [him] up for 'rudeness' and to 'put the Kaffir in his place' (1959:137). Similarly, Moses's methods of trying to control his wife are an effort to put her in her proper place as a woman and wife so that he can at least consolidate and make up for his lack of power outside the home. Just before the disastrous day when the mother is burnt by the stew there is an argument about a man who Moses does not want to see at the house any more. When Eva answers that the man is Moses's friend and Moses should tell him himself not to come to their house she is told "Don't talk to me like that! Didn't your mother teach you never to answer back to your husband and lord?" (1959:25). Here, I make the argument that what Moses says to Eva is a significant commentary on the expectations of the black man whose power is diminished when the women also become wage earners. It also mirrors the black/white relations where the latter is always telling the former what to do. Eva becomes a victim not only of black male chauvinism but of white arrogance that dictates how black mothers should run their homes. Her lot is worsened by the lack of power that Moses has outside of the home and the perception that the employers have of their workers. Cock comments about white employers:

They perceive workers only in occupational roles - disregarding human feelings and needs. This depersonalised conception is characteristic of the coloniser's stereotypical perception of the colonised. (1980:94)

Eva's degree of victimhood becomes symbolic because it shows the double bind that women are placed in by the apartheid system. She is a victim of both racial and sexual domination. At this point, Eva's powers are limited in terms of contributing to the changing of national history, but they are not when it comes to preparing her children to

face the repressive state system. Moses on the contrary, is portrayed as an irresponsible father who shirks his paternal duties and leaves them all to his wife. It becomes clear that Eva will not let this irresponsibility and later the desertion, affect the lives of her children in a materially denigrating way. She does all she can including brewing beer illegally to sell. Brewing beer could be her way of defying the system so that she can sustain her own family. Her efforts may be successful since she is cautious and knows the power of the white world. She tells Ezekiel, 'Beware of the white man, he's very, very strong' (Mphahlele 1959:104). Although her words seem like a reproduction of white superiority they are nevertheless informed as they seem to give her the determination to find means to give her son the education to equip him to face the white world with its inequalities.

Eva's significance in the narrative is felt despite the fact that she is almost always absent. This almost dominating presence that is felt through her absence is as a result of the values that she instills in the narrator. Her early sufferings give the narrator literary material to write about the inequalities that exist between the sexes in township marital relations, an existence whose hardship is worsened by white/black relationships. This suffering is not only significant for the exposé function. It sometimes becomes a tool for the conscientisation of people. Many young people's consciousness derived from seeing their mothers suffering as domestic workers under their employers. That is where Steve Biko's awareness on racial inequality grew from. He noticed how inhumanly his mother was treated as a domestic worker and this is part of the reason he decided to dedicate his life to the struggle for equality. (Cock, 1980)

That Eva occupies a central part in the narrative is dominantly felt after her death, when one notices a change of tone in the narrative. The death coincides with that of Marabastad, signaling an uprooting for the narrator. Two of the most important things that shaped his consciousness have been phased out and this is likely to be the reason why the writing becomes more openly critical of the regime. Christie et al (1980) notice the change in tempo of writing after the death of the mother. They note that the autobiography deteriorates to reportage from the vibrancy of childhood stories. I would like to suggest that during the adult life of the narrator, all the women who offered protection and guidance have been uprooted, Eva, Dora and Granny. They have been replaced by masters and this change in setting calls for a more assertive way of viewing things. The narrator is no longer dealing with whites as a middle person as he did when he collected washing or when he visited his mother's employers as their domestic's son. He now has a very direct relationship with the whites that calls for a subversive reportage of the unequal relationship between blacks and whites. Besides, the second half of the narrative was written in Nigeria (Mphahlele 1959:218) where he might have felt a sense of release and felt freer to be more direct in his analysis of the South African situation. Nigeria is also outside the family that has been the source of coherence for his narrative in pinpointing the inequalities without using propaganda.

In the absence of Eva, there are other women who take part in the narrator's upbringing, and one such strong woman is Aunt Dora. She is used by Mphahlele to show how other women dealt with the system by trying to protect the few earnings they got from their labor. Whereas Eva's form of protest is spiritual and deterministic Dora's one is more

direct and confrontational, especially towards males. Dora's maxim of "What's a thing in trousers to me! I could toss it on my little finger and fling it in the dust and roll it around until its price had gone down" is economically influenced. Her statement is important as it brings to light that in the patriarchal economy, the privileged male survives because of myths surrounding him about his power and strength that are never challenged. By 'lowering the price' aunt Dora is made to challenge the automatic placement of men by patriarchy in a higher position than that of women. This is also significant in an analysis of racial superiority where in colonial states almost all white people were protected and privileged because of their color. This way, to the underprivileged or the oppressed, they came to have a higher value that could not be contested because they had group power, and yet some of them were vulnerable without the protection of their group.

The argument between aunt Dora and Abdool can be cited to argue this point. Although Abdool is not white he is more privileged than the black people of Second Avenue are because he is an entrepreneur. His relationship with them is similar to that of the apartheid whites, it is based on a cash nexus that involves economic exploitation. The economic dimension or relationship between blacks and any person who wants to exploit them economically has its base in the apartheid system. As Cock argues

South Africa developed their system of class domination into one of racial domination where they restricted property ownership and political rights of non-whites and subjected them to various forms of economic compulsion and domination to perpetuate their economic dependence and sustain their ultra exploitability. (1980:232)

The poorer the people of Second Avenue are the better off Abdool is. The conversation between Dora and Abdool during the incident that Dora is cheated reveals the stereotypes

and prejudices that the two, and possibly their different class and racial groups have internalized in their economic dealings with each other:

"Dolla-Dolla, *Mosadi*, why - for you maker so much *makulu* troble-troble. All-a-time you make troble-troble why for?"

"Dolla-Dolla to hell! Trouble comes from you, you cheat. I don't go to the lavatory when I want money, see these hands they're rough from work."

"I holso work for me and my children."

"Stamp that book I say, coolie! You come from India to make money out of us eh!"

"Aldight aldight I come from Hindia what he's got to do with book? NO-no-no a-a-a!"

"Abdool I don't want any dusty nonsense!"

"If hum coolie ju kaffier ten-times ju-self." (1959:108-109)

It is evident from the first line of this extract that Abdool assumes a privileged gender position over Dora. He calls her *mosadi*, (woman) a term which associates her with passivity, an inferior. Dora is incensed by this labeling as woman because it is a suggestive stereotype that is meant to make her behave in a certain way, one that does not include fighting for her rights in public. She works hard for her earnings and she would like to make Abdool appreciate that she is not about to be cheated by the white world in which she is powerless and him as well. She associates him with labels that emerge in an inequitable society. To her he cheats not as a person but as part of a group that is known for cheating. That is why she resorts to reciprocating labels when she associates Abdool's theft with his being a 'coolie'. In turn Abdool calls her a 'kaffir' which is a label given to blacks by the ruling whites to subjugate them. Abdool it seems, is not concerned about how hard the people work to earn their living. All he wants is to acquire more for himself and so his 'price' or system of values has to be lowered by Dora to expose him for the insensitive money grabbing capitalist he is. The narrator, to show the divide between

capitalism and labor uses these labels, which continue to be used in the piece I am going to quote next.

In a moment Aunt Dora gave exhibit B a hard push away from the counter and reached out for medium-sized Abdool's collar, "taking him by the laundry" as we called the attack colloquially. The Indian's fez fell off as he tried to jerk himself loose. Aunt Dora placed a heavy knee on the counter. "Come outside I'll show you what-for you coolie," she kept saying and Abdool kept crying, "Lea' me lea' me kaffr bitch. Dolla-Dolla!"

She heaved herself and a thick mass of quivering flesh spilt over the counter to the shopkeeper's side. I thought she had broken her neck but she was up in an instant. She propelled Abdool out of the shop and they were out on the veranda. The shopkeeper was spending all his energy trying to wrench himself from Aunt Dora's hold. My heart was beating fast, both from fear and a sense of heroism on the side of Aunt Dora...Aunt Dora banged her head a few times on Abdool's face as was, and still is the common technique among fighting women. She drew blood from his mouth. Soon she was on top of Abdool on the concrete floor. They rolled down from the veranda and a few times in the dust, and my aunt, still on top, shouted, "Are you going to stamp the book Abdool?" He spluttered a few words and Aunt Dora got up...Abdool looked the sorry sight of depreciation Aunt Dora had set out to prove...The book was stamped. We almost made the two cups and saucers that day. (1959:109-110)

The legal terms used, "Exhibit A and B" show that although one may take this incident as an insignificant township brawl, the narrator sees it as a serious matter of injustice against his aunt who works hard to earn a living. It becomes interesting as well that the fight is clearly very much connected to the labor that Dora is fighting not to be cheated out of; the image of "taking him by the laundry". This image suggests that it is her domestic/professional association that empowers Dora, and probably all the other mothers who work for the white world. For once, a woman and supposed inferior being in terms of racial and gender hierarchy is on top of a man, and this force makes her get what she wants.

I argue that the methods employed by Dora to get what is rightfully hers could be used to reiterate Fanon's theory of the way violence pervades the colonized, who take out their frustrations on each other. For Aunt Dora, violence could be the only way to get rid of the frustrations of washing the colonizer's clothes especially the underwear. The fact that she wins the fight and justifiably gets what she deserves could be a way to temporarily ease her burdens and suggest that she is not the proverbial victim who carries the full weight of all the exploitations of history, but a victim only in situations where she is unavoidably so. This incident also highlights what other women have written about the obstacles that the black South African women have had to encounter and surpass in order to bring up their families. These obstacles abound in biographies by female writers like Ellen Kuzwayo, (1985).

The admiration and fear with which the narrator regards aunt Dora are very consistent with her construction throughout the autobiography. Somewhere else he describes her as someone "who was always quick to take offence if she thought the way she ordered her life was being undermined" In this instance she is unhappy that Ezekiel has been punished for missing choir practice when he had gone to deliver and collect laundry. She "took up cudgels...she dragged me alongside her to school on Tuesday...kept her course, towing me behind her all the time" (1959:83). The words 'dragged' and 'towed' show how forceful Dora can be especially when she is dealing with matters that affect her livelihood, and where the situation allows her to challenge unfair treatment. Indeed, she is insightful enough to point out to the headmaster that her well being is more important than a prince coming from overseas.

The conversation that Aunt Dora has with the headmaster, I propose, is very important in the narrative. It highlights the fact that in the hierarchy of the repressive state, some women are more able than men to defy the system because their relationship with the system is more indirect than that of some men. The headmaster, who is used as a tool to further the interest of the Apartheid State, can actually wield power through being the middleman of the government. Aunt Dora, on the other hand, relies on working for white people at her home where I argue that she and granny symbolically but ineffectively spit on the white people's collars, a gesture that is spiritually liberating but nothing else.

Dora's case against the headmaster is arguably a very authentic survivalist one as evidenced by her conversation with the headmaster:

"Why did you beat Es'ki yesterday, Principal, when he told you he'd taken washing away?" she asked Big Eyes.

"What shall I do if every pupil gives a reason for not coming to practice?"

"I thought I was talking about Es'ki, I don't care what you do with the other children."

"God's woman, this is a difficult time and we must get these songs known before the Prince comes."

"Oh, so washing must not be fetched because the prince is coming: will he give me food?"

"Can't the boy fetch it another day?"

"No, he can't," said my aunt tersely. "You had no right to punish the boy before you found out if he was telling the truth."

Big Eyes jerked his head backward in astonishment. "I know how to run my school, madam." His nostrils opened and narrowed like bellows.

"Let me run my house the way I want, and I don't do it by using the cane on innocent children. The boy's as good as mine. My sister left him in my care."

"The church left the school in my care, madam."

"Another time it will happen I'll have to speak to the superintendent. Now go to your class, Es'ki." (1959:84)

This conversation is very exposing of the nature of the sham power that is invested in black people who choose to collaborate with the state for survival. The principal clearly

does not have any answers to aunt Dora's questions. He may not even believe in singing for the prince, but he has no choice in the matter because to keep his job it must be done. Here we see the way the state can indirectly destabilize any chances of unity in the African community by interfering indirectly in matters of survival of this community.

The principal is expected to understand that washing is more important for survival than singing. He may understand, but at the same time doing what the state wants is his way of keeping his job to keep his family alive. If he is to listen to what the parents say, then he loses his job. If he listens to what the state says, then he quarrels with the community because he is helping to extend the racist ideology by further alienating the black children from their own history and exposing them to a colonial history that does not mean much to them at this stage. This alienation is best explained by Memmi who argues that the colonized children are denied their history and fed that of the metropole and that what they know about they learn about the colonial ways first before their own. This alienation is meant to blind them to the worth of their own history, and it is meant to emphasise that good standards should be those of the colonialists. Hence assimilation policies encouraged black people to behave like white people but at the same time excluded them from full access to the rights of colonial citizens.

The headmaster is undoubtedly placed in a very difficult position. Aunt Dora may realize the bind that he is in but she is very critical of the methods of punishment he employs. He is almost using the white stereotypical way of looking at blacks. His punishment assumes that Ezekiel is lying and to set this straight aunt Dora exposes him by divulging that she

knows that he is not the one in control. His job may be put on the line if he is reported to the authorities. Aunt Dora's exposure of this information shows that she is not ignorant of how the system works. It also shows how precarious the position of the black man is. Collaborating with the apartheid system is not an assurance of protection by that same system.

The two incidents discussed above concerning aunt Dora have prominent symbolic meaning in the text in terms of the search for identity by the narrator. This stance is not fully acknowledged by Peter Thuynsma who does not pay much attention to the presence of mothers and women in the text. In his paper where he argues that Mphahlele's autobiography is a vehicle for deep self-study, he tries to explain the play between fiction and autobiography. He argues that the South African writers who embark on autobiographical writing do so because of a sense of placelessness and rootlessness. As a result, they probe into their ghetto existence to reaffirm their identities. I generally agree with Thuynsma's observations, but my opinion differs from his in that whereas I find the place of women to be very central in Mphahlele's work, he does not seem to accord them enough prominence when he writes:

Mphahlele's characters in his autobiography are invariably of significant strength. The women are most notably, praised for '*being there*', for having a presence. Aunt Dora is undoubtedly the most physically resilient of them all, but sharply rivaled, if not outranked, by the quiet strength of Eva, his mother. (Thuynsma 1990:7)

It is interesting that Thuynsma points out the differences between Eva and Dora. However, instead of looking at them at a contesting level as Thuynsma does, I would like

to maintain that the differences between these two women are potentially significant for the narrator in the construction of his identity and awareness.

Aubrey Mokadi (1990) who presented a paper at the same conference as Thuynsma analyses the divisions in the Marabastad community in a paper where he explains the odds against Mphahlele growing up in slummy conditions. Mokadi argues that Ezekiel's life is representative of that of many other South Africans. He further argues that although the community is already divided visibly along tribal traditional and western Christian values, there are four further divisions. There are the fighters, those who directly oppose the state or rebel against its laws. Then there are the silent fighters: those who are subdued and protest passively. The third group is that of non-fighters: those who are unpredictable and sit on the fence most of the time like Dinku Dikae, and lastly the conquered fighter like the policeman who collaborates with the state against his own people for the sake of his own survival.

The categorization of fighters is important for my work as it elucidates the importance of the differences between Dora and Eva in the construction of the narrator's awareness of himself and what is happening in the larger South Africa. I have argued earlier on, using Cock, that the relationship between the narrator's father and mother is symbolic of that of master and slave. In this light, Eva's response to how she is treated by Moses opens up one possibility of how oppressed people can respond to their situation, an option that the narrator refuses to choose. Eva is a passive fighter. She fights spiritually, for the sake of her children, and the narrator often wonders why she lets her husband treat her in such an

offhanded manner. He ventures to ask her once, "Why does Father do this to you always, Mother?" whereupon the mother's answer is "I don't know, son." Eva may not know, but that is where her strength comes from. It appears her feigned ignorance and lack of motivation are what keep her going and focussed to do as much as she can to prepare for the future of her children.

On the other hand, Dora is a real fighter and even though her fighting might appear insignificant in light of the magnitude of the oppressive nature of the state, it shows the narrator another way of responding to oppression, no matter how minor it may appear. It is important that the narrator becomes an integral part of the incidents that drive Dora to fight for herself in a way that makes her fight for him as well. Because the narrator seems to admire very much the spirit of the fighter, it appears an oedipal relationship develops between him and his aunt, one that is not disturbed or thwarted because of the absence of the father. Apart from being the woman who is given most active narrative space and presence, she is also the one who gets a detailed physical description:

Aunt Dora was a tough thickset woman of about twenty-five. She was quick to use a clap on one's cheek. A woman of strict discipline, who wanted things done on time and thoroughly. She had a sharp tongue, and could literally fling a man out who took long before paying a debt for beer. When I had been selling beer in her absence she was quick to find out if I had pocketed a shilling or two when she came back...Aunt Dora moved adroitly in and out of the house in spite of her heavy build. Her hips were large, her thick arms worked like pistons. Her thick full lips were a study in concentration. She had beautiful shapely legs which tapered down serenely to the ankles. Her apron became her, lending her bosom a fierce and bold definition. She had a beautiful head, like mother's. Her black hair wasn't half as long as mother's deep brown hair; her complexion was dark...she could fling a bar of soap at a person who annoyed her and think nothing of it later. From the First to the Fourteenth Avenue people spoke of her as 'Aunt Dora of Second Avenue' - that woman who throws a man over the fence... (1959:8)

result of these two elements, she becomes as confident and as fearless as those that are protected by the state laws, "she always looked at a person-black or white- in the face after sizing him up. Now African women dare not look men in the face, let alone size them up" (1959:59). In the autobiography the narrator does not valorize Ma Lebona's understanding of her values as it works against the goal of the black people of ridding themselves of colonization. She affirms the superiority of whiteness by making white values normative and seem superior to black ones, isolating herself from her own sense of identity. She aspires to be what she can never be, at the same time reproducing the ideology of dominance by alienating her son from the throes of struggle by teaching him submission.

I maintain that it is because of the overwhelming nature of Ma Lebona's domination that the narrator lambastes her son who is never given a chance to grow. The narrator

came to realize how Joel worshipped his mother. Even as a boy, I became embarrassed for him when he fawned like a tame puppy to his mother. It was always "Yes, Ma, I will Ma, All right Ma" with him. When she was in a temper he was quick to ask her what had upset her, and coax her into good temper. He married the woman of her choice - her friend's old daughter. (1959:64)

Clearly, Joel is an appendage of his mother, one who is completely dominated and allows his mother to dominate him. When he marries the wife of her choice, he does not get any relief. Ma Lebona then dominates him and his wife. To the wife, she behaves like a stereotypical white madam of that time, the one whom granny says cannot do without her tea-cups when she gives black people their tea in a metal mug. She forces the young wife to live up to her standards of cleanliness that are mocked by the narrator who says she "was as clean as a cat in a white man's house" and that she sometimes demanded to have

boiling meat removed from the pot and washed. Anna however is unlike Joel because she does not relentlessly put up with Ma Lebona. She leaves Joel, telling him "he'd never keep a wife because she must also be his mother's wife, and if his mother could bear it, she would bear her children for him" (1959:66).

Because Anna decides to free herself from the tentacles of Ma Lebona's grip, I argue that the harshness exhibited by the narrator in his description of Joel is brought about by the fact that Joel reminds the narrator of the helplessness of the black man in a white world. Ma Lebona could be the way she is because Joel allows her to be despotic. Anna resists domination, and his mother who arranges a marriage for him with a woman who never turns up once again humiliates Joel. In the interlude where he describes the passing away of everything in his youth including Ma Lebona Mphahlele writes that Grandma tells him,

Ma Lebona has gone: remember the one who lived opposite us in Second Avenue and failed to rear husbands and daughters-in-laws, the mother of *that goat called Joel who still suckled from his mother until her death weaned him*. (1959:157)
[Emphasis mine]

The narrator here could be suggesting that Joel's independence, and consequently that of South Africa, can only come through the uprootment of the old order.

From the above argument, it can be claimed that the narrator is saved from being overwhelmed by the filth and decadence of Marabastad by the strength of the women in his life, all of whom he has special relationships with. Since the men in his life: his father and uncles have all let him down, he has found hope in the women, and the tremendous amount of faith he has in them can be witnessed by his inclusion in the autobiography of

how Rebecca's housekeeping saves them from poverty. This submission, insignificant as it may seem, is very important as it pays homage to the many mothers and women in the repressive apartheid state who managed to save their families from drowning in poverty by struggling to make ends meet on meager salaries.

It can be argued that it is when he writes about his boyhood and the memories of Ma Lebona, Dora and Eva that Mphahlele's autobiography makes for absorbing, imaginative and allegorical reading. One does not necessarily have to have knowledge about the apartheid state system, as the narrator's exposé is likely to make one imagine the gross injustice that existed. The autobiography moves from fathers to mothers to masters and in exile when he starts to write about the masters directly, he fails. He writes, "I have been trying to sniff around and find a distinctive smell to guide me. It has been eluding me. I now realize what a crushing cliché the South African situation can be as literary material" (Mphahlele 1959:218). It only becomes crushing because the narrator starts analyzing it through a magnifying glass, commenting on it. It is much more difficult for him because he does not realize that he has said all he wanted to say when he was talking about the women who acted as mothers in his life. Very revealing is the fact that when he becomes an adult and starts working for the whites, the chapter entitled "Trouble with Whites" is skeletal and contains all the obvious information about white/black relations. However, it does not have as much force as the revelations that come out about these relations through the vivid descriptions of family life in Second Avenue. This chapter could have made an appropriate closure for the autobiography before the narrator started speculating on his political awareness more directly.

It has been argued in this chapter that an alternative reading of Mphahlele's autobiography shows how he uses motherhood to paint the social, economic and political picture that prevailed in the apartheid era. He uses his mother to show social inequalities between white and black families as well as gender inequalities among black families themselves. The family relations in the black family have been seen to be greatly influenced by the way black men are treated in the white world. Aunt Dora is used to show the way disadvantaged groups economically exploited each other. Aunt Dora however does not accept this exploitation since she values the hard work she puts in to get her wages, and moreover, Abdool whom she fights with can be challenged without any disastrous consequences with the law. Finally, Ma Lebona is used to show how the racial ideology can be entrenched among black people who will help to extend the belief that white standards are normative of good values. This mindset has been shown to be indirectly oppressive since Ma Lebona becomes dominant over her son. The use of these three mothers has been very powerful in furnishing the reader with information on how inequitable the apartheid system was as it promoted white interests over all else.

Chapter Two

Writing Motherhood into History: *Things Fall Apart* and *Mhudi*

In this section of the chapter, I will analyse the controversy that has been generated by Achebe's treatment of gender in *Things Fall Apart*. I will offer a rereading of the text as an improvement on what has already been done by other scholars, and offer an introduction to what I consider to have been ignored. The readings of gender that we have so far on the text, I argue, are influenced by the prescriptive nature that the parties concerned would like to impose on male writers who decide to write about womanhood. As a result, they ignore the potentially other ways of reading the text that can be illuminating and can lead to new ways of seeing the deeper meaning that these works produce.

Achebe, who was born at the crossroads of African and Western cultures, was educated in mission institutions. The interest that many scholars have had in his novels has been the complications created by the fusion of two cultures for the educated black person. Achebe himself has positively exploited the fusion of cultures by using the literary tools acquired from his Western education to create what has become to be a widely acclaimed novel in the literary arena. Borrowing from his Western education Achebe has countered the white canonical writing that is supposed to portray in a negatively biased way the response of the black people to the encroachment of colonization. One such text is Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, a text that Achebe himself has accused of being racist (Achebe 1975:50-51). Relying heavily on orature Achebe has managed to show how significantly it has contributed to written literature by black writers. The use of orature is in most cases

the African writer's way of showing part of the rich culture that existed among African communities before European invasion. As will be argued in this section of the chapter, orature can also be used as a tool to analyse power relations as well as to empower those who produce it.

