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3 Continuity and Change

Depictions of Gender Roles and Relations from the Stone Age period to the Present

Happinos *Marufu* & Sarah Yeukai *Matanga*

Abstract

This paper blends archaeological evidence, archival materials and literary sources to make an argument that the socio-cultural fabric of the Zimbabwean society has been constantly changing in line and in response to the prevailing and dominant ideological thinking of the time. Archaeological evidence reveals how, over the years, women and children have always played a pivotal role in the subsistence economy of Stone Age societies, as they were responsible for food gathering activities as well as the overall welfare of the family (Marufu, 2012; 2017). Men engaged in higher risk, hunting activities which, nonetheless, contributed less to the daily dietary needs of a family. This social setting changed during the Iron Age period where men acquired more economic opportunities than women and, resultant, caused them to have dominance over women. This marked the genesis of numerous inequity challenges bedevilling the Zimbabwean society today and that scholars and artists in general are grappling with which Chitando, (2003; 2007) advocates for their disbandment in order to create inclusive and sustainable societies. From a creative writing perspective, early literary works have shown how heavy-handed and exclusionary the patriarchal system was on women. They also highlight how little changes were brought in by colonialism, together with the associated dynamics brought by the advent of Christianity. However, there now appears to be a paradigm shift in contemporary literary works, with scholars advocating more for women empowerment. Through an analysis of selected literary works that explore how religion has been used to deal with challenges that women face as a result of patriarchal systems in Zimbabwean societies, this chapter traces the development, over successive epochs, of the recognition of women. Reflecting on Ezra Chitando's contributions to women emancipation, our analysis enables *the identification of what needs to be done for societal transformation.*

Keywords: Ezra Chitando, gender roles and relations, patriarchy, religion, women empowerment, Stone Age, Iron Age

Introduction

The concepts of gender equality and gender equity are topical in the 21st century, especially as the world (particularly the Global South) seeks to address historical imbalances between men and women in terms of access and control of resources, as well as disparities in opportunities and decision-making processes. Where women suffer inequalities, society is the worse for it and, contrastively, there are evidentiary examples of how women inclusion, equality and overall empowerment has driven development agendas in the world. Azuh *et al* (2017:1)'s notion that gender equality and inequality negatively impact how women are perceived in their various communities is critical in this case and their argument is that:

Gender inequality and poor women empowerment retard improvement in living standards of women and act as a clog in their contributions to governance and economic development. In other words, gender equality empowers the transformation of women to access education, health, micro finance credit and recognition among other productive resources. Gender inequality lowers quality of life and culminates in limited productivity, hinders economic efficiency and growth. The benchmark for a successful society is the level of gender equality which reflects on the extent of women's rights and empowerment in that society.

The above emphasizes how addressing inequalities assists in the recognition and empowerment of women the world over. The major challenge in most societies has been the failure to both steer sensible development and impart or inculcate ideal models of a balanced society. At the centre of this struggle are ideologies, beliefs and traditions which deprive women of meaningful socio-cultural, economic, and political power compared to men. Women and children have always occupied marginal spaces since time immemorial. Societal roles, especially under African patriarchy, have always dictated the roles that women should play. In this chapter we trace the historical background and setup of the African situation and more specifically the Zimbabwean arrangement to demonstrate how this social structure has changed over the years.

Our analysis delves into how gender relations evolved and changed over time, from the Stone Age period, through the Iron Age period to the contemporary period. Throughout these phases of cultural development, women have played a critical role to the welfare of the family by contributing towards their daily needs. This is shown through the hunting and gathering activities that the women engaged in as a way of fending for the culinary needs of the family. This role has not been, however, applauded

as women have always been viewed as second class citizens. Their role in society is not considered as critical and essential.

Significantly, Chitando & Chitando (2022:58) have asserted that:

Both Zimbabwean women's writings and Zimbabwean women's theology are in basic agreement that women occupy the lowest rung on the economic scale. This is not peculiar to Zimbabwean women. It is known that across the world, women continue to be disadvantaged economically. Zimbabwean women writers have articulated the exclusion of women from formal economic systems. Although women were highly regarded in pre-colonial societies, missionary religions such as Christianity and Islam brought rigid forms of patriarchy.