Things Fall Apart, Achebe has claimed, is a novel that shows that

African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans...their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty...they had poetry, and above all they had dignity. (Achebe 1977:8)

In his reinterpretation of history, Achebe, it seems, according to popular opinion, was not concerned with the plight of the women in the Igbo society. Esther Y. Smith (1984) and Florence Stratton (1994) have been Achebe's worst adversaries and they both blatantly accuse him of not only ignoring the women in the Igbo community but silencing them altogether.

I argue here that the conscious level of Achebe's text may be biased in its representation of motherhood, but not necessarily so at its unconscious level. I would like to point out and discuss the ways in which I find his novel empowering women. It can be argued that by reconstructing a glorious past, Achebe acts more as a forward rather than backward looking writer because he is looking at how the past is influencing the present and the future, especially with regards to literacy and writing. The past can be seen as influencing new ways of thinking and viewing things, and not as a rock that stays the same and only acquires new layers. That is why orature merges so well with written literature in his text.

Males, (Uli Beier (1967), G. D. Killam (1969), Adrian Roscoe (1971), Eustace Palmer (1972), David Cook (1977), David Carroll (1980) and R. M. Wren (1981), did most of the early criticism of *Things Fall Apart*. The emphasis of these critics was on the form of the novel in comparison to the European novel, the language used and the sociological nature of the novel. The sociological analysis has centred on the character of Okonkwo and the way in which he resembles the Shakespearean tragic hero. Critics have looked at the way in which Achebe has played the role of the teacher by educating all races about the social structures of the precolonial Igbo society. They have been further intrigued by Achebe's use of the English language to express the idioms of the Igbo community: "to carry the weight of his experience". Achebe manages to a great extent to express the African experience in a foreign language without distorting its originality. An obvious but important fact to point out is that most of the early criticism has been restricted by its bibliographical inclination. An example is Rhonda Cobham's (1991) analysis of how most of the incidents in *Things Fall Apart* can be connected to biblical stories. Here, Cobham is trying to expose the influences that Achebe's mission education has had on the writing of this novel. Such an approach to criticism, I argue, can be very limiting and it almost reverts to the authority of experience argument. It is as if it is saying only Achebe could write this way because he had this experience. It fails to give credit to the creativity and construction that goes into the making of a novel.

Of course the author's life is important in analyzing his/her work but too much adherence to it may blind the analyst to many things that constitute art. Such has been the case with Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe has given interviews and comments on his book,

confirming what his readers have concluded about his text and leaving them little room to make further independent analysis. This is an important reason I find it interesting to look at gender in *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe has not given comments or lectures about this aspect of the book except to confirm what the anthropological writing of Ifi Amadiume states: that the water deity in the Igbo community is female. Achebe apologises for portraying the deity as male in *Things Fall Apart*.

Because he was not deliberately conscious that he would be significantly addressing the gender imbalances, Achebe's representation of motherhood, womanhood and the family becomes doubly significant because it has nothing to do with what he set out to do when he wrote his novel. Gender is inescapably an integral part of the society that he is recreating. Therefore looking more closely at the representation of this community has opened hidden spaces that offer new and interesting reading of gender in his novel.

This 'unconscious' level of representation, I argue challenges any essentialist claims to the authority of experience as encapsulating literature, making it a reflection of life. A reflection of life approach to literature ignores the complex nature of the writer's mediation and it deters an even closer investigation into what constitutes the essence of some literature. Achebe's text, if read against the realist approach of analyzing literature, offers new direction and possibilities in thinking about the positions of gendered subjects in nationalist discourses.

It was only after the eighties that more literature started emerging on Achebe's treatment of gender. Most of it shows a lot of anger towards Achebe and other male writers for excluding women from literary creativity, portraying them as stereotypes and making them powerless and pitiable. Although she is not interested in looking at Achebe in detail Smith nevertheless mentions him as one of the writers who have displayed insensitivity and unquestioningly accepted the inequality of women. She claims that "women play very minor parts in Chinua Achebe's novel about the coming of colonialism in Nigeria" (Smith 1986:21), a contention whose origins I understand but do not completely agree with. I suggest that at both thematic and structural levels, the women in the narrative play a very major role.

In my rereading of *Things Fall Apart* I find the most important way in which Achebe represents the versatility of motherhood to be through his endowment of the art of storytelling to the mothers of the text.¹ The stories that the mothers tell operate at two levels in the novel. They represent part of the past that Achebe is recreating, and they are the bridge that links traditional dissemination of art and instruction with modern written literature. By foregrounding the oral aspect of traditional society, Achebe seems to be acknowledging its importance in shaping his career as a writer, at the same time empowering the mothers in his text. The mothers, in telling their stories become part of Achebe's objective of rewriting history. Their importance comes not only because they

¹ It is important here to note how the paradigm of women as bearers of oral literature changes when the literature becomes written. Christine Qunta (1987) attests that publishers and critics ignored many African writers although they started writing shortly after their male counterparts. It took them a long time to finally get their works published. This explains why Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* was written in 1970 and

help Achebe facilitate his rewriting of history but also because they are revealed to have been part of the African civilisation and culture.

To demonstrate how significant the story telling of the mothers in *Things Fall Apart* is, it is important to point out the space that was assigned to women as story-tellers in traditional Africa. According to Liz Gunner and G Furniss (1995), women's story telling did not give them much power because of the age of the recipients. They mention in their collection of essays that show how story telling is shrouded in power relations that it was only the small children who listened to the stories. Boys who were around ten normally listened to older men's stories about war and valor, leaving young boys and all girls and women as listeners and participants in women's stories. On the other hand men who were story-tellers were given special regard because they transmitted history orally whereas women concentrated on social issues. Men are also said to have told their stories publicly, whilst women's space was the privacy of the household. In this sense the women acquired informal power that only went as far as the doorstep. Even though men sometimes created fanciful stories, Isabel Hofmeyr's (1993) study of historical story-telling in a South African kingdom argues that these stories were taken more seriously to the detriment of women's creativity and narrative labor. Her analysis can be equated to the way women's agricultural labor was considered less important than men's cattle keeping. It can also explain why in *Things Fall Apart* women were said to grow 'female' small crops that were not as important as the 'male' crops yet the crops that the women grew helped to supplement the family food resources.

yet became the twenty-sixth published African novel. Achebe's Things Fall Apart was the first

The limited space that women had as story tellers accounts for Hofmeyr's comment that "institutionalized speaking relates to institutionalized silencing that characterizes women's subordination in precolonial Southern Africa" (Hofmeyr 1993:25). Hofmeyr's observation offers a useful point of divergence for my argument because whereas her emphasis is sociological, I take a more political approach to the institutionalization of story-telling.

I argue here that homestead power is absolute, as it is independent of male interference in *Things Fall Apart*. The private space enables mothers to have relationships with their children that they would otherwise not have in the presence of the fathers. Hence, the text informs us that

Very often it was Ezinma who had decided what food her mother should prepare. Ekwefi even gave her such delicacies as eggs, which children were rarely allowed to eat because such food tempted them to steal. One day as Ezinma was eating an egg Okonkwo had come in unexpectedly from his hut. He was greatly shocked and swore to beat Ekwefi if she dared give the child eggs again. But it was impossible to refuse Ezinma anything. After her father's rebuke she developed an even keener appetite for eggs. And she enjoyed above all the secrecy in which she now ate them. Her mother always took her into their bedroom and shut the door. (1958:53-4)

In their hut, Ezinma and her mother have some freedom to do what they want most of the time without Okonkwo's interference. They obtain some qualified victory over him as they can do what he forbids them to do.

Achebe's representation of mothers in private spaces is what makes Smith claim that Okonkwo's "wives are introduced by name, rank and snippets of character only little by little" (Smith 1984). Contrary to what Smith believes to be a misogynist way of portraying

Heinemann African novel and it had been published twelve years earlier.

women, I argue that this presentation of the mother characters in the text could be seen as a significant narrative technique. It creates a ripple effect by gradually shifting the reader's sympathy from Okonkwo as a victim of misinterpreted societal values to his wives as victims of an over ambitious man. This gradual and shadowy introduction of his wives works well because it helps to unveil gradually the flaws of the protagonist.

Okonkwo's flaws are exposed gradually as we see him beating Ojiugo for not preparing his lunch, as he kills Ikemefuna, as he nearly shoots Ekwefi over a brawl that starts with his accusation that a banana tree "that is very much alive" has been killed, and as he gets impatient with Ekwefi during the trying moments of Ezinma's illness. The fact that Okonkwo's wives are almost always in the background tallies well with the textual dominance of Okonkwo. Because he wants to dominate and do things in daring proportions, Okonkwo must dominate the narration at the other characters' expense. He has to be magnified so that his final tragedy is magnified.

A significant point to note is the paradoxical use of the women's space. Although their narrative space in terms of character portrayal is limited, the mothers actually cover a lot of narrative space in terms of the writing of *Things Fall Apart*. This is done through subversion when the mothers' folktales are shifted from the domestic and made public and historical as they become tools with which Achebe manages to weave his main plot. From the outset it is very easy to dismiss these stories as insignificant. I propose here that, by making the stories propel his main plot, Achebe empowers the mothers by giving them a

voice that transcends the domestic sphere. The stories gather even greater significance than would be anticipated as they project themselves not as

...folksy, domestic entertainment but as a domain in which individuals in a variety of social roles articulate a commentary upon power relations in society and indeed create knowledge about society. (Furniss & Gunner 1995:1)

This analysis of folklore made by Furniss and Gunner can be used to substantiate the way the mothers' stories are in many ways a reflection of power relations in the Umuofian community. As Achebe weaves his tale so do the women tell tales that are not only commentary but also prophetic as they foreshadow what will happen to Okonkwo because of his aggression. To borrow from Furniss and Gunner once more in this paragraph, the women's stories are effective because

people producing oral literature are not just commentators but are often involved in relationships of power themselves, in terms of subverting or supporting those in power. The forms for which they work are themselves invested with power, that is to say the words, the texts have the ability to provoke, to move, to direct, to prevent, to overturn and to recast social reality. (Furniss & Gunner 1995:3)

It can be argued that despite the limited narrative space that the mothers of *Things Fall Apart* are given they are central in subverting the male power in their community. They overturn the heroic stature of the protagonist of the story by helping Achebe expose how vulnerable Okonkwo is by relying too much on orthodox social values about manhood. Manhood for Okonkwo becomes associated with physical prowess and it is presented as having nothing to do with sound mental judgement. Manhood becomes destructive, and a mismatch for the forward thinking abilities that the mothers are shown to have.

Story-telling makes the mothers educators of children in the absence of book education in Achebe's precolonial set-up. Scholars of oral literature have supported the claim of the significance of story telling. Isidore Okpewho (1992) has written that

through oral literature the younger members of the society absorb the ideas that guided them through life and the older ones [were] constantly reminded of the rules and ideals that must be kept alive for the benefit of those coming behind them. (Okpewho 1992:115)

Okonkwo does not take the stories seriously because he is prejudiced against the women who transmit them. He overlooks the significance of the stories as part of society's process. For him these stories should be listened to when one is a boy and forgotten when one becomes a man. He regards the progression from childhood to manhood as disjointed and fragmented, with the past bearing no importance to the present. As a result, he dismisses the stories as silly women's stories thereby belittling their significance in the community and in their shaping of the youths' moral consciences.

Besides their didactic function, the stories are also very entertaining. According to Ruth Finnegan (1970) recipients acquire skills informally through listening to elders telling the stories and the way the message is received depends very much on the passion with which the story teller performs her story. The performer more than the writer can rely on a lot more resources to get the message across. These include voice modulation, gesticulation, and imitation of sound as well as encouraging the audience to get involved through song. In one of the mothers' stories, Achebe states that "whenever [Nwoye's mother] sang this song [Nwoye] felt carried away to the distant scene in the sky where Vulture sang for mercy... and sky was moved to pity" (Achebe 1958:38). The effect that Nwoye's mother's

singing has on her listeners can be interpreted in two ways, both of them useful in supporting my argument on how *Things Fall Apart* centralizes motherhood.

Firstly, Nwoye's mother's effectively sad and appealing voice could indicate the importance she attaches to her task as educator of children. (Perhaps this could be closely linked to the seriousness with which Achebe has claimed to want to educate the African people about their past and inform them of where the rain began to beat them). She would like to make her efforts worthy and therefore put feeling into the song to make the listeners feel pity and take heed of the message of the tale. Secondly the sadness in the voice might be a reflection of her own sadness at her life as Okonkwo's wife. She could be sad in her marital situation because "Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children" (1958:9). The folklore becomes an outlet for her own frustrated feelings and dissatisfactions and it subverts Stratton's idea that the women in *Things Fall Apart* cannot do anything about their miserable lives as Okonkwo's wives. Folklore becomes her way of coping with the conditions of living with an over ambitious man as a husband.

The stories the mothers tell prophesy or comment on events that happen in the story. Many parallels can be drawn between the characters in the fables and those in the main plot of *Things Fall Apart* creating a motif of mocking the protagonist using animals. The motif of allegorizing society through animals has been summed up by Finnegan in her observation that

What is often involved in the animal stories is a comment, even a satire, on human behavior and society. In a sense, when the narrators speak of the actions and characters of animals they are also representing human faults and virtues somewhat removed and detached from reality through being presented in the guise of animals, but nevertheless with an indirect relation to observed human action. (Finnegan 1970:351)

Barbra Harlow (1991) who interprets the tortoise and the birds story in *Things Fall Apart* as an allegory of resistance picks up this satirisation. Harlow argues that the tortoise is representative of the colonizer and the birds, the victims, the colonized. For her, the repossession of their feathers by the birds is a demonstration of their ability to participate in the historical process of change. As much as I agree with this interpretation, I would like to offer an alternative one that focuses on gender and Okonkwo. My analysis is prompted by Stratton's observation when she writes "Even the folktale which Ekwefi is assigned the role of telling to Ezinma- the story of the visit paid to the sky by the birds and the crafty tortoise relates only to male behavior" (Stratton 1994:37). This comment fails to appreciate the critical construction of male behavior that the tale exposes, a task I am attempting in my own analysis of the significance of the tale. I suggest that Okonkwo is the tortoise in the story. Although he does not have to be as treacherous as tortoise because he is a hard worker, he takes advantage of people who are physically weaker than him by always bullying them. His bullying is an expression of his total desire for control. In this desire to control, Okonkwo begins to loathe criticism from all members of his community, most of all his wives. That is why Ekwefi almost loses her life when she criticizes Okonkwo's shooting abilities.

The revelation by Achebe here that his protagonist cannot shoot is an affirmation that he is not superhuman and yet he would like to make everyone believe that he is. Okonkwo's anger at the revelation of his incompetence directs the reader to the way in which males are portrayed as achieving their grandeur through women's silence, a theme that is foregrounded strongly in Umuofian society where women are excluded from the structured ranks of communal power. Women are shown revealing that which men want to hide. By revealing Okonkwo's inability to shoot, Ekwefi destabilizes the myth of Okonkwo's abilities. Perhaps this revelation could also be read as a way in which the author wants to reveal how inadequately equipped Okonkwo is for the new dispensation. He has firepower but does not know how to use it and this almost spells doom for any armed liberation struggle.

Tortoise robs the birds of their feast and voices when he tricks them and makes himself their spokesperson. In a similar way, Okonkwo robs his wives and children of their voices. Their retreat into silence makes Okonkwo over evaluate his abilities and power because criticism, which is important for character building, becomes absent. This misleads him into feeling that his abilities can surmount anything least of all man. Okonkwo comes to a disastrous end because he does not consult his family or anyone so that he can weigh up ideas before acting. A commentary on his misconception about manhood comes out when Obierika discusses the death of Ndulue with him. From this discussion, Okonkwo doubts Ndulue's manhood when he hears that Ndulue discussed everything with his wife. Obierika informs him

"It was always said that Ndulue and Ozoemena had one mind... I remember when I was a young boy there was a song about them. He would not do anything without her."

"I did not know that," said Okonkwo. "I thought he was a strong man in his youth."

"He was indeed," said Ofoedu.

Okonkwo shook his head doubtfully.

"He led Umuofia to war in those days," said Obierika. (1958:47-8)

The above discussion clarifies that Okonkwo's fears about creating companionship with his wives and children are very much private and not necessarily representative of the community's values. His doubts about Ndulue's grandeur confirm his inability to accept things that are different from his own way of life. To him men and women must always exist in poles, with the men being normative. Hence he cannot stop wishing Ezinma were a boy. This wish, coupled with his disappointment at what his son Nwoye turns out to be as a man are arguably meant to convey that gender is not the only determinant to character building. This Okonkwo dogmatically refuses to accept or believe.

The weapons Okonkwo uses to victimize his family are the ones used to bring his end. If he had not committed suicide he probably would have been hanged after being cajoled by the *kotma*. Alternatively he could have been shot with the same gun he nearly used for shooting Ekwefi. Okonkwo cannot do without his family as much as tortoise cannot do without the birds. Okonkwo's family helps bring out his "greatness" as they are the ready "victims". He only needs an excuse to harass any one of them. Because he does not listen to them or consider them in any meaningful way he becomes a rigid individual and this rigidity of beliefs and principles leads to his death. His death is significant in that it wraps up the didactic purpose of fables that always show "overambitious tortoise [who]

frequently lands himself in trouble, sometimes even death, revealing to us that there must be limits to our ambitions." (Okpewho, 1992:117)

Tortoise's strategy of quarreling with the birds before he goes back to earth could be linked to Okonkwo's lack of respect for those whom he thinks are inferior to him. He is sometimes rebuked by the others when he talks derogatively about less successful men. Tortoise's inconsiderate nature and his ability to fight with all the birds also emphasize Okonkwo's inability to identify with either of his parents. His father he hates with the utmost passion because he was embarrassingly unsuccessful and his mother he dismisses when he talks about her "silly stories". This denial leads to his isolation and self-centredness, which make him fail to realize that a man cannot direct the course of history alone. It is not only his family that he fails to ally with. Okonkwo quarrels with the gods when he beats his youngest wife during the Week of Peace. He is criticized by his community who accuse him of challenging his *chi* when they call him "the little bird *nza* who so forgot himself after a heavy meal that he challenged his *chi*." (1958:22)

Biodun Jeyifo shows a lot of insight when he aptly states that

the women's stories in **Things Fall Apart** are deceptively simple and are usually of extraordinary emblematic, subversive resonance to the central narrative of Okonkwo's obsession with his father and his sons. (Biodun Jeyifo, 1993)

Jeyifo makes this observation in a paper where he analyses psychoanalytically the story of the ear and the mosquito. His argument is that after remembering that ear emasculated mosquito by refusing his marriage proposal and then laughing at him, Okonkwo goes back to sleep thereby repressing the meaning behind the story. The story could be silly to him

because of its acute reversal of the values that he believes in. In the story the female is given more power than the male, and this is linked to Achebe's critical construction of Okonkwo's masculinity. This story threatens Okonkwo's fear of femaleness (he associates lack of aggression with femininity and weakness) and the fear is exacerbated since "femaleness" in a male is always threatening to overwhelm his son Nwoye, who reminds him of his "weak" father Unoka.

To add on to what Jeyifo has done, I suggest that by affirming superiority in the female, Okonkwo's mother's tale criticizes what Okonkwo believes in and elevates Unoka and Nwoye who Okonkwo believes are worthless as men. The story is important in as far as it shows how one can achieve power through words and not weapons. This power is achieved as the women and their stories become an integral part of the structure of the narration. The argument can be taken further. If the survival of Nwoye in the text is because of his acceptance of the values of the stories and the caring accommodating and seemingly tranquil nature of the Christian religion, then the power of the word is portrayed as being greater than that of the machete. The word nourishes and it is what captivates Nwoye:

It was not the mad logic of the new religion that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the *poetry* of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about the brothers who sat in the darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul - the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The *words* of the hymn were like the drops of the frozen rain melting on the dry plate of the panting earth. (1958:104) [emphasis mine]

Clearly, this poetry is an outlet for Nwoye, and a way back to the old days of story telling with his mother without his father's watchful eye. The effect the hymn has on him is exactly the same as that he gets when his mother sings sadly. His love and ability to find meaning in words and poetry open up new possibilities for Nwoye because he becomes one of the first people who is trained as an educator and clerk by the colonial government. Although some historians have argued that there were a lot of shortcomings with the educational system received by the converts nevertheless it lay some foundation for them and others were able to develop their skills and become successful in many fields. They used the tools they acquired and this has contributed to the success of most of the acclaimed writers.

Okonkwo is driven to commit suicide because when he murders the messenger he does so single mindedly, thinking that the machete is mightier than the word. The message that the messenger delivers challenges Okonkwo's authority. The messenger says, "The white man whose power you know too well has ordered this meeting to stop" (1958: 184). These words challenge and destroy all Okonkwo's hopes of being one of the greatest men of the clan. Indeed, Okonkwo knows the power of the white man because Abame has been wiped, and he himself was taunted and mistreated in the white man's prison. Instead of considering the truth of the messenger's words, Okonkwo dismisses their wisdom as much as he dismisses the "silly women's stories" in favor of stories about "valor and war".

As has already been mentioned, it is not only the messenger who wounds Okonkwo's pride through words. Ekwefi almost gets shot by deriding Okonkwo's shooting abilities. Here I

also stress that this derision emphasizes the power of the word over the weapon. It is as if Achebe is saying that for Okonkwo the availability of the machete and the use of force deprives him of the ability to learn to speak, except in anger. It is said that "He had a slight stammer and whenever he was angry and could not get his words quickly enough he would use his fists" (1958:3). Force leads to his end in the novel, whilst the women's stories remain as part of the intact frame of the novel.

The power that the female has in the ear and mosquito story can also be interpreted as the power that the 'feminine' religion ultimately has over Okonkwo and all the traditionalists. The portrayal of the Christian religion by Achebe as 'feminine' does not create problems for my overall argument because if the religion offers refuge to the ostracized members of the community, this means it is not being portrayed as a weak religion but as a caring and nurturing one. The contrast between what Okonkwo thinks about femininity and what femininity is shown to be capable of doing is biting criticism by Achebe on binary poles which pay attention to the extremes and do not consider what is in between. The in between is shown to be also important.

The mothers' instruction through story telling triumphs when Nwoye chooses the values instilled by the mothers over those of the father. Before the death of Ikemefuna Nwoye remembers stories that his mother used to tell him when he was a young boy. He prefers these stories to the bloody ones that Okonkwo tells him because from his mother's stories he learns values that preserve the community. From his father's stories, he only learns about destruction and this gives him a feeling of repulsion towards his father:

As soon as his father walked in, that night, Nwoye knew that Ikemefuna had been killed, and something seemed to give way inside him, like the snapping of a tightened bow. He did not cry. He just hung limp. (1958:43)

The simile "like the snapping of a tightened bow" is punned in this instance. The snapping of the bow could mean Nwoye's own feelings that he has been repressing have been prodded from within and he realizes then that he needs to be what he believes he can be. On the other hand, it could also refer to Okonkwo's discovery of his feelings of compassion, when he comes back from killing Ikemefuna and yet pretends it was a very simple task. For both of them though, the death of Ikemefuna has serious but different repercussions. For Nwoye, it strengthens his compassionate side, a side that is brought out through his association with his mother. The feelings that he has when Ikemefuna is killed are similar to the ones he had when he heard abandoned twins crying in the forest:

A vague chill had descended on him and his head had seemed to swell, like a solitary walker who passes an evil spirit on the way. Then something had given way inside him. It descended on him again, this feeling, when his father walked in, that night after killing Ikemefuna. (1958:43)

These feelings of compassion are what Okonkwo wants him to suppress. He has been able to hide these feelings from his father but the killing of Ikemefuna makes him snap. Here Achebe seems to have created binary poles modelled along fear by Okonkwo that his son will be like his father. However, Okonkwo fails to realize that his dogmatism has no place in the new government, and what measures a man's success might even be about to change. Maybe in this new set-up Unoka may have been a superstar because of his expertise in playing the flute.

Okonkwo's behavior can be explained mainly through the folk tales. Significant among the stories that Nwoye remembers is the one about Vulture who is sent to beg Sky for rain. Vulture gets the rain but pierces the leaves carrying the rain with his long beak because of carelessness. The rain falls heavily on him and he ends up in a far away land where he has seen fire to dry and warm him. I argue here that the vulture could be an allegory of Okonkwo who is always made the village emissary. He went to fetch Ikemefuna and he is among the men who are supposed to "return" him. Okonkwo does not return the boy because he lets his fear get in the way. His beheading of Ikemefuna who expected protection from him makes the rain fall heavily on him by triggering events that lead to his exile. Exile robs him of everything that he has worked for his whole life and he refuses to make his land of exile warm him up like vulture does. This story prepares us for the killing of Ikemefuna and the nemesis of Okonkwo and it strengthens Nwoye's link with his caring qualities. Just when he is feigning and succeeding in being male his father inhumanly murders a boy who has become part of the family.

The text seems to be modelled along the Jungian philosophy that claims that

No man is so entirely masculine that he has nothing feminine in him. The fact is rather, that very masculine men have carefully guarded and hidden a very soft emotional life, often incorrectly described as 'feminine'. A man counts it a virtue to repress his 'feminine' traits as much as possible ... (Jacobi Jolande 1971: 113)

It is this 'feminine' side that Okonkwo represses that haunts him psychologically, propelling him to do things without thinking through them because it is the 'manly' thing to do. Jung's theory fits in well with the theoretical model of this section of the chapter. Things Fall Apart is modelled along the tensions between masculinity and femininity, with

the protagonist fighting hard to conceal his compassionate 'feminine' qualities, a mistake that leads to his downfall.

I would like to add here that Okonkwo's murder of Ikemefuna comes about as a result of his disregard for the meaning of the word. The oldest man in Umuofia warns him:

That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death... Umuofia has decided to kill him. The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has pronounced it. They will take him outside Umuofia as is the custom, and kill him there. But I want you to have nothing to do with it. He calls you his father. (1958:40)

Even though he gets this warning and Ikemefuna runs to him shouting "My father, they have killed me!" Okonkwo actually gives him the finishing blow because "He was afraid of being thought weak." His friend Obierika who is described as "a man who thought about things" warns him about his irrational behavior when he sarcastically refers to the killing as Okonkwo's "latest show of manliness" and tells him blatantly

if the Oracle said that my son should be killed I would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it... If I were you I would have stayed at home. What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action which the goddess wipes out whole families. (1958:46-7)

Further allegory to Okonkwo's irrationality comes out in the story told by Ezinma, a story that she gets from her mother. This is a story about the snake lizard that killed its mother because the seven baskets of uncooked vegetables had shrunk to three after being cooked. The lizard then cooked the same amount of vegetables and when they shrunk he killed himself. The story, which is a critique of acting irrationally because sometimes it has dire consequences makes the snake lizard appear in many ways like Okonkwo, making the story another warning about what is going to happen to Okonkwo and for him to change his behavior. Okonkwo behaves like the snake lizard when he murders the messenger and realizes none of his clansmen will help him fight the colonial order:

Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult. He heard voices asking: "Why did he do it?" (1958:184)

The question "Why did he do it?" seems to have come a little too late but Okonkwo has not realized that the clan has been in opposition to most of his decisions. He fails to explain to his friends why he did it since he is a man of action so instead he commits suicide and reduces himself to a dog according to his community's standards.

The last story in the novel comes from a man. I would like to place this story in some historical context and suggest that the placing of this story is based on the motion of the folk story and written literature in Africa. In the novel, Uchendu comes in during the clash between traditional society and the colonial Christian religion. His story could be indicative of the way in which what was considered to be female's story telling of fancy stories was appropriated by the male writer who shifted it from the domestic arena to the public and the written form. It could also be commentary on the underscoring in the text through Okonkwo of Unoka's contribution to oral culture.

Uchendu's story is important to me even though a male character tells it because Okonkwo's links with Uchendu are through his mother. The fact that Uchendu is the first male to tell a folk story is a re-evaluation of the story telling genre, one that may be intended to make Okonkwo rethink his attitude towards these stories and pay heed to their didactic function. The backdrop to this story is the killing of the people of Abame who killed a lone white man and Uchendu categorically pronounces the message to his story:

"Never kill a man who says nothing. Those men of Abame were fools. What did they know about the man?" (1958:98)

The man Okonkwo murders is only an agent of the colonial government, one of the African people who has probably realized the futility of disorganized protest against the new government. One wonders whether Okonkwo has forgotten Abame and the story about Mother kite? Or does he just ignore everything to do with words?

Uchendu not only instructs Okonkwo metaphorically through a folk tale but he also philosophizes plainly about Okonkwo's situation. He gives a speech about the seemingly contradictory nature of motherhood when he realizes that Okonkwo is not happy in exile in his motherland. Uchendu explains to Okonkwo why people say 'mother is supreme' because Okonkwo does not have the answer:

It's true that a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. And that is why we say that mother is supreme. (1958:94)

Besides trying to make Okonkwo feel comfortable about being in his motherland, this speech can also be read as yet another critique of Okonkwo's construction of maleness. He is a man who can be successful anywhere since he is hard working yet he has this strong sense of wanting to prove himself only in Umuofia, just to prove that he can be better than his father. Okonkwo's love for Umuofia or identification with his fatherland could have been used ironically to mock Okonkwo who was never proud of his father. He has this fear about being like his father that

lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father. Even as a little boy he had resented his father's failure and weakness, and even now he still remembered how he had suffered when a playmate had told him that his father was *agbala*. That was how Okonkwo first came to know that *agbala* was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title. And so Okonkwo was ruled by one passion - to hate everything that Unoka his father had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness. (1958:9-10)

The fear of failure exposed in the above quote is what makes Okonkwo become so blinkered and suicidal.

From the above discussion I can use Victor Propp (1984) to conclude that "like any genuine art, folklore possesses not only artistic perfection but also a profound message...(Propp 1984:14). It is this message that Okonkwo could not decipher and that is why his life plunges from one disaster to another.

The stories that the mothers tell are allegories to different parts of the novel and so they complement Achebe's main plot. In the same way that Achebe is giving a moral lesson to the older reader who is overambitious, the mothers are giving their younger readers the same lesson through their fables. Uchendu and the mothers' stories wrap up the way in which Okonkwo destroys himself because of his lack of perception of the stories and historical forces acting against him. Society is prepared for his disobedience of its laws because it knows that

it would be unsafe to leave its moral health solely in the hands of tales and proverbs which in many cases tell how to conduct oneself only by implication. Society has more direct methods of enforcing conduct and punishing actions that violate the established codes of behavior. There are more formal instruments of punishment such as fines, banishment or even execution ... (Okpewho 1992:119)

and Okonkwo gets his fair share of these.

In the end, the fact that the women's stories are told in the privacy of the homestead does not lessen their subversive nature. They help fuel the movement of the central story. The central positioning of the stories makes up for the shadowy thematic construction of mothers and women that comes out in the story. This cannot be mistaken for Achebe's lack of interest in women as suggested by Stratton who suggests, "What we have then is a story whose concern is wholly for men and their dilemmas, one in which what happens to women is of no consequence" (Stratton 1994:36). What happens to women is indeed of great importance to Achebe who makes their seemingly inferior positioning in his precolonial construction some form of exposé. Achebe seems to endow himself with the task of making up for the thematic ambiguities by showing the significance of the mothers' contribution to the making of literary history. The mothers' stories enable Achebe to write *Things Fall Apart*.

Like Achebe, Plaatje foregrounds the family in his recreation of the Barolong history. Plaatje though is more direct in the way he states his position about the role played by women in historical processes, a role that has mostly been ignored by historical writing. In analyzing gender in *Mhudi*, I will borrow significantly and expand on ideas that have been proposed by Myrtle Hooper (1992) and Laura Chrisman (1993) whose in-depth studies are very illuminating. Plaatje rewrites and reinterprets history from the point of view of a female protagonist and as Hooper says, the narrative coheres around Mhudi. It is through the eponymous Mhudi that we learn about the four different communities in the narrative.

Clearly, the comments that *Mhudi* received from some male nationalists about its romantic element were so because Plaatje's foregrounding of women was a threat to the patriarchal nature of nationalist discourse. To note is Mazisi Kunene (1980) who writes

Because Plaatje was writing the story down and not narrating it verbally *a la africaine*, he thought it necessary to include a romantic episode (or did someone suggest it?). The episode itself is totally infantile and hangs loosely in between the violent actions of the warring parties. In fact, it is totally incongruous ... *Mhudi* itself is a second rate, badly organized hodge-podge of semihistory, semifiction, shoddy allegory - a pastiche combining fact and fiction in a most illogical manner. (*Research in African Literatures* 11 (2) 1980:246-7)

Kunene's comments underestimate the symbolic significance that the character of *Mhudi* carries in the narrative. They underscore the vision the novel conveys on issues of nationalism and feminism. The comments chart out in patriarchal style the conceptions that patrimony has on the nature of nationalism. First, patriarchy presupposes that nationalism is not about domestic love which is supposed to be private, advocating the delineation of the private and the domestic and the rigid separation of the two. Secondly that time in nationalist discourses should be linear, hence Plaatje's plot should unfold chronologically, and lastly that history cannot be fictionalized. This prescriptive nature of how nationalism ought to be is what Plaatje seems to be interrogating in his novel. The centralising of women into historical processes is a precedented attempt by Plaatje to show how the spheres of the public and the private cannot be held in antithesis, as they are spheres that shape each other and influence each other significantly. It cannot be decided at will where history starts and where the domestic ends in an effort to isolate it from history.

The attention that Plaatje gives to the way the women respond to war in different communities is one way in which he rewrites history. Plaatje manages to highlight that

history is a process that is not static but can move forward both in space and in time. As long as nations interact with each other, changes in their orthodox ways of life and their ways of perceiving things are bound to be inevitable. Secondly and equally important is the way in which Plaatje tries to inform his readership that the concept that the Matabele “were a fierce nation – so unreasoning in its ferocity that it will attack any individual tribe at sight, without the slightest provocation’ is misguided (Plaatje 1978:21). This took a lot of courage, for Plaatje being of the Barolong had grown up being told that the destruction of his tribe by the Matabele was wanton. And yet the slaying of their three tax collectors had prompted the Ndebele intransigence. Plaatje uses the woman Umnandi, Mzilikazi's wife, to show how the Ndebele behavior is a response to provocation and not just blood thirstiness on their part.

The text begins by painting a kaleidoscopic view of the Bechuana existence, which juxtaposes the way both the women and men lived their lives. There is no deliberate dual separation between the sexes that appears in *Things Fall Apart*. This is important because it indicates that both sexes are responsible for crafting the wholeness of the “Bechuana tribes (who) inhabited the extensive areas between Central Transvaal and the Kalahari dessert” (1978:25). The nation is described as patriarchal but this description does not ignore the existence of the women, an existence that is important for affirming patriarchy.

Whilst men had their own work which changed seasonally,

woman's work was never out of season. In the summer she cleared the cornfield of weeds and subsequently helped to winnow and garner the crops. In winter times she cut the grass and helped to renovate her dwelling. In addition to the inevitable cooking, basket making, weaving and all the art-painting for mural decorations were done by women. Childless marriages were as rare as freaks so, early and late

in summer and winter, during years of drought and plenty, every mother had to nourish her growing brood, besides fattening and beautifying her daughters for the competition of eligible swains. (1978:25)

This description makes the women's roles in their community very important. It shows that there is integration between what the women do and the daily existence. To those who may find the fattening of daughters for marriage offensive to the cause of women's emancipation Plaatje is quick to explain the high regard in which marriage is held

Fulfilling these multifarious duties of the household was not regarded as a drudgery by any means; on the contrary, the women looked upon marriage as an art; the daughter of a well known peasant, surrounded by all the luxuries of her mother's home, would be the object of commiseration if she were a long time finding a man. And the simple women of the tribes accepted wifhood and transacted their onerous duties with the same satisfaction and pride as an English artist would the job of conducting an opera. (1978:25-27)

The duality that is consistent throughout Plaatje's narrative is highlighted here. A daughter belongs to a man "well known peasant" as well as a woman "luxuries of mother's home". In the four different communities that we encounter in the narrative, we learn about the response of the menfolk as well as the womenfolk to any event. This presentation of the community as dual but not separate is a reconciliatory strategy that many writers fail to employ. It is also a way of expressing Plaatje's vision of equality through difference, equality that comes out in the narrative thematically and structurally.

The picturesque existence of the Bechuana people that Plaatje paints is soon disrupted by the Matabele invasion. The detailed description of the beautiful existence almost becomes ironical because of the disruption that follows. The invasion of Bechuanaland by Mzilikazi and the imposition of taxation on the people change the lives of a people that were previously accountable only to themselves. In a manner and light heartedness reminiscent

of *Things Fall Apart* we are informed that the Matabele not only bring a new form of administration but also new 'manners' that are 'offensive':

The victorious soldiers were in the habit of walking about in their birthday garb thereby forcing the modest Bechuana women and children to retire on each appearance of Matabele men. (1978:29)

This shock of the unusual can be likened to that of the women and children who run away from the egwugwu and the elders who are harassed by the *kotma* in *Things Fall Apart*. For Plaatje, this disconcerting behavior by the Matabele men is a harbinger of the terror that they can bring on a people who refuse to pay taxes to Mzilikazi. It is in stark contrast to the picture of equality that was painted in the description of the Barolong landscape. This opens up military power struggles that rupture the peaceful normal existence. This war is particularly different because it does not use women as booty but it places them right in the war as defenders of their lives. A war that is aimed at men in all aspects becomes a women's war as well.

The narrator makes it clear what it means to attack women when he reports that the Bechuana men "noticed with horror that the Matabele were not *fighting* men only, they were actually *spearing* fleeing women and children (1978:32) [emphasis mine]. The difference between "fighting" and "spearing" is supposed to convey willingness and unwillingness. Bechuana men are presented as accepting that the war is an inevitability to their existence hence they can fight to protect themselves, but the women are presented as not prepared for the war hence they become victimized, acted upon and "speared".

What Mhudi dismisses as “masculine affairs” later on as she retells her story become feminine issues as well because the battleground is the village and Langa’s army kills every Barolong they can lay their hands on. There is no separation between men and women and so the entrance of the soldiers in the village compound and attacking women marks the acknowledgement of women’s domestic spheres as inseparable from the historical national narrative. Women have not taken part in the decision to kill the tax collectors, but because they are part of a group that has challenged the Matabele they automatically get involved. Their lack of preparedness makes it very easy for the Matabele soldiers to massacre them in a manner unfamiliar to the Barolong ways of battle:

Ra-Thaga saw one of them killing a woman and as she fell back, the man grasped her little baby and dashed its skull against the trunk of a tree. The sight almost took his breath away. The next moment a woman fell beside a tree, her fall hastened by a stab from behind. She carried her baby in a spring buck skin, strapped to her back. The skin loosened as she fell, and a Matabele withdrawing the assegai from the mother’s side, pierced her child with it, and held the baby transfixed in the air. (1978:32)

The above description, which works with contrasts, is in direct conflict with the ideal that Plaatje paints of the Barolong. It inverts the earlier painting of women as artists of marriage and their work in the domestic arena, and makes them images instead manipulated by male artists of war. This shift automatically places women into active political spheres as opposed to the normal passive political contribution that they are supposed to make as significant members of communities. The use of the contrasting normal and cruel images of “little baby”- [helpless and innocent] “dashed its skull” [horrific], “woman”-[not a warrior] “stabbed from behind”- [victimized and objectified], “pierced child transfixed in the air” [horror], shows the detachment of the narrator. It is only through being impersonal it appears, that one can narrate such brutal separation

between mothers and their helpless babies. This disruption is a farewell to the old Barolong ways of doing things and an introduction to new ways, an excellent backdrop for the development of the character of Mhudi who is a survivor of this destruction.

The lambasting of the war and its nature is carried further when we are informed of the impetuosity of Langa who was leading the army. When Mhudi relates her story she underscores the victory of the Matabele army which waylaid the women as they tried to flee when she recounts:

We had not gone far out of Kunana when we found that the place was completely surrounded, and there was little hope of escape. Some women were already turning back but we, who came last had seen enough to satisfy us that it was better to meet our death endeavoring to get away. I shall never forget the happenings of that night. The screams of women and children as they met the Matabele hordes reminded me of the shambles of which my mother used to tell us, for up until then the women were unaware how carefully they were waylaid. There were five or six Matabele behind every little bush greeting a woman with a stab as she tried to pass a tree. And if one woman managed to pass while these gallant soldiers were engaged in slaying another woman and her children, there would be another soldier behind the next tree ready to probe her... (1978:40-41)

Mhudi's narration of events here is very personal compared to the earlier impersonal one of the narrator who talks about babies and women being slain. She emphasizes women as a group, "we" of victims and thus enables the narrative to single her out as a subject, and a survivor. As the narration progresses from the "we" to the "I" one begins to sense that Mhudi is a survivor out of her own innovativeness, her decision to feign death till the enemy is gone. The innovativeness shown by Mhudi here becomes consistent with her character throughout the narrative. Plaatje's objective with this forward thinking character could be meant to dispel the allegations that women are highly emotional and unreasonable.

Mhudi informs us that although the women were weaponless and therefore defenceless they did not all accept their inevitable deaths passively. Her cousin Baile who reunites with Mhudi at Thaba Nchu after surviving the onslaught retorts at one of the Matabele soldiers who has stabbed her:

Kill me you coward, go back and brag that you have killed a woman in kirtles. If that be your Zulu prowess, I admire the Bechuana trait of measuring strength with bearded men, and never defiling their spears with women's blood. (1978:40)

By standing up to the soldier who wants to murder her Baile deconstructs his prowess. Her success in doing so is demonstrated by the fact that before she finishes speaking one of the Matabele soldiers spears her from behind and at the same time killed his "comrade for allowing the dog of a Chuana woman time to curse his king's armies" (1978:40). Baile's criticism of the Matabele army could be meant to strengthen and reiterate Mhudi's criticism of the war. Baile's deconstruction gives her an important place in history and necessitates her survival as her bravery is essential in shaping future generations and their perception of war. Hence the Matabele soldier only manages to kill his compatriot whilst Baile is in her own words "picked" and "saved" and is significantly left with scars of the Matabele spears as history markers of her survival from the onslaught and therefore from victimisation. The confrontation that Baile has with the Matabele warrior is important because it meets the standards of bravery that are attributed to men in battle. She does not want to die retreating, but facing the enemy. When she is finally stabbed it is not her intention to be stabbed in the back. The Matabele warrior who stabs her again violates another rule of fairness in battle, he ambushes an unarmed woman.

The words that Baile utters complement the low regard in which Mhudi holds the Matabele's concept of war. In the passage quoted above where she narrates the events culminating in her meeting Ra-Thaga, she uses biting irony to belittle one of the armies that has gone down history as being accredited for its prowess and success on battle missions. Even when the Matabele kill women, they do not adhere to the methods of war that are supposed to make them valiant. One would interpret Mhudi's "gallant" in an ironic manner as she further adds that they were waylaying women by hiding behind the bushes for them. This would appear as though they are to some extent afraid of the women because an ambush can only be considered if the opposing side is also quite formidable.

What Mhudi and Baile's bravery also notes is the way women are made victims by their communities who do not prepare them for war by imagining them as outsiders to the decision making processes of history through war. Creating the illusion that women are safe from any harm and that the men of the community will always protect them is destructive as it shields the magnitude of the danger that women can be exposed to. Their lack of preparedness will make them helpless victims as does their exclusion from the important political decision making processes.

Baile's challenge makes her transcend victimhood. Mhudi, who has no one to save her, removes herself from the tainted war setting. She goes to find means of survival in a lonely forest, thereby refusing to be a victim. The removal of Mhudi from the destroyed domestic world of the Bechuana into the vast expanse of the wilderness is made easier because of the relative freedom that Mhudi enjoys in the Rolong world. The bush only

widens her horizons. The bush most significantly gives her the space and opportunity to tell her story from a brave woman's point of view.

It is important that Mhudi and Ra-Thaga meet outside the constraints of kinship relations and so they are able to choose each other and their marriage is not mediated or influenced by relatives. Plaatje creates this isolated space to make them have an ideal marital relationship, one that is even better than the normal Rolong marriage before the Ndebele invasion. This isolated space symbolises the dream of lack of war both at personal and large-scale political level. At personal level, when the two of them are alone together they do not have problems that they cannot negotiate and solve. When they meet other people however, this is no longer the case as will be discussed later on in this section.

From the beginning of their meeting Mhudi comes out as very assertive and decisive when she meets Ra-Thaga whilst running away from the lion. She tells him:

I have wondered through this lonely wilderness for days and nights, since my people were scattered at Kunana; I have lived on roots and bulbs and wild berries, yearning to meet some human being, and now that I have met you, you cannot leave me again so quickly. In fact, I am not quite certain that you are a man, but if you are a dream, I will stay with you and dream on while the vision lasts; whether you are man or ghost I have enjoyed the pleasure of a few words with you. I am prepared to see ten more lions with you rather than stay behind of my own free will. Walk on to the lion, I will follow you. (1978:35)

Here, Mhudi immediately subverts the traditional gender paradigm because she is the one who claims Ra-Thaga. They are the only survivors of the massacre at this point and it is only reasonable that they find comfort and strength in each other to deal with their loss.

Ra-Thaga is impressed with Mhudi's bravery. He hears Mhudi's challenge of the lion with
a

shiver. He believed that women were timid creatures, but here was one who was actually volunteering him to where the lion was, instead of commanding him to take her away from the man eater. (1978:35)

Ra-Thaga's hesitation at confronting the lion is necessary as it puts to test man's supposed abilities and emphasizes Mhudi's bravery. She even helps Ra-Thaga in his endeavour to frighten away the lion. Throughout his construction of Mhudi and Ra-Thaga as husband and wife, Plaatje humorously uses subversion by not fixing their behaviour in conventional gender myths. He sometimes even makes Ra-Thaga look the unreasonable one, showing that character traits are dependent on individual perceptions, and are not given because of a character's gender.

The physical description of Mhudi that follows immediately after the lion chasing incident becomes very important as it dispels any visualisation of masculinity that could be associated with Mhudi's bravery. Brian Willan (1984), testifies to this when he describes Mhudi as "a woman of great beauty, courage, wisdom and determination" (Willan 1984:358). Although the description by Willan could just be another stereotypical perception of how women are supposed to look, this portrayal of Mhudi by Plaatje is very important. It is consistent with how he wants to convey Mhudi to the reader. Many male writers have been guilty of equating strength in woman characters with masculinity, thereby making these characters honorary men. One figure that comes to mind is that of Ma Tau in Alex La Guma's *Time of the Butcherbird*. Ma Tau is involved in a process of conscientising the villagers about the importance of the land. She is advising them not to

accept dispossession and she is described in stark contrast to her effeminate brother who dances to the whims of the colonialists because he gets a stipend for being a warrant chief.

Ma Tau was

A heavy square woman, she looked as if she had been constructed out of blocks of dark wood of various sizes, the uppermost of which had carved with eye sockets, nose, nostrils, cheekbones, a great gash of a mouth and then sanded and polished to a shiny smoothness. She wore a dusty headcloth, a vast dress like a tent strapped around the middle with an old belt, and on her feet a man's boots, cracked and down at heel. She brandished a hand like a spade ... (La Guma 1979:45-46)

The woman's' mannish and almost animal like physical stature robs her of the ability to think and reason in her capacity as a woman and implies that she acts the way she does because she looks like a man. Not so with Mhudi who "had a magnificent figure. Her forehead completed the lovely contour of a slightly emaciated face...Her bewitching mouth and beautiful lips created a sense of charm..." (1978:37). Her bravery comes from her disposition not from her size and looks. The creation of such a feminine character by Plaatje suggests that femininity is not a deterrent to achievement, assertiveness and thoughtfulness, a fact that Okonkwo fails to acknowledge with his daughter Ezinma.