The above assertion brings to the fore the debate that we seek to explore in our interpretation and reading of the nexus between religion, literature and history as far as the treatment of women is concerned. The quotation highlights and acknowledges the fact that women were highly regarded in the precolonial society, a position that we intend to dig deeper into in our analysis in this chapter.

Remarkably, contemporary scholars have fully engaged themselves to give a voice to women and to empower women from all walks of life. In this paper, we therefore, in particular, work closely with the contributions put forward by Ezra Chitando in an attempt to voice his concerns over the welfare of the females, be it their treatment, acceptance and/or involvement in various facets of life. This is to argue that the woman's place is not just in the house and scholars have advocated for women who rise to transform the home they live in as well as impact their communities. Our analysis is therefore cognizant of Chitando's contributions in attempting to break the barriers that hinder the full recognition of women as well as dealing with the various stereotypes that have been used as tools for women oppression.

Literary works and debates have also emerged as responses to these stereotypical perceptions and the marginalization of women. Our focus is however on how Zimbabwean women writers have contributed to women emancipation through their literary works. Chitando (2011:ii) avers "the possibility of literature to offer a platform for the liberation of women, or a counter-platform for reactionary politics". In this way, literature becomes an important lens within which issues affecting women can be explored. To this end, we discuss how literature has emerged as a site of empowering marginalized women and a platform that provides a voice for voiceless women.

Tracing the developments of patriarchal issues in the Zimbabwean context allows an entry point for the general discussion in this chapter where our major concerns are emphasised through an analysis of literary texts that represent real life situations. These texts become platforms of urgency and agency in dealing with issues affecting women as the perceived marginalised populations. We also give archaeological interpretations that help explain the role that women have played even in early societies.

Our conclusions are drawn from Chitando's conceptions of these issues as a way of coming up with solutions that wholly address these challenges bedevilling women's recognition and empowerment. Various stereotypes have existed in Zimbabwean discourses where women were *otherised* as supported by Gaidzanwa's assertion that, "while male Africans could be trained to lead Christian and heathen natives, native women were supposed to bear children and raise them in a fit manner for these leaders" (Gaidzanwa, 2006:196). It is such a view that women in Zimbabwe have risen to challenge and increasingly, Zimbabwean women writers have taken the role of rewriting these discourses that disempower women. The same is advocated for by Chitando as a male theologian to ensure that women are given opportunities and platforms to exercise power and authority even on platforms that have been regarded as dominantly male. Chitando & Chitando (2022:56) insist on and cite the role of men in a mentality and practice shift where gender issues are related. They acknowledge the way males have viewed issues to do with the emancipation of women; especially their contributions to the theories that can be used in understanding African women's writings and African women theology. On the other end of the spectrum, one has to also question why men are seemingly comfortable with these other theories, like *Africana womanism*, while rejecting others:

However, this popularity of *Africana womanism* among male scholars will require more careful analysis. Why would men, who are enjoying patriarchal privileges, be so comfortable with this particular literary theory? Could it be that there are greater possibilities of retaining the status quo under *Africana womanism* than under other literary theories? Applying a hermeneutics of suspicion, we would wonder why some male scholars are so keen on promoting *Africana womanism* in Zimbabwe. (Chitando & Chitando, 2022:56)

To Chitando, these groups of men that genuinely lobby for the emancipation of women exist among African men and these should not be viewed with suspicion.

Statement of the problem

The interplay between literature and culture has always been an issue for discussion in various forums the world over. Women have always been known to occupy marginal spaces and their presence in nation building platforms has been on minor issues. These challenges of marginalisation that women have faced over the years date back to the early days of the Stone and Iron ages in the development of societies. If history shows that women at one point in time occupied places of authority, how then did they lose it and what are the current developments that seek to empower women for the benefit of societies. In what ways do these developments, relating to intersectionality of gender, culture and religion, manifest in the Zimbabwean context and how have they been handled?

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The study is a qualitative enquiry where we analyse literary texts, archaeological evidence as well as texts that speak on women's issues such as abuse, emancipation and recognition. We seek to demonstrate the intersectionality of gender, culture and religion and how these three are critical aspects to be considered in a study of this nature.

This study is inclined towards sociological theories of gender, that is, examination of how society influences our understanding of acceptable and/or appropriate behaviours from men and women. More specifically, we subscribe to the Structural Functionalist view of gender inequality, which posits that sexual division of labour is predefined, continuously modified by the ever-changing socio-economic circumstances, but always maintaining complementary gender roles (Zevallos, 2003). From this theoretical underpinning, gender roles were developed as human culture evolved and became structured along sex lines, where men assumed most of the outdoor, energy-demanding and risky activities while women became accustomed to 'lighter', domestic responsibilities in and around homes (Boserup, 1970; Alesina *et al*, 2011). What was critical in this socio-cultural setup was the complementary nature of gender roles, and supporting the idea of fluidity of gender roles depending on the circumstances. For instance, during the liberation struggle between 1966 and 1979 in Zimbabwe (also known as Chimurenga II), several women assumed masculine activities when men participated in the protracted war and were deployed to various parts of the country. Apart from this, both

young men and women were at the war front during the height of the liberation war.

According to Azuh *et al* (2017:3), “[t]he functionalist perspective sees society as a complex system and suggests that gender inequalities exist to maximize social efficiency. This approach looks at society through a macro-level orientation and broadly focuses on the social structures that shape society as a whole.” In this chapter we maintain that gender roles are dynamic social constructs which can be altered or modified according to the socio-cultural, economic, and political setting of the time. Above all, these gender roles are structured according to the cosmological view of the world by the society.

On the Origins of Gender and Division of Labour: The Stone Age Period

In this section, we explore the origins of gender and division of labour from the Stone Age to the contemporary period, demonstrating how the socio-cultural transformations among early human communities influenced engendered societal roles today. We also demonstrate the critical roles performed by women and how their activities constituted the substance of past economies. The argument in this analysis manifests through an analysis of the representations of women and the roles they played as well as the positions they occupied. We, therefore, provide these representations, and their metaphorical implications through rock art paintings and other archaeological evidence that describe the roles played by women in the early days. We adopt Wienclaw’s (2011:111) definition of gender inequality as, “the existence of disparities among individuals based solely on their gender rather than objective differences in skills, abilities, or other characteristics.” Wienclaw’s definition allows us to posit how women have been unfairly treated based on their gender.

In this section we trace the origins of gendered roles and responsibilities during the precolonial era among communities in southern Africa, with particular reference to the Zimbabwean landscape. The earliest glimpse of the socio-cultural fabric of past societies we have is rock art; which is the earliest form of record of the past, showcasing how Stone Age foragers lived and organized themselves socially and economically (Adams, 1991; Marufu, 2012; Nhamo, 2020). Whereas Stone Age culture began around 2,5 million years ago (Toth and Schick, 2005), it is only in its later phase,

that is 20,000 to 2,000 years ago, that behavioural practices of Stone Age foragers were captured in rock art. This chapter focuses on those cultural aspects of Stone Age communities focused on division of labour along gender lines and as are depicted in rock art.

Rock art showcases the socio-economic organisation of Stone Age foragers, where both men and women had responsibilities of fending for their families and the society at large. Men were depicted as hunters; they are shown wielding bows and arrows, and or carrying hunting bags (also called quivers). Women and young children, on the other hand, were depicted as gatherers of plant foods. Their toolkit included weighted digging sticks and gathering bags. These contrasting and yet complementary roles are illustrated in Plates 1 and 2. This type of division of labour ensured that both sexes took up equally important roles in the survival of the family, and or society.

Early anthropological works conducted among hunter-gatherer communities have demonstrated that gathering activities contributed more food than hunting activities (Marshall, 1976; Lee, 1979). This observation has been further strengthened by Kusimba (2003) who argues that gathered plant constituted 60% of the hunter-gatherers' diet. Elsewhere, Deacon and Deacon (1999:140) argue that gathered plant foods dominated the diet of Stone Age foragers and was the rich source of carbohydrates while hunting provided proteins and fats, mostly during periods when plant food was scarce. Despite this significance of plant food, 'it is indeed ironic that more credit and prestige is given to the less successful 'man the hunter' than to 'woman the gatherer' (Deacon and Deacon, 1999:140). All these observations demonstrate that women had important socio-economic responsibilities over their families or bands in terms of ensuring food security and social welfare of their family/group members, both young and old. It should be noted that, at this stage of cultural development, there were neither stereotypes nor discrimination of people along sex lines. This idea is also buttressed by Chitando (2011:38) where she asserts that; "In the past, women had greater leverage through their control of agriculture and indigenous spirituality," an assertion that strongly points to the idea that the role that women played and can still play cannot be underestimated or doubted.