The relationship between the two survivors, Mhudi and Ra-Thaga becomes one based on respect and companionship. Mhudi and Ra-Thaga share equally their experiences. Plaatje seems to be suggesting through their relationship that gender socialization can play an important role in division of labour but it does not necessarily have to entail subordination of women. Mhudi immediately assumes the domestic duties of preparing food, stating that

though I have lost my people, I have not lost my manners. Men first; you have the right of way. You tell me brother, how you came here in time to save me from the lion, and I will give you my story afterwards. (1978:38)

For Mhudi, Ra-Thaga deserves respect as a man and in this instance it is respect that he justly deserves since he demonstrated his bravery by protecting her from the lion. In this scene, it appears Plaatje's vision of equality comes out through mutual respect. The significance of maintaining one's masculinity or femininity is emphasised. Mhudi can still be the preparer of food and Ra-Thaga the protector and hunter and the respect of these duties forms the basis of their understanding.

The existence they have created for themselves is presented as an ideal, championing a monogamous marriage as opposed to a polygamous one. Mhudi reflects:

did they not say that a man is by nature polygamous and could never be trusted to be true to only one wife? But here is one as manly as you could wish, and I have never, never seen a husband of any number of wives as happy as mine is with me alone! (1978:60-61)

As will be elaborated later, the monogamous relationship is foregrounded as a backdrop to the polygamous Mzilikazi one. Monogamy and the nuclear family are suggested to be the basis of mutual understanding between people as Mhudi and Ra-Thaga are seen giving time to each other's opinions, a scene we never see in Okonkwo's polygamous existence. The isolated placing of Ra-Thaga and Mhudi is conveniently manipulated by the author as it gives a window to explaining the multi-faceted role a wife and husband can play in each other's lives, especially mental stimulation which is outside what is normally represented about relationships between men and women. This is an unusual early novel where we are presented with a female character who is talking not to ask for something from a man but to express her own opinions and views.

Such is Mhudi's closeness to her husband that she warns him about Ton Qon whom she suspects of having evil intentions. But because the couple is no longer living in isolation but with other people, Ra-Thaga starts to pay heed to the generalisations that have been created about women by his environment. He takes Mhudi's warning to be "some idiosyncrasy, peculiar to women" (1978:73). The fact that Mhudi's warning turns out to be authentic and that she is the one who rescues him is meant to highlight that Ra-Thaga's weakness does not come out as an individual weakness but one that is spurred by group identification. From the moment they get into contact with other people, Ra-Thaga is painted as an individual who can easily be influenced in the negative, revealing lack of strong will. This is in direct contrast to his wife Mhudi, and to his behavior in the isolated setting. Mhudi stays as strong and determined as ever whilst Ra-Thaga's weaknesses help to strengthen her strengths. Such is her strength and determination and sense of righteousness that she refuses to have Ton Qon's cattle until the Quorana chief gives her his and takes the ones she has refused. This act in the text shows the beginning of ownership of property that Mhudi embarks on until the end of the text.

Mhudi is again used to show the brutalities of the Boers in the text. Ra-Thaga on the other hand, has it seems, nothing but admiration for the Boers:

Almost every time he went up to the Hoek he returned to his house with tales of fresh virtues he had discovered among the Boers. Their unerring shooting, their splendid horsemanship, the dexterity of Boer women with the needle; the beautiful aroma of the food they cooked, and the lustre of their cooking utensils. (1978:115)

Once again Ra-Thaga is presented as the one who has the impaired judgement. He gets carried away by surface behavior and does not search deeper and analyse more closely, as

closely as Mhudi does. When she goes up the Hoek with her husband she is impressed that de Villiers can speak her language but this impression is quickly thwarted when she witnesses the punishment imposed on a Hottentot girl. This incident disturbs her so much that she tells all her visitors:

My husband's friends! They looked at the girl squirming with pain, with her ear between two irons and they peacefully smoked their pipes like a crowd of people watching a dance. Give me a Matabele rather. He at any rate, will spear you to death and put an end to your pains. (1978:117)

This judgement of the Boers and the Matabele is not emotionally induced as it is not fixed. Mhudi is able to judge individuals within races that are considered to be inhuman separately as she manages to create friendship with Hannetjie and Nandi. Of Hannetjie she manages to comment "the Boers are cruel but they sometimes breed angels" (1978:162). The cruelty of the Boers that Mhudi exposes is one that is not found in the history books that always emphasise the barbarity of the native and the justification they have of treating them as slaves. It becomes another way in which Plaatje rewrites history, a task that is facilitated by Mhudi's keen eye. Mhudi's comments about the way the Boer women treat their workers help to bring out the ways the Boer women have security and advantage over other women because of their privileged racial position. They can easily abuse the black women, and they can relieve themselves of the drudgery of housework because they get black servants. This privileged position is what prevents Mhudi and Hannetjie from having a friendship that is based on equality. Hannetjie can only regard Mhudi as a slave, an *ayah*. "She said if she lived to have little ones of her own, surely they would be proud to have for an ayah such a noble mosadi as Mhudi" (1978:183). The advantageous

position that the white woman has over her worker is an extension of national history because it is determined by the public historical male configurations of race.

Thus far, Mhudi has been the central Barolong woman and through her we get an alternative view of history that shows women's presence and visibility in historical processes. She gives us an insight into the Matabele offensive that is different from her husband's. She also gives us different opinions of the Quorana and the Boers that is different from her husband's, at the same time singling out the 'good' particular people from generally potentially 'bad' races. All these incidents make Mhudi the central figure around whom the narrative coheres. She is assigned the role of getting in contact with the diverse groups in the story to show how women can have diverse subjectivities and have the ability to explore possibilities within their reach. This is different from the one sided perception of history and people that is shown through Ra-Thaga, a view that influences most historical texts that show only one unchanging perspective. She is able to meet with the different groups of people because of her mobility. She does not allow motherhood to tie her down. Her cousin Baile supports her by looking after her children.

In contrast to the suffering women at the hands of the Matabele, the beautiful existence of Mhudi and Ra-Thaga at Re Nosi, we have another picture of the lives of women and mothers in the Zulu kingdom. The text informs us that when the Zulu army is celebrating its victory,

The infection was not limited to the men. Long files of Matabele women were descending the hills along the tortuous footpaths leading into the capital from every direction. They carried on their heads earthen pots full of beer for the

entertainment of the conquering heroes, singing at the same time praises of the victors. Nearly every one of the files of singing women was headed by a group of sycopanting cymbalists, ringing or beating time with their iron cymbals in a rhythm with their steps...The women of the city were busy in between their huts, outside the frenzied crowd of warriors. Their business was to cook and prepare the eatables... (1978:50-51)

Although the women are also involved in the celebrations for them it is not so much the destruction of the Barolong but the cattle that are brought. In this case there will be an abundance of meat and so "no one, much less a woman, cared to know the cause of the raid, for the end had amply justified the means" (1978:50). However not all the Matabele people condone war and this is brought out by the parting conversation between Mhudi and Nandi. Upon being asked what will convince men to stop fighting and killing each other, Nandi replies "nothing my sister, ... so long as there are two men left on earth there will still be war" (1978:165). Loathe war as she might Nandi cannot influence Mzilikazi to stop fighting because he only gets his advice on war issues from his regiments. Nandi's statement about war being masculine is powerful as it intentionally signifies women as more forward thinking, preferring peaceful protest to bloody and wasteful wars. It can be regarded as a powerful narrative technique to hint that native people do not have to destroy each other, but maybe unite against opposing forces.

Apart from the public display of celebrations of the Matabele victory we are taken to another setting of polygamous marriages that is different from the one that is painted by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe's women coexist peacefully in a polygamous marriage but Plaatje shows us another version of polygamy. The different depictions here cannot be used to discredit Achebe for misrepresentation. Speculatively, it can be argued

that polygamy can actually work to the advantage of some women. It relieves them of the sexual demands of their husbands and allows them space to pursue other things like travelling for conferences if they are academics. It may cause trouble however as Plaatje shows, when the women have something to benefit from the squabbles. Okonkwo's family has nothing to gain from Okonkwo whereas with Mzilikazi's family there is the kingship at stake. The squabbles in Mzilikazi's family among his wives may be used to show how domestic everyday occurrences play a major role in influencing the public and political. The mothers' antagonisms come about because they are competing to be the ones who want to reproduce history by having one of their sons as successors.

Nandi is Mzilikazi's favourite wife and this draws hatred from the co-wives. Despite the affections she receives from Mzilikazi Nandi is stereotyped as the childless woman. This becomes a source of mockery from the other wives, making her wish for a child desperately. She could

willingly have given up her beauty and stately mien and forgotten her skill in cookery, in return for the birth of a baby as a present to her husband and his people. She would gladly have gone through fire and water if the end of it was to nurse a royal child of her own. She took counsel with famous herbalists from Basutoland, Swaziland, Bechuanaland and Bapediland; she went through painful and disgusting ordeals on their advice, just for the hope of becoming a mother, but these wizards accomplished nothing beyond her filling her heart with a succession of hopes, each of which in turn proved worthless. (1978:92-93)

All this pain, like the pain experienced by Achebe's Ekwefi and Hove's Marita is caused by the pressure the communities exert on women to prove their womanhood by having children. The jealousy of her co-wives drives Nandi away, giving her an opportunity to meet with Mhudi and express her condemnation of the war. Her absence however causes

great separation anxiety for Mzilikazi who embarks on a reign of terror to compensate for his loss. Nandi and Mhudi meet when both are seeking their husbands who have been uprooted from their homes because of the war. It is interesting to note that although Nandi could do anything for a child, ultimately, it is the love that she has for her husband that gives her a child, not the demands society has on her. She triumphs because of the high regard in which she views her husband, supporting him and justifying to Mhudi that there are reasons why he wars other nations.

In the Boer camp, women are also portrayed to be showing initiative in terms of defending their nationality. Circumstances affect the traditional domestic role ascribed to women when the Matabele attack the Boers. We are informed that if "Cilliers's women had not helped the Boers, they would not have defied Gubuza's army and Schalk would not be here to tell the tale" (1978:110). The Boer women are effective in their attack because they have weapons at their disposal unlike the Barolong women who were just running away to seek refuge unarmed. The incident with the Boer women challenges the set gender roles as it shows that a lot of possibilities can be opened for women if they have access to technology needed to face different challenges. This representation goes a long way in addressing the invisibility that has characterised Boer women's absence in historical processes. When they have been accounted for they have been shown as victims as Debora Gaitskell and Elaine Unterhalter (1989) have argued in their paper on "A Comparative Analysis of Nation, Race and Motherhood in Afrikaner Nationalism and the ANC". Gaitskell and Unterhalter argue that although women were actively involved in the Boer wars they are constructed in history books and statues that represent the wars as victims

that needed to be protected. Plaatje's novel exposes this misperception and misrepresentation in his portrayal of them.

Plaatje therefore is interested in showing how women have been excluded from historiography when they have formally and informally decided the course that history should take. Through his depictions and inscriptions of women into history he has managed to suggest the ways in which women can create possibilities for themselves in any historical epoch. He chooses and shows the war as providing the stage for the heroism of women. All women in the four communities we are presented with create politically significant meaning out of the domestic, showing that the domestic is inescapably an integral part of public politics. There is a closure in the text that does not appear in *Things Fall Apart*. The individual withdraws from the public political to the private domestic and political. Love triumphs over war. Mhudi in the end wants Ra-Thaga never to leave her again. To this request Ra-Thaga replies,

I have had my revenge and ought to be satisfied; from thenceforth, I shall have no ears for the call of war or the chase; my ears shall be open to one call only - the call of your voice. (1978:188)

The political significance of this statement has been shown by the way the statement was changed in an earlier version of the book. Tim Couzens and Stephen Gray (1978) state that a publisher changes the statement where Ra Thaga says he will only listen to the voice of Mhudi to say that he will listen to the voice of the chief. This change is another of the many that emphasise the threat that this novel has had on nationalist, masculine discourse. The refusal to answer to the call of the chief's voice shows strength in personal decisions and a refusal of the discourse of nationalism that expects sacrifice even death by its

subjects in defence of a nation. Family choice is meaningful because it is not a sacrifice but a personal decision.

The love that Ra-Thaga and Mhudi have has created new opportunities for Mhudi whose wandering in search of her husband has led her to acquire a wagon from Sarel. This wagon, like the cattle she got from the Quorana king, increases her ownership of property. It could be symbolic of better economic prosperity for her and her husband. Although Jane Starfield (1991) has found the wagon threatening because she claims it is a symbol of Boer conquest and a poor substitute for the Rolong land, I find it a sign of hope, a symbol of the wandering trader. It is a suggestion that the Boers had something to give in spite of everything that they took away.

Finally, a very significant aspect worthy of note in the construction of Mhudi is the way her identity is not attached to that of her children. It is mentioned cursorily that she has children, but her motherhood does not tie her down. She is made to define her own space within which she wants to mother, and this gives her the freedom to retain her own personal individuality. Her motherhood is not a male construct, or a role imposed on her by the community.

Through the use of women, Achebe and Plaatje have managed to unravel their stories about the transition of different communities. They have treated gender not as fixed and immutable but as categories that can be contested and negotiated. This approach to writing has produced a lot of political undercurrent that acknowledges women's history as

part of the general history. It also gives credit to the ways in which women have been actively involved in making their presence felt in the making and development of civilisation in their nations.

Chapter Three

A Struggle for Whose Liberation? - Gender and War in *Bones*

This chapter will argue that in Chenjerai Hove's *Bones* (1990), a national liberation movement is used as a metaphor for the depiction of issues of women's domination and emancipation. Liberation movements are presented as being in conflict with female emancipation. Hove uses the war to provide a setting through which the mothers and women tackle and deal with issues affecting their position as members of an "imagined community". The war as a metaphor for women's domination and emancipation is appropriate since the war itself deals with matters of domination and liberation. It provides space for an analysis of where nationalism and feminism, discourses that both deal with oppression and liberation overlap in conflict, with nationalism overshadowing and trying to suppress the emancipation of women. In this regard, Hove breaks new ground by offering an alternative version of the concept of national independence from colonial rule. He blatantly exposes and criticizes liberation processes that do not concern themselves with the liberation of women, when as he shows in his novel, women play major roles in the liberation processes, a fact that has been ignored by many literatures.

The working definition of an African nationalist novel for this chapter will be that of a novel that sets out to build and reconstruct a nation that has been torn apart by some force. This process can be accomplished by preaching one homogeneous unity or a heterogeneous one that does not ignore different contesting voices. Efforts at unifying the nation that ignore difference, I argue, are based on pretences and hopes that do not

acknowledge the importance of difference and diversity as parts of a nation building process. National literature that decides to take a more critical stance than the euphoric one can have the courage to disrupt accepted themes in favor of more contesting ones that reject the concept of total unity in a nation. Such narratives will be able to point out how nations are “invented” and “imagined”. This literature

is a literature of combat, because it moulds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; it is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space. (Fanon 1963:193)

Most literature in English about the liberation war in Zimbabwe happens to be from a masculine point of view. Typical of war literature that comes out after and during the wars, this literature usually valorizes the achievements of the freedom fighters, most of them males. In the process, the intoxicated celebration of victory ignores the place of women in that war. If their contribution to the war is not accounted for in the war novels, women's place in an independent nation becomes vague. The writers' view of the war becomes one sided, making representations in fiction about the nation what Anne McClintock calls "a repository of male hopes, male aspirations and male privilege" (McClintock 1995:353). McClintock makes this observation when she analyses the domesticated space that discourses of nationalism allocate to the family and women in her book *Imperial Leather*. The model that she describes dominates war literature in Zimbabwe. The image of the heroic freedom fighter with victimized women forming the backdrop of his heroism can be found in works such as Edmund Chipamaunga's *A Fighter for Freedom* (1983), and Garikai Mutasa's *The Contact* (1985), to name a few.

Hove is one of the first writers to write about the liberation war in terms of gender (Rino Zhuwarara 1996). Whilst agreeing with Zhuwarara's identification of the significance of gender in *Bones*, I differ with him where he suggests that Hove has not gone far enough in his handling of these gender issues in a war novel. Zhuwarara writes:

... the roles assigned to women characters hardly break new ground in the context of Zimbabwean, and indeed, African literary discourse. What *Bones* successfully depicts is the frighteningly awesome extent to which the African woman has suffered at the hands of the colonialists as well as at those of their men folk. At its best the text captures the prodigious energy of Marita, her passion for life, her love for her fellow sufferers and her deep yearning for justice and a fulfilling existence. It seems deprivation and denial are the hallmarks characteristic of the life of women caught up in a colonial and neo-colonial context. As such the text appeals to our conscience but it does not go on to suggest that women can indeed determine history and improve their lot in life. (Zhuwarara 1996:41)

What Zhuwarara seems to suggest in the above quote is that if Hove had preached sermons about what women should do to emancipate themselves in an independent Zimbabwe, he would have achieved greater impact than making suggestive hints that give room for several interpretations as he does in his novel. This position in many ways underscores what Hove has done with the women's suffering in the context of a war of 'liberation'. Hove's approach of dealing with gender and war makes it easier for my argument to engage with the overlapping colonial domination/liberation and patriarchal domination/emancipation dualities at textual level.

I argue here that Hove to a great extent sets a precedent in creating female characters whose roles provide an opening for a critical discussion of the roles assigned to women in conventional nationalist discourses. The conflict between a war of liberation and issues of women's emancipation can be questioned through an analysis of Hove's use of multiple

and predominantly female voices to narrate a female perspective of the colonial situation that is different from that of males. The female voices are used to interrogate the issues of the family as a figure of national unity and the domestication of females in stagnated backward linear time and space.

The stereotype of madness is used as a tool to distinguish between the controlled weak and the more powerful. At the same time, it is used to evade control of freedom of speech. Madness is subverted because the mad narrator fails to be silenced. It is through her eyes and voice that the narration unfolds. Fanon's extensive and thorough work on the psychotic disorders of war situations is important and useful in elaborating my argument about the centrality of Janifa's madness in the novel. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) Fanon documents and explores the psychotic disorders that are a form of reactionary psychosis to different incidents encountered by patients in the Algerian liberation war. He looks among other cases at how torturers are disturbed by their acts of torture and how some men become impotent after their wives have been raped by the opposition. What is characteristic about all the cases that Fanon deals with is that they are a reaction to the violence that pervades in a war situation. With some cases Fanon argues that practitioners fail to specifically point out what could be the cause of the patients' psychotic behavior. These cases he calls psychosomatic pathologies because the violent atmosphere of the war causes them. An analysis into the causes of psychiatric disorders is important to explain why in this case Janifa is made a mad narrator.

An analysis of the way in which Janifa's madness is used as an indicator to her empowerment will be made through the use of Lynette Jackson's 1998 seminar paper on madness in colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe. In this paper Jackson analyzes ways in which discourses of psychiatric practice and healing have overlapped with those of power and authority in colonial Zimbabwe. Her case study is the Ingutsheni Mental Hospital that opened in Bulawayo on June 16 1908. Jackson points out that this institution was a creation of the white colonial government to create racial and social boundaries. Not all black males institutionalized were mad, some were removed off the streets for loitering. It was feared the loiterers caused a threat to white women. The problem at the institution came when two vagrant women were arrested and brought to Ingutsheni. With this case, Jackson stresses that it was difficult for the institution because it had not planned for women,

a dilemma which reflected a certain level of denial and unwillingness on the part of the authorities to accept that the state bore any responsibility for the care and control of African females, a group not formally incorporated into the colonial political economy and laborers ... (Jackson 1998:11)

African women were not expected to venture into colonial spaces. Fortunately for the state, a husband claimed one of the women and the one who remained was used as an experiment to see what could be done when African women appeared unexpectedly in colonial spaces. Being an unclaimed woman, she could easily be shifted back and forth between the mental institution and jail if the institution needed space for male inmates. Jackson's analysis can usefully be related to *Bones*. I would like to argue that her views could be used to illuminate and magnify the extent to which a point of view that does not relegate mad women into the darkness of silence is an example.

As the Ingutsheni institution grew and women became part of the system, the medical staff began experimenting to heal the mentally ill. What Jackson finds intriguing about this experimental treatment is that when there was a commission of inquiry into malpractice by a doctor, only four male Africans out of three hundred and eighty seven were asked to submit evidence on how they felt about the treatment. No women were asked about how they felt so "...while all African voices in the asylum were outrageously neglected, African female voice was aggressively denied" (Jackson 1998:25).

The argument made by Jackson is useful as it gives me the background to how repressive the mental asylums were during the colonial period and how this repression is shown to spill into independent Zimbabwe in *Bones*. It seems mental asylums were used by the governments involved to further isolate and silence completely those who were assigned as mad. It is important to note that colonialism did not in any simple way cause mental illness. It just created a place for the mentally ill as a means of control and a way of getting cheap labor from the rehabilitated patients. Jackson gives evidence that there were mentally ill patients before colonial intrusion who were kept tied to trees at home by their relatives so that they did not hurt themselves. However, the number of mentally ill patients increased dramatically during the colonial period, (perhaps because of the violent "atmosphere") from two hundred and fourteen Africans in 1925 to three hundred and twenty seven in 1931 (Jackson 1998:15). Jackson's analysis especially where it discusses the silence of mad women and the claiming of women by husbands, is significant if used as a model to analyse the psychiatric condition of the protagonist in *Bones*. Through this inquiry I intend to determine how Janifa's condition is used by Hove to challenge

perceptions on female hysteria, confusion and exclusion, conditions that can be used to silence and muffle a subject's presence and existence.

It can be argued that Janifa is the most important character in *Bones*. Not only is she used by Hove to break the silence that is supposed to engulf those assigned as 'mad', but her madness is also a tool for liberating her from the oppressive shackles of tradition. Although Janifa is not a mother, I use her as the focal point of my discussion as one who provides the link to the diverse mothers in the text. Her relationship with Marita is very much maternally based. The absence of Marita's son makes Janifa a substitute child for Marita, not only because she is a young woman but also because it was Marita's son's intention to make Janifa Marita's daughter in law. Janifa is the one who keeps Marita's spirit of fighting and search for freedom alive. She is the one who makes us interpret Marita's death not as a sign of defeat by the new patriarchal order but as a beginning of a more directed and purposeful struggle by the younger Janifa. Janifa is the center for coherence for the narrative and it is through her that relations between mothers and daughters and sons unfold in the narrative.

The seemingly schizophrenic² structure of *Bones* has puzzled some of Hove's critics like Tim McLoughlin (1991). McLoughlin does not find it clear what is happening in the text in terms of time and movement of the text. On the contrary I find the text clear as I look at it from the point of view that Janifa does most of the reconstruction of events in her 'ill' mind. The paradox of her madness comes out in the way she is made to take an

authoritative stance by Hove. She becomes the literary mad woman who, similar to Shakespeare's mad people, is a disguised philosopher.

Arguably, the fragmented treatment of time in *Bones*, a national narrative, might be an effort to disrupt ways in which conventional time in nationalist discourses is regarded as linear. There is supposed to be a forward movement into progression and modernity that favors the male nationals. This progression is made possible by the mummification of women into traditional time that is already in the past. A linear presentation of time causes problems as it exposes the tension of the retreat to tradition and advance into progressive modernization characteristic of the making of some new nations. This progressive approach is very ironical as it is a perpetuation of patriarchal privileges, that do not encourage change for the woman nationals. McClintock argues that it is during this tense moment usually at independence where there is need by the nation to be modern and to cling to its traditions that women are fixed in time. She argues that women are expected to be the authentic body of national tradition, inert, backward looking and natural, while men advance into the future and become more modern. These tensions between tradition and modernity, I propose can be used to explain part of the reasons for Janifa's psychosis.