Plate 1. Depiction of three women clad in animal skin aprons, two of whom are holding digging sticks used for plant food gathering (Site: Gwangwadza Rockshelter, Murehwa). Photo by H. Marufu



Plate 2. Depiction of hunters (all men) wielding their hunting toolkit, i.e. bows, arrows and quivers (Site: Marirangwe Rockshelter, Murehwa). Photo by H. Marufu

Depictions of gendered behavioural patterns in Stone Age rock art have greatly influenced the traditional thinking that men were hunters while women were gatherers. Whereas this thinking has some elements of truth in it regarding the structure and organisation of these Stone Age societies, it closes out possibilities of overlap in gender roles. A recent excavation at Wilamaya Patjxa in Peru, conducted by Haas *et al.* (2020) has provided concrete evidence on sexual division of labour during the Stone Age. The

archaeological research found 9,000 years old remains of a young adult female buried with what appeared like a complete set of big-game hunting gear and animal processing tools such as blades, scrapers and spear points. According to Haas *et al* (2020), this break-through research revealed that women were big-game hunters, contrary to the much-popularised male-the-hunter hypothesis. If findings of this research are anything to go by, then it can be argued that there was fluidity of division of labour among Stone Age communities, with women engaging in both gathering and hunting activities. It is important to note that both men and women were active participants and and/or contributors to the subsistence economy of the time.

Technological organisation of Stone Age communities in Southern Africa, in terms of production of utility tools and objects of adornment, presents another area where sexual division of labour can be traced. Who manufactured stone tools used in hunting and gathering activities? Who manufactured objects of adornment such as beads and pendants? Was the production process an exclusively masculine activity? There is no adequate archaeological evidence to answer these questions. As such, the authors make use of the recorded ethnographic researches conducted by early anthropologists in southern Africa such as Dunn (1931), Marshall (1971), and Lee (1979) among the descendants of San hunter-gatherers and Khoikhoi herders (jointly referred to as Khoisan). According to these ethnographic studies, stone-based technologies were not a preserve of men. Dunn (1931) observed that San women in the Northern Cape during the late 19th century were skilful stone knappers, who had knowledge and experience of ‘... how to flake, hammer, pick into shape, and finish [the manufacturing process] by grinding or rubbing ...’ All this testifies that there were no exclusive roles for men and women during the Stone Age, and that different sexes would take up tasks interchangeably. Thus, women would not require men in the production of equipment used for plant food gathering, the same way men would manufacture their own hunting toolkits. Elsewhere, Marshall (1976) observed that San women in the Kalahari region were responsible for the manufacturing of objects of adornment from ostrich eggshells. This, too, indicates the importance of women in the production of non-utilitarian objects. By and large, women were not excluded from the cultural technologies of the communities they belonged to.

Gender Roles and Relations during the Iron Age Period

Gender roles and relations became more pronounced during the Iron Age period, that is, the last 2,000 years. This is a fairly known period associated with the Bantu people, from whom the majority of present societies in the subcontinent of Africa can trace their ancestry (Phillipson, 2005; Huffman, 2007). What is clear during the Iron Age period is the advancement of cultural technology, craft specialisation, establishment of economic and socio-political systems, and origin of distinct gender roles and responsibilities. The purpose of this section is to trace the historical origins of sexual division of labour during the Iron Age period. What could have triggered sexual division of labour? Why were certain roles associated with either men or women? What impact did this have on present day societies? These are some of the issues this section shall try to answer in an attempt to understand gender roles and relations during the Iron Age period.

It is argued that sexual division of labour commenced when people started practicing agriculture, specifically land tillage (Boserup, 1970; Alesina *et al*, 2011). The argument is that land tillage is labour intensive in terms of soil preparation and other associated activities, required significant body strength and high energy expenditure. According to Alesina *et al* (2011), this gives men a relative advantage over women. Given the importance of agriculture to the subsistence economy of the people during the Iron Age period, societies developed a specialisation of production along gender lines. Accordingly, 'men tended to work outside of the home in the fields, while women specialized in activities within the home' (Alesina *et al* 2011:2). Further to this, societies then considered all out-door tasks which are labour intensive not appropriate for women, hence the genesis of gendered roles and responsibilities. Other labour-intensive tasks which were considered masculine include metal working and mining activities.