Janifa's illness can be some form of reactionary psychosis to the physical violence imposed on her by Chisaga and then the attempted sexual abuse by the medicine man who is supposed to heal her. Her rape and attempted rape bring to question the difficulty that victims face in discourses of rape versus traditional conceptualization of the nature of

² The plot of novel does not unfold in a linear and straightforward chronological order. It adopts a

sexual relations between males and females.³ Janifa starts questioning things when she has been raped and that is when her mother gets worried about her lack of "womanliness". We are informed:

To the medicine man, my mother said I had too many bad things in my head. She says my head is full of lizards, worms, snails, bad roots and half moons. She says the things I say in my sleep must never be heard from the lips of one so young. Things that make the chest swell, the heart beat and the hair of the head move like the beard of a cat...Give her some herbs to calm her mind, give her some herbs to steady her down so that she can grow up to be a good woman. It is a shame if a young woman like this grows up to be like a flame in the village. (1990:93)

Janifa's mother not only wants Janifa to conform to the values that she herself cherishes. Janifa suspects she was part of the plan to have her raped by Chisaga because she wanted to get food from Manyepo's kitchen through Chisaga. Thus she is disappointed when Janifa refuses Chisaga's further intentions with her. It seems for the mother, it is not enough that she has helped Chisaga escape the arm of the law by siding with him and intending Janifa to be his second wife. She also tries to aggressively mould Janifa into a 'good woman' by asking the medicine man to cool her mind with herbs so that she can be steeply stuck in traditional behavior and not become the new 'bad' woman.

What we are presented with in this scene I argue, is the way mothers are used as cultural reproducers of nations by socializing their daughters into passive woman that are forever

modernist rupturing of time, such that sometimes it is confusing to tell when the events are happening.

³ In a University of Zimbabwe Publication edited by Julie Stewart and Alice Armstrong (1990) entitled *The Legal Situation of Women in Southern Africa*, J. Stewart, W. Ncube, M. Maboreke and A. Armstrong explain how difficult it is to prove rape in the Zimbabwean Legal system. They say that substantive as well as procedural problems can be associated with rape situations. The substantive problems concern the definition of rape, whilst the procedural ones are in regard to the trial situation itself. To put Janifa's situation in this Zimbabwean legal situation, I suggest that it will be difficult for her to stand trial if her own mother is supporting the man who raped her. The connection I make here is simply that of Zimbabwe and not the historical time that Armstrong et al deal with

at the bidding of their men folk. Hove's representation becomes different from the usual as it criticises this behavior. It is exposing the way mothers can be used to help advance male selfish projects. Janifa's mother is emphasizing the cultural boundaries of gender. Floya Anthias & Nira Yuval-Davis, (1989) propose that mothers induce boundaries in children. They argue that as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities, women reproduce boundaries of ethnicity by educating their young ones correctly about their place in history. As far as her mother is concerned Janifa as a woman should not interpret sex as rape, but as an act of giving men their pleasure. As a result of this, Chisaga may not be arrested for doing what the mother considers giving the child "the first pains of pleasure...We like Chisaga very much. He eats here every day. He is not a bad man" (1990:92).

That Janifa and her mother have different interpretations of Janifa's violation shows the difference in perception that the two women have about womanhood and the rights of the individual to the law and protection of their being. Janifa is above the traditional expectations of womanhood. Chisaga might have used the rape as a way to subdue her, but this does not happen. The rape actually fuels the fire that is already in Janifa through Marita's teachings about respecting and honoring one's body and not letting men violate it.

Marita's voice, even when she is dead continues to speak to the living Janifa. She advises her:

To fight on is all right, but a good fighter knows when to postpone the fight in order to sharpen the knives for a renewed fight. Young girl, breathe the breadth of your rest so that you can meet sunrise with the new fight in your muscles. That is

the way to fight. That is the way to walk the path whose destination you do not know. (1990:100-101)

It seems in this quote that Marita is suggesting that the effort by women to find a place in an independent nation is a battle that women have to fight alone because of the betrayal by their male counterparts whom they fought the war of liberation side by side with. The women's contribution to the struggle has been forgotten after an independence that expects women to retreat to traditional times. In this independent nation women who are considered to be deviating from the confined domestic space are labeled "prostitutes" and "witches" like what happens to Marita and the unknown woman in the city where they venture into bureaucratic male spaces to try and get Marita's son back.

Janifa's battle is a continuation and elaboration on Marita's as it appears to be more organized than Marita's. Janifa starts by disowning her mother who let her down, and this first step is a refusal of tradition. If a daughter refuses her mother then she is breaking the link with her mother, refusing to be the 'good' wife and mother who cannot do anything to determine the direction of her life. Struggle alone she has already begun and she does not hesitate to ask her mother:

What mountain have I not climbed mother...What mountain? What river have I not crossed? What river has not drowned me? What fire has not eaten me? Eating my fingers all the time like those finger-like pieces of meat which Chisaga brought you from Manyepo's kitchen. Mother, every flower has its season. It will bloom when its heart of seasons says you must bloom. I am the flower of this season, mother. Nobody can stop me blooming. (1990:107-8)

The hyperbolic expressions used in the above passage "What river has not drowned me? What fire has not eaten me?" are meant to heighten the suffering that Janifa has gone through. However, she refuses to let this suffering subdue her. Rather, she uses it as

motivation to assert her ability to change her own life, to bloom into something new. The road may be thorny, but she is prepared to travel it alone.

Having denounced her treacherous mother, Janifa goes on to denounce yet another institution that imprisons some women in domestic spaces. Marita's son tries to persuade Janifa to marry him when he comes from the war. When the traditional voice in him starts speaking to her in proverbs she tells him "I have nothing to do with proverbs in this house where people with bad heads are kept. Nothing to do with that because nobody listens" (Hove 1990:108). Proverbs are part of the old order that has been inherited by the younger generation and Janifa is trying to dissociate herself from this tradition. This old order dictates that she should be married so that the parents eat cattle. She vows that she will not marry if she will not eat those cattle herself. This way, she adds value to her sense of self by refusing to be manipulated.

Janifa's refusal to marry a freedom fighter in the text is a significant turning point from the nature of canonical national narratives. Freedom fighters are valorized but in their struggle for liberation they do not seem to consider the liberation of women. Brenda Cooper has argued that there has been a "...tradition in African politics of rejecting sexual politics as a luxury within the urgencies of national liberation struggles" (Brenda Cooper 1997:26). While her argument is particularly helpful since she uses it in a similar context as my own when she looks at a postcolonial situation in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, a different but relevant context has brought similar observations about gender and liberation movements. Zoë Wicomb has used a situation where dancing women in a band have no

instruments and their voices echo in the background singing about freedom. This is in Jameson Hall at the University of Cape Town whilst people are waiting for a revolutionary to speak about the new South African constitution. She calls their "grinding of hips and shaking of breasts" a "display-while-we-wait, the pre-text, which speaks of putting gender on the backboiler while matters of national liberation are dealt with..." (1990:44). These comments by the two scholars are just some that look at the suspension of gender equality issues in favor of national liberation. In light of these arguments male freedom fighters could be seen as hindrances to the fight for women's independence. If Janifa were to get out of the asylum by virtue of marriage to the freedom fighter, then she would have failed to rescue herself and removed credibility from her strength. She would have heaped all credibility on the freedom fighter, repeating the cycle of images of the helpless woman victim who needs the strong male to rescue her.

Nothing much has been said about Marita's son except the information that he has been somehow physically maimed. Zhuwarara finds it a pity that Hove does not bother to dramatize how the generation of Marita's son becomes radical and different from the older and more timid one. This is revealing of the extent to which his sympathies go with regards to issues of female emancipation. This is so especially when he appears to be so concerned that Hove does not adequately handle feminist issues in his novel. It could be argued that Hove intentionally chooses not to give much attention to Marita's son because his novel is about women's efforts to transcend the roles national discourse has almost always ascribed for them. Marita's son does not have a place in this transcendence because his efforts to marry Janifa are efforts to tame her by making her create a national family

that will perpetuate the imaginary and illusory figure of a national unity. When Janifa refuses a family, I argue that this is Hove's way of offering us a more radical symbol than that of the family as a figure of national solidarity. He is suggesting that national unity can come from individual contesting voices and not the pretence of a perfect nuclear family. Janifa's refusal to marry Marita's son further places him on the margins of history. This gesture could be meant to suggest that like the women who fought and were forgotten, the freedom fighter's place in independent Zimbabwe is also very uncertain.

Although Janifa is tied up with chains in the asylum, she tells Marita in her imagination that she has already unshackled the chains that bind her. This unshackling is metaphorical. She has declared herself that she will not be dictated to by those who have classified her as mad. Doing so would be giving them the mandate to decide her fate for her, a situation that would give them control over her. She would rather determine her own fate. What we have in Janifa then, is the determination to fight for her individual freedom and carry on what was started by Marita. When she says, "But they killed you just like that. How can my soul rest? How can my body rest when my soul is not ready to rest? (Hove 1990:122), she is exhibiting the resilience that surfaces out of the need to perpetuate the memory of an individual whom she looked up to. Marita's significance to Janifa makes her defy death the same way Nehanda did when she was executed and she claimed that her bones would rise "in the spirit of war" and "compose new war songs and fight on" (Hove 1990:53). Nehanda became inspirational and her speech before her execution was used in one of the most popular war songs in Zimbabwe during and after the liberation war. This song and

other inspirational ones about the war can be seen in Alec Pongweni's 1982 *Songs that Won the Liberation Struggle*.

The links that Janifa makes between her life and Marita's suggest struggle and unease. They expose the ways in which Marita fought for individual emancipation in colonial and patriarchal situations that were struggling to stay alive during a war of liberation. The magnitude of her suffering under this colonial situation has been regarded by Zhuwarara as that of a

singular woman in African fiction, an African version of the legendary Sisyphus who is forever carrying the burdens of history with all the pain and suffering that role entails. (Zhuwarara 1996:37)

Zhuwarara adds in his argument that Marita's suffering is exacerbated by her inability to have more children. I disagree with Zhuwarara on this point and would like to argue that I interpret Marita's inability to have more children as some form of unconscious biological protest against both the colonial settler economy and the liberation movement. As a biological reproducer, Marita is expected to produce children and rear them to provide manpower to work in Manyepo's fields. Manyepo is always reprimanding her for not⁴ having any successors to work on his farm when she dies. In this context, we see how settler economies want to appropriate black women's mothering to their own advantage in a manner that leads to objectification of the women whose relationship with them is based

⁴ Discussing the importance of babies in national causes but in different situations, Anna Davin (1978) documents how 18th century England put so much significance in children as the future generation that women were given material incentives to have babies. Yuval - Davis and Anthias also look at how some states could pay women of certain racial groups to produce babies. If nations and groups of people need babies so badly, failure to have those babies, whether consciously or not, can be interpreted as some form of resistance because a woman's body would be refusing to conform to the needs of a patriarchal order.

entirely on a cash nexus. Jacklyn Cock (1980:232) has argued in her *Maids and Madams* that in the South African apartheid era, the system of racial domination "must be related to the capitalist system of production and class structure..." a deduction that can be used to explain Manyepo's relationship with his workers. He is forthright about his intentions with the black people's reproductive capacity. He

once beat Marume because he does not have young children who would take over from you the work you are doing...They even say Manyepo asked another man to sleep with you if he can't give you children himself. (1990:29)

The black mother here is presented in her yielding capacity where she must provide for the upkeep of others. Instead of married people having babies, the fact that it is functional makes Manyepo deduce that it should be a process of the male "giv[e]ing" the female babies. If reproduction is viewed this way, it becomes an impersonal act that is supposed to be functional and exploitative. It is not only the settler economy that expects Marita to have children not for her satisfaction and pleasure but for other people's uses.

The liberation movement also expects manpower from the black population, and in songs that were sung during the war, the mother is not only encouraged to be brave, but to sacrifice her children and make them children of the land (Pongweni:1982). Irene Staunton's (1991) documentation of stories told by women survivors of the war shows that it was not only providing their children as fodder to the belligerent's guns that was expected of the mothers. They took over the home front aspect of the war and in their nurturant ways were able to sustain the freedom fighters whom they did not know with the hope that some other mother was looking after their child somewhere. The feeding and clothing of the freedom fighters was a very significant contribution to the war. Hove

attests in his interview with Flora Veit Wild published in *Patterns of Poetry in Zimbabwe* (1988) where Wild asked him if he was actively involved in the war that:

the struggle was not fought with guns only. There were many fronts to it. And if by 'active' you mean carrying guns, I think you narrow the meaning too much to give you a good overview of what the struggle really involved...the war was fought with guns as well as food and other materials...(Wild 1988:36)

This aspect of the war, where the mothers give their services free of charge, clashes with some theorisation that lambasts the appropriation of motherhood by male projects to their advantages (Cherryl Walker, 1982). It is also treacherous because in Hove's novel, women sacrifice, but the government after independence does not seem to do much to help the mothers who sacrificed reunite with their children. This treachery highlights the ways in which national projects clash with efforts by women to emancipate themselves. Women and mothers are the ones who are expected to sacrifice for life, and they are not supposed to expect anything in return. Marita however uses this new government insensitivity to liberate herself from the thankless hard work on the farm, and to venture out of prescribed colonial spaces into city space that was also supposed to have bad influence on the chaste rural woman.⁵ The movement into the city is easy for Marita who has no other children to tie her down. Her ability to move forward in space, to the modern city from the rural village, I argue, is an achievement of individual freedom to a great extent.

⁵ The few male writers who dominated the literary scene in the seventies and eighties like Charles Mungoshi and Musaemura Zimunya were writing from a cultural nationalist point of view. They lamented the loss of traditional aspects of their communities because of colonisation and appealed to have them back into practice. Their emphasis was mainly on how colonialism had caused much rupture to the once perfect African landscape. Zimunya published a poetry anthology entitled *Country Dawns and City Lights* in which he criticises the negative effects that the city has had on the once chaste country girl who has now lost conscience to a love of money, and as a result has become a prostitute. This poetry, it can be argued, was meant to chastise the female personae and stop them from venturing out of traditional time space and stay static in the village while male personae moved on in the city.

She has chosen that she wants to look for her son, and there is nothing to stop her even if she has to do some scheming to get the money to go and do the search. She has defied the mapped confinement, and her death is not a sign of defeat because she dies doing what she wanted to do even when she has to struggle to penetrate patriarchal spaces where she is not wanted. Her biological mothering and at the same time physical non mothering liberated her, and her death probably liberated her from the disappointment of seeing a maimed and also forgotten hero in her son, a son whom she had a lot of hope in but one who might be ineffective in changing the structure of the independent nation despite his contribution to its making. She had expectations that her son would be able to liberate her from the slavery on Manyepo's farm, but it appears he would not have been able to grant her wish, as unarmed and physically disabled, he does not have any power over the white coloniser that some black men in power might have. The return of Marita's son would have presupposed the reunification of Marita's family, a thing that does not happen because of Marita's death. This failure of the family to reunite, I propose, causes a rupture in conventional nationalist discourse. For Hove, in the new nation, individuals go their own way, leaving the text resonating with possibilities of individual autonomy and psychological liberation, but never those of the intact nuclear family. The lack of family premises freedom to pursue goals independently without restriction. It importantly shows that unlike what nationalist discourses would let us believe, the concept of family has neither been static nor fixed over time. Janifa has been let down by family and she is her own family now. She has to fight for her own survival without any dependency barriers.

Marita's struggle against patriarchal oppression does not begin when she goes out of the farm to look for her son. It begins on the farm when she makes herself the unofficial spokesperson for the overworked laborers. In her confrontation with the baas boy, she not only attacks black male patriarchy but white colonial patriarchy as well. When the baas boy who feels he is more privileged than the rest of the other workers because he has the white man on his side verbally abuses the women, Marita stands up to him and retorts:

What is the white man's loincloth saying today? Has the white man wetted his loincloth so much that it has the courage to drip itself on us? Go away and listen to your baas's insults. Do you think we are stones to work without resting? If the white man has given you his poisonous drink, you must drink it bit by bit until the time you know how to control it. If you want us to control your drink for you, then we will tell you the words we tell to our small children when they wet their sleeping places...(1990:19-20)

The comparison between the baas boy and the loincloth is meant to expose the shielding effect that the baas boy's control over the other black people has on the white man. Chiriseri may think that he holds the reins of power, but in actual fact, all the power lies with Manyepo. Chiriseri himself can be as disposable as a loincloth. The idea of Manyepo wetting his 'loincloth' (Chiriseri) suggests how the farmer has managed to spoil and turn Chiriseri against the weaker farm workers but in an exploitative and abusive rather than liberating and empowering manner. The hierarchy of power that exists between Manyepo and Chiriseri itself suggests that although race is a major contribution to the way Manyepo dominates every black person, it is not the sole determinant of oppressive behaviour.

Perhaps this is why Marita does not want to be responsible for Manyepo's death when she refuses to testify against him to the comrades. Zhuwarara criticises Marita's gesture calling it Christian like but "in the prevailing circumstances, misdirected and self defeating". I

argue on the contrary that the inclusion of this scene is in sync with Marita's construction as a character. Marita has plans and part of the plan is not to have Manyepo killed. Perhaps Hove is also suggesting that killing one individual cruel farmer will not eradicate the problem. It is the system that has to be eradicated and getting out of the farm setting is one of Marita's ways of getting rid of the system of capital exploitation. Marita's envisioning of the war as reformist, changing the black/white racial and social relations could be to emphasize and critique how mothers shape social attitudes and help transmute different ideologies in nationalist projects. She tells Janifa:

The white man thinks we are children, that is why his tongue is loose. The day he learns that we are also grown ups, he will learn to loosen his tongue. He was brought up like that. You do not expect him to think differently from what his mother told him. Do you think all of us here went to school where the white man is called baas: we were brought up like that. So it is not our fault. One day we will learn also that the white man is like us, if you prick him with a thorn in his buttocks, he will cry for his mother like anybody else. (1990:64-5)

It would have been too easy for the plot if Marita had instigated Manyepo's killing. Sparing Manyepo and her arguments for doing this; "What would his mother say when she heard another woman had her child killed" is more effective as it can be used to dissect the relationship between mothers and socialisation processes that further alienate women from public political decision making processes. Manyepo's wife whose absence in the narrative is conspicuous, may not have as much power as Manyepo, but because of her social position she finds herself coming higher in the hierarchy between blacks and whites. She is protected by her racial social status, a position that isolates her and disempowers her. Her absence in the narrative confirms this disempowerment and exclusion. The only time she is mentioned is when Marume complains that the workers' wives are working for Manyepo and his wife. By being absent, Manyepo's wife is being used to endorse the white

patriarchal ideology of the superiority of whites over blacks, to show how black labour can relieve privileged white women from the drudgery of physical work. This protection from her husband's policies of exploitation presuppose ignorance of what is happening on her part, or endorsement of the exploitation. Marita tries to question the ideological use of mothers by patriarchy by appealing to all mothers not to reproduce patriarchal oppressive and hateful ideologies. She in her own way refuses to serve the nation by refusing to sacrifice somebody else's son.

Marita's sense of consciousness is consistent with the grasp of language that she has, as well as her circumstance. It would be unfair to claim as Zhuwarara does that she achieves a belated sense of consciousness. He claims that she does not see how the war will change her situation. Maybe he is referring to consciousness pertaining to articulation of mainstream political issues. But it is the everyday material conditions that shape the language of Marita's awareness of her situation. She may not express it in a logical and sophisticated manner, but it still comes out in her teachings of Janifa about gender/sex relations and about race relations.

Marita is presented through the recollections as one who challenges the norm to achieve personal freedom first. This is a tactful way of instigating a revolution because I propose that Marita cannot free others before she is free herself first. She ought to understand her position as a gendered and racial being within the larger context before magnifying the struggle and including others. Marita's fight for her freedom is further made authentic by

the way it is presented in a half planned and half impulsive fashion. The part that Marita plays unplanned is perhaps what makes her urge her disciple Janifa to rest since:

To fight on is all right, but a good fighter knows when to postpone the fight for another day. A good fighter knows when to stop the fight in order to sharpen the knives for a renewed fight. Young girl, breathe the breadth of your rest so that you can meet sunrise with the new fight in your muscles. That is the way to fight. That is the way to walk the path whose destination you do not know...(1990:100-101)

Marita may have failed because she did not plan, but she does not want Janifa to fail too. After having suffered defeat by not finding her son in the city and meeting an uncalled for death, Marita through her surreal communication with Janifa, seems to view the liberation of women as a battle that women must fight alone because of the betrayal from their communities especially the males. Marita's death at the hands of the new government seems to suggest that women's invaluable contribution to the war has been forgotten or that the new government wants to rub it off the face of history, to kill it for the repercussions it may have for the male nationalists. Acknowledging the diverse roles women and mothers played in the war would entail recognising their need to occupy more public positions in the nation, a situation that disrupts patriarchal powers. It appears there is a need by the new government to reassign women to their old traditional roles, hence Marita and the unknown woman are labelled "witches" and "prostitutes" by the government officials they come across because they are refusing to conform to the image of the passive confined woman.

Hove's achievement in depicting mothers and women responding in different ways to their colonial and postcolonial situation is complemented by the fact that he also presents a generation of males that is struggling to fit into the new colonial set-up. This way, he

represents gender not only as an issue that affects women but men as well. He makes women's and men's histories part of the same history, and not as separate histories. His depiction deviates from that of portraying changing women as rebels rising against traditional systems but individuals who are dynamic and who respond actively to transition. Hove's intention, I suggest, is to analyse how any form of domination affects the community as a whole and not just part of that community. Any clash is bound to affect the language of a community, its beliefs, and its general way of life. In light of this, it is easy to find Zhuwarara's deductions that the males of the novel have been humiliatingly domesticated in conflict with his intentions to have Hove portray a more vigilant generation of female characters. On the one hand Zhuwarara seems to be questioning Hove's feminist agenda and its success and on the other he seems to be endorsing and complaining about the uprooting of traditional structures that disempower black men, making him seem as though he would want the rigid traditional structures that keep women and men in bipolar terms to be preserved. His observation:

The feminization of the male in the new colonial dispensation is symptomatic of a society which has lost its capacity to hold its own and survive in accordance with the demands of its own values and beliefs (Zhuwarara 1996:33)

could be read as a conservative desire to protect traditional gender roles. Perhaps the inconsistencies that emerge out of Zhuwarara's arguments can be used to point out how difficult it is for males to be supportive of the female cause after growing up in communities that socialise them about certain behavioural and ways of thinking about being men. This could make Hove's ambiguities where they emerge appropriate strategies for representing the relationship between gender and national liberation movements.

It could be argued that ambiguity in a text, if there is any, cannot always be interpreted as negative and defeating the writer's intentions. Ambiguity can help a writer ask questions and point out injustices instead of claiming to give answers to a particular problem. Ambiguity indicates uncertainty and perhaps the complicated nature of a subject. Gender and nationalism may be better manipulated if they are handled ambiguously because of the complications and tensions that arise out of their discourses.

Flora Veit-Wild has criticised Hove for portraying a monolithic view of the African nation, ignoring the "disparateness and fragmentation of perception in independent Zimbabwe". She asserts that Hove's attempt to recreate the African image "seems, at best, romantic and naïve, and at worst, dangerously misleading" (Veit-Wild 1993:319). For Veit-Wild the communal voice that Hove endows his characters with recreates collective history. I argue in this section that Veit-Wild's observations ignore the rupture and discontent that come out of the "communal" voices in *Bones*. The characters may belong to the same community but they speak each in their individual voices. I assert that it is this "communal" voice that Hove is trying to break down by showing how the communal voice can never be monolithic and homogeneous but is one that is fraught with disagreements and tensions. Communal voice is not necessarily unified. People of one community may speak the same language but with different intentions of meaning.