The subsistence economy of the Iron Age communities was anchored on agriculture (Scarre, 2005), an indispensable economic activity that constitutes one of the four critical pillars of Zimbabwe's economy today (*National Development Strategy 1*, 2020). Due to the significant role played by men in agrarian activities during the Iron Age, they continued holding grip in other economic activities of the society, thereby subduing women. According to Alesina *et al* (2011), these cultural beliefs tend to persist even if the economy moves out of agriculture, affecting the participation of

women on activities performed outside of the home, such as market employment, entrepreneurship or participation in politics. Thus, domination of men over women in several facets of life is a social construct which is traceable to the Iron Age period. Over the past centuries, these social constructs have contributed to the creation of male-dominated societies and the attendant stereotyping of women as subjects of men.

The socio-cultural fabric of prehistoric African societies is poorly understood. This is because of the absence of written records and fluidity of orature as sources of information. However, we have rock art as the earliest form of documentation across the breadth and length of the African continent. In Zimbabwe we have a fair knowledge of these foraging communities because of dense concentration of rock art in the country, compared to other parts of the continent. Provided with such a background, it becomes important to explore depictions of these perceptions in literary texts as a way of demonstrating the role played by art in addressing societal issues. This analysis also allows us to show the interplay of literature, gender, and religion as is similarly advocated for and explored by Chitando & Chitando (2005).

Positing Religion and Literature in Addressing Women's Issues in Zimbabwe

Literary arts also play a role in addressing women's issues. We read literary arts or literature in this discussion as fictional representations of reality. In this case we argue that literary texts can be viewed as tools for addressing societal ills and challenges. We draw on p'Bitek's (1986) notion that there is no art for art's sake. We demonstrate how literary texts act to expose the challenges that women go through when they are denied a chance to show that they are also capable of executing tasks that have been traditionally known as men's. The role that women play in society has always been viewed with scepticism. Women have always been treated as second class citizens in most societies (Chirongoma, 2012). Since time immemorial, women have been fighting for recognition and acceptance of the critical roles they play in societies (Parpart, 1995). African scholars have taken a key role in advocating for women empowerment and participation. Chitando is one such scholar who has stood for the emancipation of women in almost all spheres.

According to Chitando (2013:42): “African women writers have sought to weaken the patriarchal hold by articulating women’s voices. Where previously the discipline was dominated by men’s voices and visions, they have radically altered the face of the discipline. Women’s voices and experiences have become an integral part of African literature.” Chitando’s assertion, makes it imperative to highlight the need to recognise women’s voices and experiences that have become a critical part in African literature. This is a step further in the processes of emancipating women in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole.

Our chapter demonstrates how women have emerged in various circles and how they have been perceived, especially in the Zimbabwean context. Patriarchal patterns have largely influenced the way women are treated in African societies (Maunganidze, 2020). Male dominance has always been the order of the day with women having to suffer in almost all areas of life. Educating the girl child was viewed as waste of resources as it was believed that the girl would grow up and get married and whatever she would have gained from her parents’ home would benefit the husband’s family. This resulted in the girl child being denied education, which would have served as a source of empowerment. What is ironic is how the females have always played critical roles in society, including providing food for the family as has been alluded to in the previous sections.

In Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, the reader is introduced to a young girl, Tambu, whose full name is Tambudzai. The name alludes to the pain that Tambu as a girl child is subjected to. She is denied a chance to go to school while in the rural areas and preference is given to her brother Nhamo. This shows how the girl child was denied the right to empowerment by being denied an education. At one-point Tambu narrates, “the victimisation, I saw, was universal. It didn’t depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. It didn’t depend on any of the things I had thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere with them...” (Dangarembga, 2004:118). This emphasises how women and girls were subjected to victimisation and abuse. Our argument holds water here because we see Chitando joining the wagon of creative writers to advocate for the empowerment of women. *She No Longer Weeps*, by Dangarembga also presents Martha, a young university Law student who was impregnated out of wedlock and later suffers abuse from her boyfriend, Freddy. Striking in this play is how Freddy tells Martha, “A woman like you has no place in Zimbabwe,” (Dangarembga, 1987:9) which represents some of the patriarchal voices that could not envisage empowerment and recognition of

women in Zimbabwe. This entails that there was need for men and women to come together in the fight against male dominance.