For Hove, communal language seems to play a naturalizing effect that is meant to sustain subordination in power relations. It thus becomes a way in which people legitimate their subordination without realising that they are trapped in language. Conversely, it is also

used to show how a critical analysis of the accepted myths in a communal language can liberate from that which naturalises subordination. I argue that to interrogate the concept of a unifying national language, Hove uses the male characters to endorse the 'wisdom' of proverbs in ways that make them helpless. On the other hand, he uses women to critically question the validity of such national language in a changed climate and political set-up.

When Veit Wild argues that the fragmented narrators fuse the community into one she observes:

The linguistic and stylistic basis for this fusion is the communal idiom that holds everything together. Hove uses Africanised English, a fairly literal translation of Shona sentence structure, proverbs, sayings, terminology and imagery. This language which all voices speak carries the tradition, the wisdom, the perception of their people, of their culture and creates out of many seemingly separate and individual voices one communal and collective voice. (Veit-Wild 1992:315)

The 'communal' idiom that Veit-Wild talks about is one that is fraught with inequalities and one that easily translates into criticism of the subjugated people when used carelessly in a colonial context, where the colonised male has been turned 'feminine' in order to justify his domination by the white male.

As the male characters wallow in the 'wisdom' of traditional discourse, it becomes clear that language like the male nationals who want women to stay in traditional atavistic time, is resistant to change. If discourse is viewed in its immutable state, it legitimates the suppression of its users in very subtle ways and renders them ineffective in terms of recognising that the language they worship is fraught with oppressive connotations. In a similar but different way, if mothers are viewed in a permanent and cyclic state of

reproducing children as is expected of Marita by Manyepo and Marume's family, then they will use motherhood as a tool for resistance. Marita uses motherhood as stated earlier on by refusing to reproduce and by making this decision set her free from Manyepo's farm.

Language is revealed to be entrapping its users through the male characters especially Chisaga who chooses naturalising images and proverbs to justify his failure to resist Manyepo's 'legitimacy' to the land. Chisaga ruminates:

Seasons leave room for one another. Rain, dry, cold, rain, dry, cold, rain dry cold. Look at me now, poverty is like a stubborn friend. Always with me, but I look with the eyes of my own village and say, - leaves fall but they will come back again one day. The stars die, but one day they will come back after the sun, their enemy has left the dancing arena. (1990:37)

It is unclear here whether Chisaga is suggesting that he wait for his turn to be as comfortable as Manyepo instead of doing something to positively change his weak position. His use of the Shona language is as uncritical as Marume's who says that he should be submissive because he is a stranger on Manyepo's land. Ironically, Marume does not seem to realise that Manyepo is the stranger here.

Without wanting to ascribe too much literary and linguistic consciousness to the female characters, I would like to contrast the way in which Hove uses Marita and the other female characters to utilise language critically. They are presented questioning the validity of Shona proverbs in the prevailing circumstances of deception, betrayal and invasion by foreign rule. The suspicion shown by the women in expressions is a lack of faith in tradition and folk wisdom. When betrayed by her husband who instigates the killing of the freedom fighters, the unknown woman, who I think represents all the unsung and

unappreciated heroines and heroes of the war, starts doubting the validity of the statement that a husband should be the most important person in a woman's life. She claims, "Although they say every woman thinks her husband is the bringer of rain to the village, I do not know if I believe that now" (Hove 1990:58). This woman's refusal to believe anymore in traditional maxims is a move to make language disaffirm folk wisdom. It is important because as a transmitter of cultural aspects of the community (Anthias and Yuval-Davies 1989), this woman's refusal to sustain this saying's empowerment of the male is a critical engagement with her environment. It shows the cultural dynamism that is as a result of contact with other social groups. Colonialism has created a setting for the woman to question her husband because of his greed for money.

The unknown woman's loss of faith in expressions and idioms seems to be shared by Marita and Janifa who refuse to claim the expressions as their own. They always allude to the fact that they are borrowing from somewhere when they say "Do they not say that..." . This allusion shows how different disembodied voices can be the basis of a nation. The pretence that there is one unified nation only becomes a sentiment that masks all divisions and inequalities.

At the end of the novel, all families have broken down. They have broken not because the men have left the women as is the case with some novels that deal with family disintegration caused by colonialism in the Shona communities in Zimbabwe (See Dambudzo Marechera's *House of Hunger* 1978), but because women have ventured out of domestic spaces to find fulfilment in search of what they value. The death of Marita and

the unknown woman can be regarded as further acts of deviation because the two do not become extinct because of death. Janifa carries on their memories, and it appears their mark is left because they sacrifice for the freedom of future generations like Nehanda did. Through their deaths, I argue that Hove seems to be suggesting that the freedom of women from patriarchal oppression will start through individual sacrifice before it takes on a more defined and more organised programme. It may not be homogeneous and completely organised because of the diversity of what women will want to fight for. Marita is fighting against being exploited as a labourer whilst the unknown woman's support of Marita stems from her betrayal by her husband. Janifa's fight for autonomy is encouraged by Marita's death and her rape by Chisaga as well as her betrayal by her mother. We see in these instances that the characters' struggles intersect at some points but at others they remain very individualistic.

It is important to appreciate the magnitude of individual efforts at freedom especially considering the circumstances that the women in *Bones* never get the chance to organise as they are being driven from the fields to their individual homes in the case of Marita and Janifa. Marita and the unknown woman may have the same concerns but they are geographically torn apart. It is therefore worth reevaluating the individual efforts of the women characters in light of the fact that it is difficult for working married mothers to get time to organize. Let us consider Norma Kriger's summation about the individual women's contribution to the war that:

To appreciate why women participated in the war, one must take into account their efforts to take advantage of the war to try to improve their domestic lives.

Like youth, women protested as individuals rather than in an organised way. (Kriger 1992:196)

The individual efforts were significant, Kriger adds, since "ZANU concerns about clashing with African custom imposed a limit on the attainment of its goal of liberating women from their double burden of racism and tradition" (Kriger 1992:193). ZANU may have been calling on the services of women and appealing to their status as mothers but Kriger here makes it clear that its agenda was to freeze women into traditional spaces and time. The individual and unplanned efforts can also be read significantly as direction markers especially considering that the liberation war itself was initiated by the unsuccessful and spontaneous 1896/7 Shona-Matabele risings. These risings actually directed the people to further ways of planned resistance. If the effect of these risings, which were a precedent to the larger scale 1970s liberation war may be used to explain Marita's efforts to liberate herself, it can be argued that spontaneity helps shape future events because it appears Janifa is more focused and directed in her efforts to achieve her freedom than Marita was. The same can be said about Hove, whose novel sets a beginning in terms of dealing with issues of liberation wars and gender. Rather than read Hove's novel as a failure or point out with emphasis the limitations his text presents, one ought to emphasise the possibilities that he has illuminated rather than what he has failed to do.

Hove manages to create a model of the nation that is not based on the illusion like the one that has been presented by theories on national discourse. He looks at the nation as dynamic not only for the males but females as well. The family that is supposed to maintain national unity is disrupted, paving way for a complex nation whose voices

resonate with diversity and conflict, creating the scene for more transition. This model safeguards one from portraying independence as the perfect destination. Instead it looks at it as just another phase of historical continuity, one that can easily be disrupted.

This chapter has tried to map out the ways in which Hove has broken new ground by using the war to deal with issues of female oppression and liberation. It has concluded that the success that Hove achieves has been because he places women centrally in nationalist processes. This enables a different reading of national narratives that differs from the one that has come out of the theorisation of nationalism. It destabilises the false pretences that the nation consists of people who are content and unified by their victory against colonial oppression. Instead, Hove suggests that the attainment of independence is the beginning of another battle by females to redefine themselves in the new nations.

Chapter Four

Mothering Dictatorship in Nuruddin Farah's *Sardines*

In her analysis of the novels of Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta, Katherine Frank (1987) concludes that for these writers, economic freedom and education are the tools that will lead to the emancipation of women. This standpoint is valuable in terms of encouraging the upliftment of women through economic independence, but it is too simplistic because it assumes that when women are educated and they have money, then they can easily fit into the male dominated world without any complications. In this chapter, I argue that in *Sardines* (1981), Nuruddin Farah problematises the ideal of women's emancipation that is supposed to be achieved through education and economic empowerment. Through the use of an educated protagonist Medina, Farah shows that educated women, like any other women, have the same susceptibility to suffer under male rule. The fact that a woman character is educated and materially wealthy becomes an even greater inducement for the ruling patriarch to suppress her because she becomes part of the intelligentsia of whom a repressive state is afraid. Using Medina, Farah opens up a discussion of how the family can be an extension of the ruling oligarchy, and shows how family relations can also be those of power and manipulation. The place of motherhood in a dictatorship is used to show how the private and the public are directly intertwined and inseparable from each other.

Farah's interest in politics and gender has been critically analysed by many critics, Felix Mnthali (1989), Derek Wright (1989), Juliet I Okonkwo (1984), Barbara Turfan (1989) and Kirsten Holt Petersen (1981) among others. Of these critics, I will engage seriously

with Mnthali, whose dismissal of the protagonist of *Sardines* in his comment that Farah's achievement in this novel is his

dramatization of the kind of narcissistic "much ado about nothing" which now takes up most of the time of Somalia's frustrated intellectuals, especially that of women such as Medina and her disciple and protégé Sagal who appear to be *steeped in mere frivolities*. (1989: 58) [emphasis mine]

I find it inadequate in commenting about the position of women in the text. That I should find Mnthali's comments problematic, especially the part I have italicized in the quotation, stems from the abundant attention that he pays to the male protagonists of *Close Sesame* and *Sweet and Sour Milk*, in the same article that dissects *Sardines*. This is in spite of the fact that these males are as ineffective in toppling the dictatorship as Medina and the other female characters are. Mnthali's cursory dismissal of women characters in *Sardines* makes one suspicious, and it leads to an investigation of why there is this lack of interest. The answer to this can easily be provided by reading Okonkwo's article that does nothing but praise Farah for his portrayal of women, an approach that I also find wanting.

Mnthali's undervaluing of the textual and social space given to the female characters in the novel contrasts with the overvaluation that they get from Okonkwo. Both these critics, I argue, are influenced by a realist mode of reading and analysis that makes them place their characters more in real life, a "common sense" approach that assumes that "literature tells truths about the period that produced them, about the world, and about human nature" (Belsey, C. 1980) Okonkwo sees the hero(in)ism of women only, without thinking about how Farah could be using this hero(in)ism to comment on political issues. Some of her

comments will be discussed in the unfolding of this chapter, mostly in contrast to Wright's whose interpretations are more insightful, and whom I tend to agree with more.

Okonkwo has pointed out that Farah's treatment of women is unique; by this she means that Farah uses women as protagonists in most of his novels. She rates him against a writer like Achebe, who I have already tried to illustrate centralises his mother characters by making them produce intertexts for his main plot. I agree with Okonkwo's point that Farah can be commended for using women protagonists, but I disagree with her opinion that Farah is unique in his efforts. Okonkwo writes:

Farah seems virtually alone among African writers in depicting the progress which women have made within the constricting African social landscape...So pervasive and consistent is his espousal of the female cause that he has been described as "the first feminist writer to come out of Africa in the sense that he describes and analyses women as victims of male subjugation. (1984: 217)

I have illustrated in the previous chapters the different ways in which other African male writers have produced complex representations around issues of gender. They have moved beyond exposing these issues to espousing the possible artistic levels of meaning that can be achieved through the use of motherhood. Even where the intention is not conscious, most writers inevitably point out that female exploitation is as a result of the patriarchal structures, because of the dominance of such structures in most communities. It is actually as a result of this exposure of gender inequality in societies portrayed in the chosen works that different levels of political meaning comes about. What is prominent about Farah though, as Okonkwo suggests, is the consistency with which he deals with issues affecting women. In other words, he is deliberate about his intentions, unlike some of the writers

whom I have analyzed whose complexities through gender themes emerge at an unconscious level of the text.

Wright has been one of the most consistent critics of Farah's work and his work on the importance of the Somali family has been very useful in the construction of the argument in this chapter as we agree on several points. He perceptively identifies the theme of the "collusion of family and state authoritarianism and of domestic and political patriarchy" that have become dominant not only in *Sardines* but also in Farah's other works (See *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1980), *From A Crooked Rib* (1970), *Close Sesame* (1983) and *Maps* (1984). In Farah's depiction of the family as the potential decider of Somali politics, what is most commendable is that he does not look back to traditional society for sanctuary. He sees the family as a dynamic entity that has the power to evolve according to the ideological positions of different individuals. This of course is different from what the General is made to want. The General needs to use family ties to strengthen his position by dictating whether the family must stay in its stagnant form and consolidate his power or else weaken by collapsing thereby making it impossible to have family units that oppose him. He embarks on a process of making and unmaking families as suits him to protect his position by destabilizing the most potentially powerful force against him, the family. As Wright points out,

the authoritarian family structure at the roots of Somalian society conditions people to the tyranny officially endorsed and institutionalized by military regimes. The twin repressive institutions of family and state invoke each other's authority and sanction each other's violence. (1989: 95)

The repressive family that Wright discusses is the conservative patriarchal or matriarchal family with a head of family who supports the General. If it takes the conservative family then to keep the General in power, it will take a new and rebellious family to remove him from the ranks of power. This will entail a destabilization of the traditionally accepted concept of family to produce a strong enough family that can organise and topple the General. This family will be the modern one that does not easily get satisfaction from the sham power bestowed upon matriarchs and patriarchs. It will have to be critical of the methods used by the general to ensure that he stays in power. It does not have to be cheated by the call that the family is supposed to uphold peace and to keep unity in the nation.

The manipulation of families by the General who uses them to play against each other, I suggest, is what makes Farah present us with many contrasting families in *Sardines*. Wright points out that in the construction of female characters, there is a complementary as opposed to diametric opposition. The opposing characters that we meet in the text have common interests that come about as their lives intersect at certain familial points; Medina and Idil have Samater, Medina and Idil have Ubax, Ebla and Fatima have Medina. It is these familial intersections that provide the unity in the novel. The characters all have separate voices that make themes intersect. There is nothing that stands apart on its own. I propose that the complementary nature of the characters' feuds and conflicts is also noticeable with the family units that dominate the narrative. This is because in spite of all their superficial differences, the families are in many ways part of each other. Their similarities are aptly brought out in discussions in the novel about differences that exist between the mothers, who are the main players in the novel. Sagal, who in a way is a confused young woman

whom Farah seems to be suggesting is psychologically ill equipped to fight the dictatorship because of lack of original ideas is the one who points out the links between the dominant mothers of the novel. The links show how their mothering in many ways colludes with the dictatorship without them being aware of it, even when they think they are opposing the dictatorship.

In a discussion with her mother in which her mother mentions how much she has tried to make her happy, Sagal retorts,

How very vulgar of you, Ebla, how very commonplace! I've always thought of you as special, a mother of a different breed, an older *Medina*! Listen to your gabble, your worrisome prattle. You're as plaintive as Idil herself. (1981:34)

The reference to Medina at this early stage is an indication that she is the mark of success for Sagal hence the emphasis of her name. It could also carry a ring of irony from the author to warn us that she has her shortcomings like Idil who seems to antagonize other women's freedom especially Medina's and Xaddia's. The similarities between the three mothers is pointed out again by Sagal not long afterwards when she is in Medina's house this time, when she asks "Mother- as- martyr or mother-as the all-knower. In the final analysis, what is the difference between yourself, Idil and Ebla?" (1981:51), a question with which Medina does not want to engage. All that these comparisons allude to is that the mothers may appear to be different at surface level, but there are inherent similarities that may be brought out by the ambience in which these mothers are living. None of them can be perfect or be capable of facilitating change as they are presently; they need to combine their strengths in order to be more effective in opposing the dictatorship. They need to be malleable and not fixed like the General, as this will create a gridlock. Sagal who singles out Medina as special when she compares her mother to Idil is the one who reincorporates Medina to the

imperfect circle, a move that shows how shaky her opinions and probably actions are. She only participates in the struggle because one of her chief opponents in the swimming competition has been thrown in jail for painting political slogans on the wall. Sagal does not have her own well-planned political agenda. She seems to represent a generation of young people who are not interested in how their actions can influence the direction of politics in the country, but how politicking can make them famous.

Sagal's comparison of the three women prompts a closer analysis of the mothers in the novel. This analysis will try to argue that Farah uses the mothers' relationships with their daughters to show how family can easily collude with or help to oppose the dictatorship. As has been mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Medina is used by Farah to show how her intellectualism has isolated her from the majority of the community and how it entraps her instead of liberating her from the authoritarian state. Through her own life experiences as a girl child growing up in a patriarchal society, she unconsciously becomes that which she dislikes; "She was as confident as a patriarch in the rightness of her decisions" (1981:5). That confidence almost becomes her downfall because like her grandfather Gad Thabit, whom she disliked, her decisions are sometimes devoid of consideration of how they will affect other people. When she moves out of her house when Samater joins the government, she is not considerate enough to see how much of a victim he is in all this. It appears she blames him for joining the government and yet he had no choice as he had to save his clansmen. Her desertion leaves Samater vulnerable to the regime and his mother, leading to the break up his family, invoking Xaddia's anger towards Medina and the explosion;

You are a gambler who having won once thinks that another win is in the offing...You pawn and pawn and pawn until there is nothing and nobody left to put up to auction. Yesterday it was Samater; today, Nasser and Dulman; tomorrow - who knows? - maybe it's my turn; the day after tomorrow, Sagal. When will you stop being obstinate and start seeing reason? Will you never concede or accept defeat? (1981:245-6)

Xaddia's anger, which is justified because she almost lost her brother in Medina's 'experiments', helps to point out Medina's limitations as a contributor to the rearrangement of national politics. If it is not her gender that cripples her, then it is her methods. Unlike Okonkwo who believes that Medina's finest hour comes when she is made editor of the government paper, I think this is where she digs her own grave in preparation to bury the General or herself, depending on who falls first. Her appointment makes her at least have the chance to effect change as an editor of the national paper but she misuses this chance by sticking to her unbending principles. Even as she does it, she knows she is committing suicide by editing the General's speech but this does not stop her. This daring but thoughtless act gets her a banning order and more disastrously it makes her ineffectual as a major public political historical player, one who could be useful for helping to bring about changes in Somalia. Medina is used to show how powerful women like her can use their educational advantages in an unreasonable manner, thinking their high level of educational attainment makes them immune to the cruelty of repression. Medina does not foresee how the omission of the truth is a powerful tool for fuelling opposition from the intelligentsia. The General's use of ellipsis to hide the truth would lead to exophoric reading by the intelligentsia who know what is going on in the political arena.

After being told by Farah in the novel that the Somali people are very illiterate, the enormity of Medina's carelessness is realized. The edited speech could not have reached many people anyway. Although she does not seem to realize it, her potential to reach and influence the people's perceptions is highlighted when she starts retelling her translated stories to Ubx; she translates them to be able to reach her, to make her understand in a language she knows. Here, she uses motherhood in a way that is meant to empower her daughter with knowledge as well as a useful tool for future struggle. Dulman informs us of how powerful the oral literature is: "Rich as the Russian underground literature. Russians read, Somalis don't, for our tradition is oral. One can communicate with the hearts of the Somalis *only* through their hearing faculties" (1981:170) [emphasis mine]. With her competence in languages, Medina could have well used the folklore translations to express explosive ideas more effectively. The Somalis could get the stories in Somali like Ubx who got them "hot like maize cakes from the oven". Unlike other instances where her knowledge of languages is used to exclude, with the translated tales she uses them to include Ubx in her quest for oral literary freedom. The editorship post can be used to emphasise Medina's weakness as a national player in contrast to her individual strength as a mother who equips her daughter with the necessary tool for future struggle.

The stories are a useful alternative for Ubx who has been isolated from the public school where children are taught to be sycophants as well as to sing the praise names of the general. Although the text does not foreground it, I believe Medina's oral instruction seems to be preparing Ubx for the fight ahead. Since her mother has failed by trying to fight using the pen, Ubx is endowed with what Dulman calls the effective way to communicate with

the Somalis. The preparation of Ubax for the role of national player seems to be suggested by the narrator who makes Ubax an extraordinary child. She plays too much of a functional role in the novel. She may have been constructed that way to help show how Medina loves power games. These games she cannot play with the people in power anymore because she has ostracised herself, so Ubax becomes her pawn. As a result, Ubax's credibility as a character needs to be justified and this is done by her mother who describes her as "...an intelligent eight year old who acts and speaks like an adult, who remembers bitter quarrels and who, like an adult, passes judgement and condemns" (1981:16-17). The ability to speak in the form of questioning things that comes out in Ubax could be directly linked to her educational instruction. She learns orally and this gives her the confidence and power to speak. This is in contrast to her mother who must first read literature and then conceptualize it into words, a method that is rejected by Xaddia whose anger at Samater's ordeal makes her accuse Medina:

I am not a Sagal or one of those you give a book to read whenever something goes wrong. So tell me: what was the meaning of that charade? Or do you suggest I look it up in some book? *A book for everything*. (1981:246)

Xaddia's denunciation of the reliance that Medina has on theoretical constructs is a critique of the way in which Medina sometimes fails to express her analysis of situations in a more subtle and varied way. She makes everything dogmatically political, and narrowly so from the Somali politics point of view. Her reading and analysis become controlled by the Somali government, hence they become limited in terms of what they can do to help improve the situation in the country. By making everything political, she impairs her judgement of some situations and turns her back on situations that need her personal and private decisions because she believes involving herself would be compromising the revolution. She ends up

restricting her life too much around the Somali situation and failing to come up with alternative and useful ways to engage critically and effectively with the system.

Medina's desire not to compromise her opposition of the dictatorship makes her shun Amina who returns to her father's house when her father has helped the General suppress Amina's rape. Amina needs support, and Medina does not give her this support because she does not believe in compromises. As in Samater's case, she does not want to consider that Amina's father was also a victim in the whole rape situation albeit a willing one. She politicizes her friendship with Amina in an effort to stick to her convictions and this way she becomes a betrayer of her friend's needs. She further limits her ability to exercise free will. She is letting the regime control her. By sheer luck, Medina's lack of insight does not backfire on her. Her strength to stick to her decisions is portrayed as her weakness; "...she was her own principal opponent..." (1981:241). Her mother says of her, "You are a prisoner of your own principles and your secret dreams, Medina" (1981:144) a statement indeed accurate in describing Medina's inability to read situations from different angles. She sees things only from her own perspective and because it is this perspective that shapes the whole narrative it becomes too limiting in terms of analysis to a point where it is difficult to tell whether the author is ironical or genuine about Medina's personal 'accomplishments'. This irony could come about as a criticism of the way in which, despite all her professed accomplishments, Medina is as ineffective as anyone else in changing the situation in Somalia.

When her plans of getting Samater back after his ordeal have been accomplished, that is when she starts asking herself what she could have done if things had taken another turn;

What would she have done had Idil and Samater, to begin with, behaved differently? What if Idil had not suggested that Samater marry that maid? What if, in the first place, Idil had not confiscated his drinks? Or, better still, what would she have done had Samater taken the maid as his lawful wife, since Islamic tradition gave the man the right to marry as many as four women? (1981:241)

Medina asks these decisive questions a little too late, just like Achebe's Okonkwo. These questions show the extent of her stubbornness and single mindedness. They also indicate that she does not anticipate any trouble in her plans, maybe suggesting the authoritarian nature in which she deals with people. An autocrat views leadership only from one perspective, his/her own. To an autocrat, people are supposed to do what she wants or face the consequences and that is exactly how Medina perceives her relationships with people. Her apparent disregard of other people raises questions about Juliet Okonkwo's observations that "Indeed, Medina has a country, and an enviable identity. Her efforts, therefore, are for the silent majority who submit to the oppressive laws of the fascist state" (1984:220). Okonkwo does not identify the limitations surrounding Medina because she is very impressed with the fact that Medina is a female protagonist in a male-authored novel. The unlimited space that Medina gets in the text blinds Okonkwo to the author's critical construction of Medina as a character. As will be shown later on, Medina does not have the interests of the "silent majority" but her own.

The self-assessment that Medina does at the end is important as it reveals the problems and anxieties that are created by viewing her as a flawless female creation of male writing. Her assessment is important as a sign of hope that for future purposes of struggle, Medina may be more flexible and consider other methods of assessing the Somali situation. Looking at Medina as the example that other male writers should follow in representing female

characters blinds a reader to the possibility that Farah was being very critical of his elitist protagonist, which does not make him misogynist but artistically competent in creating dynamic characters. He thereby manages to create a plausible and not an irritatingly ideal character that meets the expectations of naïve scholarship that gets satisfied with tokenism. The exposure of her weaknesses leads to an interrogation of the place of the educated woman in relation to the wider society, an analysis that I intend to dwell on in this part of the argument.

A first hint of condescension and insensitivity to the plight of women who are not as accomplished as herself comes out in Medina's relationship with her woman worker at Nasser's house. Because Medina has principles that forbid her from benefiting from the revolution, she avoids using Samater's position to get the VIP card that will enable the worker to get food supplies without standing in long queues. Medina does not give the issue of the card much thought, and she does not want to discuss it with the woman who works for her even when she is described as a character whose life would be made easier by the card:

The maid's expression was as flat as the tray that she brought. The poor thing had stood under the sobbing shower of dust for two and a half hours in a long queue and had come home with only a kilo of sugar and another of flour. Would Medina get her the red ration-card for VIP homes, a card issued only to ministers and other dignitaries' wives and which exempted them from joining queues for essentials such as sugar, oil, flour and foreign cigarettes? The maid set the tray down, and moved about impatiently. Did she want to repeat her request, remind Medina to call on Minister so-and-so? Medina thanked her in a manner which made the maid understand that she was being dismissed... (1981:60)

Here, Medina again considers her own feelings and perspectives about the VIP card. The words that the cards were issued to "ministers and dignitaries' wives" could be used in this

scene to reflect on why Medina does not want to get the card for her maid: because it would elevate the maid's status. If the maid does not stand in the queue, she will take on the status of a dignitary's wife. Medina's summary dismissal of the worker can emphasize this point, pointing towards Medina's need for power that she achieves through identifying lack in less fortunate women. This way, she replicates the system that she is trying to fight. If the system benefits by giving itself privileges at the expense of the poor, Medina is gaining power through refusing to give a poor downtrodden worker the privileges of an easier life. In my opinion, letting the poor benefit from the system would be another way of fighting the regime. Medina cannot be complemented for only thinking that using the VIP card would be compromising her beliefs.

Medina's love for power can be further revealed during a major incident in the novel where she clearly undermines other women in her thoughts. When she goes to visit her mother on New Year's day:

For a while, nobody knew what to say. But Medina was aware of one thing: she was conscious of those devouring eyes of envy, the women's hard stares focused on her. They believed they knew every secret of hers, she could bet her last secret that they knew the precise date and hour in which she left Samater and naturally had heard both versions of the story: his and hers. But how, how did they know? These women generally went out once a week, and on this away-day they traded the latest gossip and their veiled profiles exchanged whispered intimacies. A life with a given coherence, a life lived in a caged existence... (1981:145)

The words "devouring" and "envious" show that Medina elevates herself above the position of the other women, and she considers herself to be the icon of success. She feels that her perspective of these women is the only authentic one. It is ironical though to think that the women's lives were "caged" because Medina with her rigid analysis of the system and lack

of tact has started living a caged existence herself. She has isolated herself from most of her friends, and she spends most of her time with Ubax whom she sometimes also isolates. There seems to be an inherent self/other dichotomy between her and those she associates with, where she always makes herself the center.

Her condescending attitude is witnessed again later during the same visit when she is surprised at the questions these seemingly 'downtrodden' and ignorant women ask,

Had the whale come ashore? she wondered. Certainly she was delightfully shocked that they were asking intelligent questions, that theirs wasn't a banal inquisitiveness, indeed more intelligent than a congregation of Samater's colleagues who talked about nothing but women, money, trips abroad, presents for their mistresses and wives and, more significantly, about their obsession: age... (1981:148)

Here again, she identifies another group of people to undermine, Samater's friends. Her method of isolating and undermining everyone she knows seems to suggest that she makes herself the icon of progress and civilization. Farah capitalises on the women's questions to strip her of her superiority. The realization that the women are more perceptive than she would like to give them credit for drives her away quickly. Her approach of either confronting a problem head on, or avoid any challenge altogether makes her fail to see the contradictions in her life. I would like to propose that escaping from a challenging situation is an indication that Medina only wants to stay in situations where she thinks she is in control. She moves away from home as she can no longer control the situation with Samater, who has compromised his values by agreeing to work for the regime. She breaks off her friendship with Sandra because by getting a job that Medina had been fired from and colluding with the regime, Sandra is seemingly better off than Medina. In her association

with people therefore, Medina is like the General who discards people who want to confront him or threaten his superiority. The only difference is that whereas the General wins by eliminating, Medina loses at first, and her victory is not guaranteed. She does not have enough political power to let things go her way. Only through mere luck does she finally win by having her family together at the end. When she removes Idil from her life, initially this can be interpreted as Idil's victory, and if Samater had played along with Idil, Medina would have found herself in the mire. Unlike the General's power that is absolute, Medina's is limited and it depends on luck.

Isolating people through different methods is one of the ways in which Medina proves to be a very dictatorial character without realizing it. In a discussion with Sagal, Medina makes us aware of the reasons why she abhors the general. She tells Sagal, "The General is primitive...in thinking that women are not worth taking seriously, which all the more proves that he is backward and fascist and, worse still, an uneducated imbecile" (1981:45). She further tells her mother that the general controls people especially women by making them uncertain of things, just like her grandfather. Gad believed that a woman's god was her husband and that "a woman, like any other inferior being, must be kept guessing, she mustn't be given reason to believe she is certain of anything" (1981:140). Medina claims that if a human being loves others, then he/she will have the capacity to treat others equally. She uses this claim to convince her mother that Ubax is her equal. But alas, unbeknown to her, Medina's relationship with Ubax is sometimes as dictatorial as that between the General and the nation. This relationship between a mother who thinks she practices liberal parenting and a daughter who is independent shows how easy it is for people to be

dictatorial, as long as they have power over others, be it older age or material wealth. The power that Medina has over Ubax in contrast to her lack of power over the General can be analysed as power and powerlessness that are achieved through a singular perspective of viewing situations.

Although it is for her own good according to her mother, one could argue that the prohibition of Ubax from playing with other children is dictatorial. As a result of this exclusion, Ubax feels left out and out of place when she gets in contact with other children. The only consolation about this isolation is that Ubax manages to learn much more from her mother than she would have otherwise from the street children and the schools. Medina uses her extensive knowledge of languages to isolate Ubax whenever she wants to exclude her from a conversation. As we learn from Ubax, she is not the only one who suffers this injustice. She informs Nasser that Medina and Samater control people through exploiting their ignorance when she complains that:

Medina and Samater always talk in a foreign language when they don't want me or Idil to listen. That way they needn't bother about me being there and don't have to tell me to go outside to play, like other parents tell their children. They speak Somali when they want to shut Sandra or Atta out. Now you are doing the same thing, Uncle Nasser, and I don't like it. Medina and Samater can't say I haven't told them. And now I'm telling you: it's unfair. (1981:97)

The gravity of this accusation stems from the fact that it is being made by an eight-year-old. The choice of words "shut...out" indicate that she is aware that language is being used manipulatively as a tool to assert power through difference in the case of Atta and Sandra and through ignorance in Ubax's case, a game that Medina enjoys playing to evoke Ubax's anger. Even at the most intimate level of relationships, the characters in *Sardines* still play

power games. They may be unconsciously forced to view their lives in light of the prevailing tyranny imposed on them by the General.

A conversation Medina and Ubax have when they move to Nasser's house follows:

"Dye it socialist red, my darling," she said to her attentive daughter.

"What"

Medina searched for signs of irritation in her daughter's eyes and was disappointed not to find any. Neither was there that quizzical look Medina had hoped to produce in her.

"Dye it socialist red, with the red star of victory (and bureaucracy) prominently placed in its proper central position. And in the background trace lightly a crescent, like a half-cup. Don't forget the sword whose blunted edge is good for female infibulation."

Ubax was definitely angry. Ubax was so angry she threw the crayons aside and tore the drawing into shreds small as teardrops. She then kicked at one of her toy trains which had been in the corner and out of her focus. When the noise had died down she went to her mother, defiant as her rage, and asked for an explanation.

"What are you talking about, Medina? Kindly tell me what you're talking about."

"Politics as usual." (1981:21)

Medina's "Politics as usual" may have been meant by Farah to expose the rigidity of thought that Medina has internalised about her relationship with people. Ubax is clearly annoyed by her mother's strategy of confusing her by playing a mind game. Medina herself seems to anticipate Ubax's disappointment, yet she believes that she is not a tyrant. To Fatima she says:

I see things differently, Mother. I don't see myself as the tyrant parent towering above a trembling child, hand half-raised in such a way the child doesn't know whether I am about to hit or give or just want to offer a pat on the head. (1981:139-140)

This declaration is a very contradictory one if one is to consider the previous conversation that has gone on between Medina and Ubax. She indeed confuses the child and keeps her guessing for answers and comprehension until the game irritates her. In this light, Medina

comes out as a dictator. Hovering over a child, like her father says, produces negative results:

A flower chokes on the bountiful waters which surround it. Too much of anything in the end smothers, too much of anything kills. Don't you know when love ceases to be love? You must leave breathing space in the architecture of your love; you must leave enough room for little Ubax to exercise her growing mind. You mustn't indoctrinate, mustn't brainwash her. Otherwise you become another *dictator*, trying to shape your child in your own image... (1981:14)

Barkhadle's warning comes as a pointer that there is a thin line between being a tyrannical parent and a liberal one who considers that family must not be used to play out state authoritarianism. Medina may not realize but she may be doing to Ubax that which she is fighting against by opposing the dictatorship. She may be trying to have a family that is not authoritarian like the state, but unfortunately, she helps the state authoritarian system by being a tyrant herself to her daughter. Her tyranny though, she may argue, is intended to sharpen her daughter's mind.

Perhaps Medina has strong grounds for claiming that she is not a tyrant because Ubax, unlike other children, grows to be a very confident child. She also engages with her mother on seemingly adult and very sensitive issues like the one involving Sandra when she accuses her mother of being jealous of Sandra. She even has the freedom to challenge her mother on her smoking and to tell her of the injustice of speaking in a different language to isolate her. Medina's kind of dictatorship can be argued to be a good one because it gives and nourishes and indoctrinates growth whereas the General's destroys and tries to kill anyone or anything that has its own ideas and agendas different from his. However, it could be argued that Medina is robbing Ubax of her childhood by moulding her according to her own beliefs.

This would further point to the way she uses motherhood in an authoritarian manner to achieve personal satisfaction.

So far, the discussion on Medina has emphasized how she fails to see the contradictions in her life that make her unable to contribute to the changing of national politics. It has also analyzed the ways in which Medina somehow becomes despotic despite her appeal to the contrary. This discussion has been developed through the view that Medina does not read her situation elaborately.

The argument will now take a turn and discuss how Medina is portrayed as gaining domestic and personal freedom through her material independence and her education, which give her the power to be assertive and disregard tribal loyalties. This argument will be based on my own reading of how Medina's rigid perception of her own life blinds her to the impact that she could otherwise have in her community if she seriously considered the repercussions of the advantages that she has over other Somali mothers in everyday life. It is very easy for Medina to move in and out of spaces because she is decisive and independent and can financially support herself without Samater. The significance of her domestic power is pertinent when it is contrasted with her lack of power regarding the direction in which the politics of the country should go. This could be Farah's way of saying that the effort by women to emancipate themselves can start through organising around everyday occurrences that marginalise them in their communities. This approach would enable Medina to reach many mothers since the patriarchal laws of the nation, it seems, are directed against the freedom of all women.

Although it never becomes clear right up to the end of the novel why Medina moves house, she appropriates from Sagal the story that she does so because of the fear that Idil might circumcise Ubax. This may not be the real reason, but her appropriation of it highlights the fact that as an educated woman who can dictate the course of her own life, she has a lot of power to protect her daughter from the traditional atrocities that confront other women. However, Medina does not seem to realise the potential that her refusal to have Ubax circumcised may have in terms of finding common ground with the other mothers whose daughters are forcibly circumcised every day in Somalia. To defeat any understanding the other women may have of their situation, Medina despises the other mothers and as a result she uses her position as an educated mother selfishly to protect only her own, showing that she does not have the interests of other downtrodden mothers at heart.

This ability to protect her daughter from circumcision could be interpreted as a major political victory for her. Unlike other mothers who allow their daughters to be mutilated because it is part of national custom, she realizes that circumcision is meant to control women and adhering to national custom is validating the General's power. As a parent, she refuses to implement a custom and therefore she marks the path to a different family that does not collude with the state in degrading women. Her efforts are part of a greater scheme to convert her husband into cutting ties with an oppressive tradition. But because it is only a victory for her alone, it does not carry much political weight. However, Medina may have failed to change public politics, but she has managed to rearrange her domestic domain. She says to Samater, "You have held well. Congratulations!" as a way of affirming

the victory of a family and "a home in which patriarchs like Gad Thabit and matriarchs like Idil (whom she saw as representing the authoritarian state) were not allowed to set foot."

Idil the troublemaker has been discarded and the nuclear family that Medina has is used to show the guests that they intend to stick together:

She got up and softly and silently went to Samater. She took his hand, then dragged him further from the others, yes, from those who qualified as guests; then she motioned to Ubx to follow them. The three walked away, refusing to play host to the guests who waited to be entertained with explanations, explications and examples. Medina, Samater and Ubx behaved as though they needed one another's company - and no more. (1981:250)

This triumphant ending in which Medina includes Samater in her decisions to move away from the suffocation of the way Somalis are imprisoned like sardines is the highlight of the unconceivable mysteries that she tries with difficulty to explain to people like Xaddia. She creates a nuclear family that does not have a colluding patriarch in it, and perhaps its efforts at toppling the dictatorship will go further than the previous ones that were thwarted by colluding matriarchs and patriarchs. The final scene no doubt explicitly explains Medina's thoughts: "If only Xaddia could understand that I'm fighting for the survival of the woman in me, in her - while demolishing families like Idil's and regimes like the General's" (1981:246) who thrive on customs like circumcision to stay in power.

I propose at this point that the praise that Medina may get through this victory is however marred by the exclusion of the people who have helped her survive the ordeal of Samater's illness and her own separation from him. This exclusion suggests that this experience has not changed her in any substantial way. Fight she must and she will not be able to do it

alone with her family. She will need supporters, and will need to include in her 'family' those who have been victims of the regime's extension of power to the family like Amina who has been twice humiliated by being circumcised and then raped would consolidate the strength of her family. The family has to transcend the limitations of its own class interests and look at those of other subordinate groups. If it stays a nuclear family, then it is still being conformist. It needs to rupture the whole idea of extended and nuclear families by incorporating in the family all willing to fight for the same cause. Incorporating other subordinates can only happen if Medina stops seeing only her side of things. She could start by rereading how the atrocities of the regime open up ways that can be used to oppose it without necessarily confronting it directly.

Medina's description of circumcision as "humiliation" and "inhumane subjugation", does not do justice to the system of infibulation. This is seen when the sixteen-year-old Somali-American girl is circumcised. The barbarity of this act is emphasized by the fact that she is circumcised for nothing else but some pretence at nationalism by the regime. Her parents have denounced their Somali citizenship. Her circumcision subjects her to misery, and the humiliation is worsened by the arranged marriage to an old man whom she does not even know (not that knowing him would civilize the barbarity). The force of this act is felt by the suicide that is committed by her parents. I argue here that her circumcision is a patriarchal political act directed against the intelligentsia. By leaving Somalia, the girl's parents did not want the General to rule them, so they indirectly opposed him. The sixteen-year old girl's foreignness is erased by sexual initiation to an old man who for his prize will help to consolidate the General's rule. She becomes as much of a political sexual victim as Amina

who is raped by three men who tell her they are raping her not because of her but because of her father. To further emphasize the position that sex is a political act endorsed by the General to control women, (many of the ministers try to get sexually close to Medina when she leaves Samater) the men who rape Amina all benefit substantially in an effort by the regime to 'protect' Amina. They are not punished, and it is even suggested by Amina's father that one of them marry Amina (this would make her rape prize for the rapist who will dehumanize her further).

The raping of Amina and the betrothal of the American girl to an old man makes sex definitely take on a gruesome political meaning in the text, although I argue that some of the characters overstretch the symbolic significance and nature of sex. Sagal, for example feels let down politically when she sleeps with Wentworth George who later gets a job with the regime. Her reasoning that she had sex with him to recruit him to the clandestine movement is only a mask covering her carelessness for not taking responsibility for her reproductive capacity. Emphasizing her lack of caution is the fantasy that if she has the baby she would "prick the nation's conscience with guilt". Certainly the nation or the General will not worry about another woman having a child. Not when nothing much is done about the many children who die of malnutrition. Sagal herself gives us the statistics that the infant mortality rate is shockingly high in Somalia because of malnutrition. She also questions the wisdom of having a child when she says, "What future is there for a child born now, under the tutelage of the General, Father of the Nation, General Warden of this prison - what future" (1981:112). If she has a baby, it will be her life that she will be pricking, not the nation's conscience. She will not be able to pursue her dreams of reaching the sky with her

swimming as soon as she would like to. She is just hiding behind politics to shift the blame from herself. Sagal, Medina's protégé, is presented by Farah as reading her life from a singular perspective: that which is dictated by Somali politics. This limits her potential to significantly contribute to the changing of the nation into a more tolerable place.

The contradictions in Sagal's reasoning and points of view bring out the strength in her mother Ebla. Ebla exposes Sagal's weaknesses for not having ideas of her own; Barbara and Medina always influence her. This portrayal of Sagal by Farah, I aver, is an indication that she is not fit to be one of the deciders of Somali politics. She is emulating those who have failed, and so she is also likely to fail. She is unlike Ubax who draws what her mother cannot decipher and who complains to her "You want me to be like you", an accusation that brings out the individualism and decisiveness in little Ubax. Sagal's victory could only come if she decided to arrange her family by getting Wentworth George from the regime, but she does not want to do this because for her as for Medina, Wentworth George has compromised his values by accepting a job with the regime.

Ebla chastises Sagal for getting involved in what she does not clearly understand and her decisiveness in doing this brings out the important role she plays in the text. Unlike Medina or Sagal, she adopts many critical perspectives of looking at situations. According to Mnthali women seem to be failing to get involved in national politics as oppression is stifling their identities but as for Ebla, the General fails to numb her mind. I submit that in comparison to Medina and Idil, Ebla is the bridge that connects staunch traditional values and extreme modern transformative ones. She is not educated formally like Medina, but her

education has come out of the hardships of her life. She is quite traditional but she does not embrace tradition as warmly and as manipulatively as Idil. This makes her a well-balanced character to face the challenges of both modernity and traditionalism that are manifested by the regime. The narrative informs us that she fought for Sagal in court and won her custody. She is a mother who knows what she wants and she has been providing well for Sagal, nurturing her but at the same time giving her room to breathe.

From this description of Ebla, I argue that she would be the ideal person to include in Medina's circles in her efforts to orchestrate a revolutionary movement that could gain freedom for Somalia. Medina has been used as an example that the regime does not tolerate direct confrontation, and it is more terrified by the clandestine movement, hence the rounding up and scaring of innocent people from time to time. Ebla is practical because she emphasizes the importance of understanding a cause first before getting involved, and then acting carefully to become effective for that cause. She perceptively tells Sagal:

The land is mined, and this General is out to kill. Duck at the buzz of the coming bullet; duck, my dearest, before a stray one gets you, duck and dodge. Do you argue that the city is full of walking corpses? We all know it. Who doesn't? And please do not speak of *conscience* to me. I, too, have one. But I wear mine inside me and not on my forehead. I know many men and women in Somalia who wear their *conscience* inside, pinned to their underthings. Private as one's private parts. (1981:30)

The emphasis of "*conscience*" in Ebla's speech is meant to make Sagal aware of the importance of the state of affairs for every Somali, who would do what they could to topple the general but are aware of the consequences of being overt about it. Ebla is used to show that it does not take education or a complete denunciation of the regime to gain personal liberation, but common sense and caution. She fills the gap that is created in Medina's

discussion with her mother where Fatima claims that she does not understand politics. Her understanding of the personal and the political from everyday experience and her covert criticism of the regime contrasted to Medina's self-defeating one is used to highlight the lack of faith in the intelligentsia. Samater vouches elsewhere in the novel that the intelligentsia collaborates with the oppressive state when he reflects:

We the intellectuals are the betrayers; we the so-called intellectuals are the entrance the foreign powers use so as to dominate, designate, name and label; we the intellectuals are the ones who tell our people lies... We are the ones that keep dictators in power. (1981:72)

Ebla seems to have been used to support Samater's thesis by highlighting Medina's shortcomings in relying too much on her western education to do things. Ebla sums up Medina's downfall thus, "Medina was offered the pen with which she wrote herself off" (1981:41) the face of public political history. The regime knows how to bait its victim, and Sagal will surely have fallen prey to their methods if she is nominated and refuses to go and represent her country in the swimming competition.

Of all the mother/daughter relationships in the text, Ebla seems to enjoy a mutually exclusive one with her daughter whom she does not dictate to but gives advice and choices. She is an unmanipulative mother. To emphasize Ebla's strength as a character are Fatima Bint Thabit and Idil. Fatima is the exact opposite of Medina, and she has survived her life of servitude to the patriarchal system. Farah uses her to show the extent of the oppressive nature of tradition that prohibits women from participating publicly in transformation of the country to more tolerable rule. For Fatima, her reticence and her bondage make her feel safe from the grip of the general's oppressive methods. She says

You, Medina, are the fire which nearly burned everything at birth; Nasser is the water which almost drowned us all. Why, I am as quiet as a shadow which doesn't get wet and which isn't consumed by fire. (1981:135)

This sense of security is a false one because it does not make patriarchy refrain from victimizing the women who adhere to the constraints of its strictures. In fact, I argue that Fatima's acquiescence colludes with patriarchy. It qualifies her father's theories that a woman must not know and therefore must not ask, "A woman mustn't be sure of anything ever...A woman, like any other inferior being, must be kept guessing, mustn't be given reason to believe that she is certain about anything" (1981:136). Her acceptance of this doctrine through her uncertainty is an affirmation that she is 'inferior' as Gad Thabit says. She helps to perpetuate the ideology of women's inferiority and at the same time she endorses the General's rule and helps its prolongation.

The security that Fatima feels is therefore quite false, as she can be as much of a victim as Medina. However, her importance in the narrative is to show the extent to which the extremes of modernity that come out in Medina can be as self defeating as the extremes of tradition that are referred to as a prison. Fatima is described at the beginning of the narrative as

a woman weighed down with the contradictions of tradition: she was chained ankle and wrist and foot to the permanence of her homestead. She seldom came out of her house unless it was absolutely necessary, unless she had to answer to an urgent call of some kind. (1981:7)

This construction of her sets the stage for her enormous absence in Medina's life, a situation that Medina tries to change by creating a relationship in which she can be close to her daughter. Later in the narrative, Fatima calls herself "a veiled woman who is chained to the

string of her purdah, the string which strangles one..." (1981:139). Both these descriptions portray Fatima as a victim. Indeed she is a victim, but she does not become a victim because of tradition. I think by portraying different mothers who view tradition differently, Farah is stressing that situations do not create prisoners out of people but it is the way people react to institutions that determines their position in that situation.

Fatima emerges to be as much of a victim as Medina who is distinctively singled out by another oppressed as a victim. Fatima, who seems to be aware of the implications of powerlessness and intelligently analyses them, tells Medina:

You are a prisoner of your principles and your secret dreams, Medina; I am a prisoner of a tradition, that I won't deny. One is always a prisoner of one thing or another: a prisoner of acquired habits or a prisoner of the hope which chains one. (1981:144)

The use and repetition of "prisoner" in the quoted passage is a summation of the similarity of the situations between Medina and her mother. Medina may not think that highly of her mother's adherence to tradition but I argue that she hears reason from the very person whose opinion she might not respect because of the intellectual differences. Throughout the text, Medina refers to herself as a "guest" in her own country, but this is a refusal to read the situation properly. It is Fatima who puts it precisely by labeling her lifestyle a "prison". The fact that Farah makes Fatima's perceptions of situations more varied and sharper than those of Medina is meant to emphasise how employing radical and less fixed ways of reading into situations can be liberating in terms of giving better insight.

Fatima, characteristic of her suffocating links with tradition, is given a shadowy but at the same time very prominent role in the text. She provides a good parallel to Medina because both of them are prisoners in their own ways, and she enhances the pivotal role that Ebla may have as a potential active player in the decision to liberate Somalia. Ebla is careful, perceptive, and even though she knows what is going on, she is careful what she says in public. Also very significantly, from those who adhere strongly to tradition, she provides a useful maternal comparison to Idil, who uses her position as a mother to manipulate, and to try and acquire power by creating her own kingdom in which she rules her daughter-in-law and her children.

I argue that this presentation of Idil makes her another dictator. It gives another version of dictatorship; one that is poles apart from the one that is painted through Medina. The extremity of Idil's kind of dictatorship could be caused by the material deprivation suffered by Idil all her life. Idil emerges as another dictator because she sees and reads things only from her perspective, the perspective of how tradition bestows power among elders. Her form of dictatorship can easily be compared to that of the General. Idil suffers deprivation as a single parent raising her two children. Because of this material deprivation, it is easy to bribe Idil to stop interfering in her children's lives by giving her trips to Mecca. This bribery is similar to that which satisfies the deputy presidents and the General who expect every minister to bring their mistresses and wives presents from abroad. I propose that it is the one that makes Idil regard her son and daughter as some form of investments. This attitude in turn makes her interfere in their lives, like a dictator, causing havoc and disappointment.

The way she looks at her situation here is that because she never had enough whilst her children were growing up, she deserves compensation.

It is ironical that Idil is presented as fixing tradition to that which she thinks will give her more powers. Unlike Fatima whose tradition of purdah actually "fixes" her between four walls, Idil is free to relax the grip that tradition may impose on her because she is a nomad who has no fixed abode. However, because she sees benefits in her position as a mother if she sticks to tradition, Idil engraves the traditional gender stereotypes in her. Among other things, she believes that the kitchen is a female domain and criticizes Samater as being weak when he cooks. It is interesting to note that Idil blames Samater's 'feminine' attributes on the fact that he grew up with no father to emulate. It is as if she is saying she is not good enough to be emulated, emphasising her beliefs in tradition that bestows more power on men over women. To her, men should be exemplary, hence her disappointment that Samater does not wield enough power in his household.

Idil's criticism of Samater makes her very vindictive and vengeful. She sees as the only means threatening to or even circumcising Ubax as a way to get back at Samater for being a "weak" son; weak because he lives in a house that is legally Medina's and lets Medina control the family finance. The circumcision is supposed to make Ubax like other children because Idil is opposed to the way in which Ubax is spoiled, and most importantly the way in which she is not being sensitized to the traditional expectations of being a woman. According to Idil, Ubax dresses like a boy and even walks like a boy, both aspects of which she is opposed to. One could argue that Idil is propelled by the jealousy she has of the

relationship between her son, his wife and their daughter. Hers was a life dominated by misery and this becomes a way in which she thinks things should be. It seems to pain her to see any family that is liberated from this misery that she knows. In this light, one would compare her disposition to that of the General whose main object in torturing and even arranging the elimination of those who oppose him as a sadist means of wanting people to accept his oppression. Those who oppose will be humiliated and broken like Soyaan and the family of the Somali American girl.

As stated earlier on, Idil has the power and choice to change tradition because of her nomadic existence and her age. Clearly, she will not change those clauses of tradition that give her power. Hence, she uses motherhood to call on tradition only regarding those aspects that work to her advantage. Because of her status as a mother and a representative of the old order, she is powerful as "... it is in the old and not the young that society invests power" (1981:23). That power she uses to manipulate because she cannot earn respect from Medina and Samater because of her interference, which has cost Xaddia her marriage. Her position of power can easily be compared to that of the General who expects every Somali to worship him because he is the one holding the reins of power. The revolution creates triangular loyalty situations that put people in very uncompromising positions, with difficulty in what to choose.

When the Somali American girl is circumcised, the parents are faced with decisions to identify with the regime and stay in Somalia, leave their daughter there and choose to die fighting the regime since death is an inevitability for most people who oppose the

dictatorship. Perhaps knowing that they will not win a fight using legal channels and that they will never be able to change what happened to their daughter, the parents choose death and commit suicide. The break up of this family and the death of the parents, I argue, is used by Farah to expose the strength that the revolution will have if the family is broken and weak. The General makes and unmakes families as pleases him to guarantee prolongation of his stay in power. And not choosing the General is analogous to choosing death, he can arrange to have you killed himself or he will drive you to kill yourself.

Idil creates intricate loyalty triangles for Samater and his family in an effort to consolidate her power as the giver of Samater's life. She forces Samater to choose between her and Medina, Medina between marriage to Samater and having Ubx circumcised if she continues living in the house with Idil. Xaddia is also forced to choose between pleasing Idil with a grandchild and saving a marriage. The choices that people are being given work in the best interest of Idil alone, and whatever choice they make, she comes out as the triumphant party. If the General's power is consolidated by the weakness of the nuclear family as seen in his attempts and success in breaking up the sixteen-year old girl's family, Idil's breaking up of Xaddia and Samater's families can also be read as a form of collaboration with the General. As long as there is no unity in the family, the general will use the policy of divide and rule. The dictatorship seems to thrive, symbolically in the novel, because of the division that comes out among families, a phenomenon that is explained by the fact that the term 'family' is not uniform.

To take the comparison of Idil and the General's power further, I argue that she calls for tradition in the same way the General does when he is threatened. According to Medina, Idil is very fond of taking refuge in unscientific generalizations when she starts losing an argument. Her embracing of tradition makes her criticize Samater and Medina's marriage as unholy as it was not done according to her belief in tradition. Such is her adherence to this tradition of hers that she does not want to acknowledge its dynamism, one that could come about as a result of contact with other cultures through reading. She criticizes as waste the money that Medina and Samater spend on books, and she threatens to burn all their books. Books are tools that can enrich people with knowledge and I submit that burning the books will symbolically signify some form of closure, a refusal to acknowledge that there is other knowledge besides that which one knows. Books threaten Idil because they may expose the shallowness of her ideas and they give her children the words to argue with her and point shortcomings in her way of thinking. Burning books would be tantamount to the same gesture of banning Medina's writing that has been imposed by the General. What the General and Idil may fail to realize is that what the mind has stored is difficult to get rid of. One way or the other the things that Samater and Medina have read have strengthened their convictions and they only need to gather and replan on strategies that are relatively safe enough to attack without getting burned.

Like a true dictator, Idil's methods of asserting authority are numerous and diverse. Such is her effort to dominate Samater that when Medina moves out, she wastes no time in looking for a replacement wife, one who is docile enough for her to control. Many parallels can be drawn between Idil's replacement of Medina and that of the General's of Medina too. Asli

the replacement wife is uneducated, and can easily be bullied. If Samater were to accept her, she would enter the marriage with no bargaining power at all because she would owe her good life to the skilful matchmaking of Idil. The educational discrepancies between Samater and Asli will be Idil's greatest weaponry. This choice of wife, I argue, is used by Farah to show how Idil uses motherhood in a manipulative way in order to consolidate her matriarchal power. She plans everything so subtly that Asli is even fooled to think that her aunt has her best interests at heart when underneath that kindness is a hidden motive of power and control.

The General uses the same motive of kindness to gain control when Sandra is made to replace Medina as a writer. Sandra is Italian, and therefore may not have any real nationalist feelings towards Somalia. What she needs is a break because she has been failing to find a good job. Her appreciation at getting this job is what blinds her from seeing the real truth about the devious nature of the revolution. She is told what to write in praise of the regime in exchange for publishing rights with different top magazines in the nation. One could also argue that because of her non-mothering state, Sandra does not have anything to lose if the country remains in the hands of the dictator. Even if she is aware of bad governance it does not concern her because she has no future in Somalia in the form of children. Like a true opportunist, her friendship with Medina does not survive because she must now serve a regime that Medina opposes. Sandra also wants to get the full benefits of being a mistress of the government. Her popularity with the regime becomes very much conditional. She must lie for them in order for her to keep her job and happiness.

As with the dictatorship, Idil's love for her children is very conditional. She makes it clear that she can only be a friend with Samater and Xaddia if she can manipulate them to get what she wants. Samater protests against his mother's indoctrination, refuses the wife she chooses for him and throws her out of his house. For this he pays heavily because he has challenged atavistic traditional authority. As Nasser says,

there is one thing society will not forgive him: for disobeying the authority of an aged mother. Idil represents traditional authority, and it is in the old and not the young that society invests power. If he as much as raises his voice or a finger, the man is gone as a slaughtered cow. (1981:23)

The use of the phrase "slaughtered cow" in the above passage is meant to emphasize the ruthlessness with which traditional deviants are handled by the regime. They will not be spared. If the aged mother is given authority by society, and if the General gains power by appealing to traditional tribal loyalties, confrontation with Idil is a direct challenge to the General's regime. Idil herself believes that tradition will be the ultimate victor when she says:

You needn't push me or manhandle me. I am rags in whom dwell life's rages. But I will make you regret. I will make you regret... Children outgrow their parents; men outgrow their women; women outgrow fashions; and the year, the seasons. Unlike the seasons, the years, the men, the women and the children, unlike all these, tradition stays and wins in the end. You have done something you shouldn't have. And I will make you pay. (1981:175)

Idil's mindset is revealed in this passage. She acknowledges change in some aspects of the society, but thinks that tradition remains static. She does not realize that the change in other relationships is a change of tradition and that everything outlives its time. It is this refusal of hers to acknowledge the change in gender roles regarding her children that makes her stir problems for everyone she comes across. Her confidence and conviction in the repetition of "I will make you regret" in the quoted passage is an indication that she understands her

sham power. The political governance of the dictatorship is based on acquiring support from those who have been discarded by the modern and dynamic generation that is bent on toppling the dictatorship and it will support her cause.

It can be argued that by throwing his mother out, Samater makes his first public move to denouncing the regime. At first, he gives in by accepting the appointment as minister to save his clansmen, and when he gets rid of his mother he is also breaking the tribal umbilical cord. He chooses his wife and child, and this is a suggestion by Farah that if the defeated and sickly nuclear family stands together and strategize well, then they will find means to unseat the General. This family has to define its own terms, and become a family according to its own standards. Idil is proved wrong by this reunion; tradition does not stay the same. The nuclear family can get on well without her. Actually, she is a hindrance to whatever values they may have. Samater saves his principles by not listening to her and cutting all ties. She was encouraging him to plunder the nation's monetary resources like other ministers, have many wives like the rest of the ministers. It is clear that Idil wanted to live what she regards as success through her son, and therefore rule him. Samater's refusal to be ruled is a major effort to change tradition; he has challenged the matriarch who was supposed to have unquestionable authority.

The different faces of motherhood that Farah has used have managed to show the ways in which motherhood can be both a force to prepare the young for future struggle. It can also be a retrogressive element that discourages change for the better for some people. Although the dictatorship limits the growth of their identities, some mothers are portrayed to be

overcoming this hurdle and creating their own private worlds that are a starting point to the renewed fight against patriarchy. The educated mother Medina and her followers are presented as being very limited in terms of changing the political tyranny as they only have one perspective of looking at the Somali situation. By directly confronting the regime, Medina is limiting her potential as a future decider of Somali politics. She openly criticises the government and this gives the regime an open excuse to control her and eliminate her from public politics. Idil is presented as a manipulative mother who defeats efforts by other mothers to liberate the country from a dictatorship. She is only concerned about enriching herself. Ebla seems to be the only mother who is presented as having the capacity to nurture a child and understand the significance of being cautious under the conditions in Somalia. In the end, it appears Farah is emphasising the importance of family, but the family that may have any hope of organising to topple the General must be a radical family, not the conservative nuclear and extended families.

Conclusion

This study has argued that accusations against male writers for their biased representations of motherhood are informed by a limitation in the way their work has been read. Male writers have in many ways produced diverse and dynamic representations that show multiple levels of meaning that can be generated from the use of motherhood. These various meanings, however, will not be perceived if male writers' work is read with an outlook that regards literature as a reflection of life. Literature does not simply mirror life. Taking literature as such leads to reading with agendas that expect to expose how male writers view women in real life, and not how they make use of women characters and roles to construct meaning. This thesis has tried to show the diverse ways in which a political reading of the use of motherhood by selected male writers has shown how this metaphor is loaded with meaning.

Chapter one has argued that Ezekiel Mphahlele's autobiography has used the family, especially motherhood as a tool to create an allegory of the racist ideology of the apartheid era. The use of motherhood has been a very clever weapon of criticising the iniquities of the apartheid regime. Writing in a confrontational manner about these evils might have resulted in the work being censored. The way Mphahlele writes his story and at the same time manages to offer biting criticism of how the apartheid system shapes relationships is an example that censorship is not always successful if people engage in reading that goes beyond what appears on the page. The form of protest that Mphahlele uses is effective because it exposes to the reader the imbalances between the black and

white families during that time, and yet underlying this realism is a subversive political message.

I have argued that the inequitable system based on the racial ideology of superiority of one race over another is also used by Mphahlele to reveal the unequal nature of relationships between men and women that pervades in a patriarchal society. Mphahlele shows that it is because of the inhumane treatment that the males receive in the work place or in their dealings with the white world that they fail to have meaningful relationships with their wives and children. The white system has labelled them as beasts and this behaviour becomes characteristic of their everyday existence. They are daily exposed to violence and this becomes a cyclic way of life. They get their daily dose of violence at work, and they give some to their wives and children, and the cycle becomes unbreakable.

It has also been argued that Mphahlele uses one mother to show how reductive the internalisation of white values as normative can be of African values. He does this through his use of Ma Lebona as an African person who has acquired European tastes and behaviours because she thinks they are better than her African ones. This behaviour is shown to be very destructive because, apart from reproducing the ideology of white superiority, it makes Ma Lebona become as domineering as the white people whom she is emulating. She reproduces and enacts another cycle of violence unconsciously, and she makes her family victims of this violence.

Chapter two argues that two male writers have foregrounded the family and motherhood to show that women can be used in the process of creative writing. The writers have shown how female characters can help drive the plots of male dominated literature. Achebe and Plaatje both use the transition from precolonial African states' autonomy to colonial rule to show how women's history has mistakenly been thought to be separate from general histories when it is indeed a part of that history. Both writers use mothers as centres for coherence for their novels.

Achebe more than Plaatje relies on this technique by showing the centrality of mothers in the historical transition from orature to written literature. This transition left women no place because the patriarchal Christian order that was put in place during colonisation excluded women from its schools, making them lag behind in terms of acquiring formal book education. Achebe makes women part of the very important formation of written literature when he makes them the vehicles with which to drive his main plot.

In the same chapter, I argue that Plaatje centralises the position of women in history by making a woman's perspective of war dominate the narrative. He uses the eponymous heroine Mhudi to show how wars force women to be actively involved in defending themselves in four communities. It has been observed that Plaatje's representation differs from that found in other war texts because for him, women participate in wars not as victims, but as strong individuals who take advantage of the war to show different degrees of heroism. Destructive though it may be, the war is used as a liberating force for Mhudi, the Boer women and Nandi who uses the war to show her devotion for her husband

Mzilikazi. Mhudi uses her innovativeness to survive being killed by the Matabele army, she survives in the bush alone till Ra-Thaga comes to stay with her, and she mocks the bravery of the Matabele army when she tells her side of story about the invasion. As a mother, it is important that Mhudi is still able to venture into the wilderness to look for her husband. This freedom of movement that she carves for herself within her mothering makes her able to reveal the forward thinking abilities of women when she meets Nandi who claims that it is because of men that there are so many wars.

Chapter three has dealt with the position of women in discourses of nationalism. It has argued that Hove seems to create his representations with a seeming awareness of what has been theorised about the position of women in nationalist discourses. It has been proposed in the thesis that patriarchal views have not favoured the involvement of women in nationalist projects for their own liberation. Instead, they have been expected to sacrifice for the nation and then retreat to the homestead when the liberation of the country has been achieved. The chapter argues that Hove subverts the idea that women should give up the fight for their emancipation in favour of liberating the nation. He offers new possibilities for women who are caught between family loyalties and their precarious position in a war of liberation. Hove's *Bones* manages to reveal that national liberation does not go hand in hand with the liberation of women, and that women in fact have to carve their own spaces within those wars to emancipate themselves. Because of the large-scale national force of the liberation wars, unfortunately, women's efforts at their own liberation are very much isolated and private.

The fourth chapter has argued that intricate webs can be woven between state and family, to the advantage of state authoritarianism. Without the families realising it, the state permeates their daily existence so profoundly that their own personal relationships become dominated by power and powerlessness. An analysis of how the authoritarian state can affect and influence family relationships has been done through an examination of the nature of the mother daughter pairs in *Sardines*.

The examination has concluded that different classes of women suffer state repression, educated mothers more so than uneducated ones who adhere to tradition. It was argued that educated women's lot is worse than that of their uneducated counterparts because their education will lead them to question things and make a contribution in an effort to help change the political situation for the better. This is impossible because of the harshness with which their criticism is handled by the authoritarian regime. However, it has been argued that even though at public level educated mothers can be controlled heavily by the state, their private life is more tolerable since they can make decisions that the women who adhere to tradition cannot make.

Having looked at the diverse representations of motherhood through different stages of historical transition, it is tempting to speculate on whether motherhood as literary material will continue to be used by male writers. Some contemporary literature has shown that motherhood is certainly still important for representation for male writers, who still come up with some new meaning and significance through the use of motherhood. Some writers

are beginning to foreground and exalt the role that the mother in African communities has played, and this open exaltation still resonates with political meaning.

An area that would be of interest to look at is how African writers in the Diaspora have taken up representations of motherhood. One such writer is Zimbabwean Ken Mufuka who is now lives in the United States of America, where he has continued writing. His collection of short stories, *Letters From America* (1997) is intended to give an African's view of American culture. However, Mufuka uses the celebration of Mothers' Day in America as a prologue to find a way in which he gives recognition to his own mother and other African mothers. Mufuka acknowledges that his mother is not unique in her resourcefulness when he writes:

Until I was grown up, I thought my mother was the greatest woman on earth, which she is, but I have since realised that she represents many Zimbabwean women and that what I thought was unique was in fact quite common among African women. (Mufuka 1997:36)

Mufuka's movement from the particular to the national to the continental in this quote seems to suggest that it is only possible to appreciate the significant role that mothers play in history by appreciating the contribution of a mother in her home first. To show that the strength of mothers comes from everyday occurrences in the home, Mufuka turns back to the personal and begins in quite a humorous way to recount the events in his life where his mother always surprised him with her strong sense of intuition. He mentions the way in which his mother used to cajole them into admitting all the wrong doing they had done in her absence by calmly pretending to know everything that had happened.

He then moves on to the general again when he writes, "The African mother is a genius in making a meal out of nothing. The Lord himself must admire how the African mother can make four loaves and fishes from nothing" (1997:37). Here, the admiration is in the way mothers sustain lives through their creativity in making food out of limited resources. Mufuka takes a private and seemingly trivial matter and publicly attests to its significance.

For Mufuka, it is little things that mothers do to keep the families alive that makes them wonderful and exceptional. He expresses his admiration for mothers' compassion when they intervene by telling the fathers not to be ruthless when they punish a child. The mothers believe and tell fathers that "Punishment does not mean killing the child" (1997:38). Mufuka's sense of the need to acknowledge the lack of appreciation that goes with the position of motherhood is noted in his declaration, "African mothers deserve a monument at heroes' acre or somewhere" (1997:39). This closing statement by Mufuka could be a criticism of the heroes' acre in Zimbabwe, where it appears only male heroes are buried. These heroes are considered so because they fought in the liberation struggle. Mothers who fight to help children survive long after the war is over are, however not given any form of recognition for their hard work. That is why maybe Mufuka's "or somewhere" could be interpreted as his dismissal of the heroes' acre as an insignificant place because it is controlled by males. For Mufuka, it may not even be fit to carry a monument for all mothers.

That an adult male writer is courageous enough to go back into his past and bring to the public the great things that his mother used to do and has done for him shows how

sensitive some male writers are to the use of motherhood as literary material. It is therefore uncalled for to group all male writing on the basis of the sex of the writers and accuse it of being unconcerned about how motherhood ought to be used in literature.

My analyses of the different uses male writers have made of motherhood does not in any way claim to be exhaustive. Rather, it should be taken as a beginning where questions have been raised and suggestions made. This study calls for a reassessment of the way literature by African male writers has been perceived. This reassessment will only come if such works are not prejudged on the basis of the sex of those who write them. Prejudging work according to the sex of the author is mere perpetuation of the fixed and rigid gender systems that classify women as opposites of men. It fails to acknowledge that interaction with different members of the community can indeed change and reshape accepted gender perceptions in a complex way. To use Doyal and Harris (1986) again, it is important to keep in mind that as human beings we are trained to evaluate not only our behaviour but that of others as well. This power to critique that we are endowed with can be used in a more challenging manner to read beyond the ending of a novel and try to find deeper meaning. In order for works by male writers and indeed by female writers as well to be appreciated better, readers have to adopt a more political position of reading. This reading will have to look at texts not as reflections of life. The mediation of the writer between the intertext, which is usually real life, and the final new text is very crucial.

It is hoped that this study will encourage more research on multiple levels of meaning that can be produced through representation of gendered characters. This research could be of

value to other scholars who may want to look at the extent to which interpretation of literary representations can be stretched or limited due to positions taken in reading. A call for the recognition of how significant reading with the intention to find deeper meaning and not blame is being made, so as to raise renewed interest in what has already been exhaustively researched on and dismissed as lacking in gender sensitivity.

This research raises some questions for research on male representations of black womanhood. A relevant question could be, to what extent do methods of reading influence the meaning derived from any text? Theresa Rogers & Anna O. Soter (eds) (1997) have done work on reading across cultures. For these writers, it is important for students to be able to make use of literature to explore who they are, participate in the lives of others, negotiating positions of criticism and critiquing assumptions that may be held about certain people through their representative literatures. This argument is important and useful for my own study because it points in the direction of the necessity to have work done on reading across gender in different genres of literature. Reading texts, it appears, has been done from a biased gender perspective and this has imposed several limitations already pointed out in this thesis because of assumptions that certain gender groups write in a certain way. This assumption usually leads to a sociological approach to reading literature.

A sociological approach to reading presupposes that the writer does not mediate but reproduces society as it is. The limitations of sociological reading can be seen in the work by female white writers who have undertaken to criticise some black male writers' work.

It is clear from the criticism by Florence Stratton and Esther Y. Smith that their criticism of Achebe is influenced by the fact that they read his novel as a reflection of the way women were treated in precolonial Africa. As a result, they engage with him at a very limiting and closed level. The level at which they criticise his work is full of assumptions about the way African males oppressed women. Because of this they end up expressing a lot of anger towards Achebe's work and failing to see the complexity of his work in terms of historicising the significance of women in the transition from oral to written literature.

Perhaps another possibility that this thesis can open up is an investigation into the criticism of male writers' work by female writers to see again how this criticism has been limited or has stretched due to the standpoint taken in reading. This would involve looking at a range of criticism of male writers' work to find out if there are any assumptions that are imposed that result in the weakness or strength of the criticism.

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