Significant to note also is Alumenda's *Marita goes to school* (1997) that speaks to the importance of educating the girl child. Set in Zimbabwe, the story depicts a society that looked down upon girls and their emancipation but in the end, turns around to applaud Marita's achievements. In the article entitled, *Zimbabwean Women's writing and women's theology, supporting women's struggles for full rights and dignity*, Chitando & Chitando (2022) content that the struggle for Zimbabwean women's full rights is an ongoing struggle. In this case, they acknowledge the role the literary arts play in dealing with women's issues. Linked to literary arts is the role that religion plays, hence most of Chitando's scholarly contributions are centred on religion and women. This study, therefore, is an intersectional analysis of gender and religion as forming the basis of Chitando's aspirations and conceptions of a sane Zimbabwean society that acknowledges women.

It was considered a waste of time and money to send girls to school because they were only going to get married. And if Marita went to school, there would be no one to help with the work at home. With the colonial subversion of indigenous African processes and systems of knowledge generation and dissemination, the school marginalizes the 'new' and by extension, 'enlightenment' and 'development' without which the girl child would forever remain entrapped in a distorted tradition (Muhwati *et al*, 2010:207). Through an analysis of selected children's literature texts, Muhwati *et al*, (2010) argue that even mothers have a role to play in society as buttressed by the view that:

In the Zimbabwean literary tradition, mother characters have been cast as the foil against which male agency, superiority and athleticism have been negotiated, celebrated and entrenched. This has resulted in a scenario whereby mothers have been discursively disenfranchised and negotiated out of the nation building effort. The net result of such negative depictions has obviously been the distortion and narrowing of the gender space such that the nation has not been fully benefiting from the collective energies of all its citizens, regardless of their gender.

The assertion speaks of how women were looked down upon in the Zimbabwean context but in the selected children's literature texts, the mothers rise beyond societal prejudices and fight for their rights and that of their children as what Sekai, Takadini's mother, does in the novel, *Takadini* (Hanson, 1997).

Chitando & Chitando (2005) have also noted the existence of a sisterhood between creative writers and women theologians as they unite to fight against men who use religion, be it traditional or Christian, to oppress women. By looking at Chitando and his work, we see how these two scholars, from two different fields, have collaborated to show the linkage between that which exists in literature and theology.

Critical Reflections on Chitando's contributions to African Masculinities

The discussion will be inadequate without highlighting Chitando's major contributions towards the empowerment of women through a practice of safe masculinities, where men respect women and do not use their power to stifle women's progress. Chitando stands as an example for other male theologians, mainly because of his decisive critique of the pervasive nature of patriarchy and his call to men that they must take radical steps to bring about the desired change towards equitable gender relations. To buttress this Chitando, (2012:138) writes, "men must be challenged to have new approaches towards power. This will require rigorous analyses of the religious and cultural factors that inform aggressive masculinities." Such a position allows men to rethink and treat women in a way that will bring social transformation and development.

Significantly, an exploration of Chitando's contributions clearly articulates how his vision is encapsulated in respecting women and the notion that men play a critical role in the empowerment and recognition of women's contributions to nation-building. Critical to note is how Chitando's works have looked at key issues that affect women and among these are issues related to climate change, environmental disasters as well as pandemics (Chirongoma and Chitando, 2021). Chitando (2012:141) in discussing how women theologians have focused on HIV, women and children as the ones who are hit hardest, bemoans how "the absence of men in the discourses of HIV and theology has been counterproductive." This is a direct call to men to be actively involved in these issues so that masculinities can be transformed. In a related argument, Chirongoma, Manyonganise and Chitando, (2022) further edited a volume that focuses on issues that are at the intersection of religion, culture and women's sexual reproductive health in the context of Sustainable Development Goals. Chitando's presence in the editing of this volume bears testimony to how

he is a key player in advocating for women's agency as well as participation of men in issues affecting women.

Chitando's work challenges the notions that came with the Iron Age where men exercised much authority and dominated the societies. This meant that even patriarchy became vibrant as the males dominated most aspects of the society. Women had to, therefore, suffer the ills of patriarchy and whenever disaster struck, women had to suffer doubly as they battled with disaster as well as the patriarchal system.

Through an analysis of *Nervous Conditions*, *She No Longer Weeps* and *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Mudzi, Svongoro & Mutangadura (2021) concur with Chitando's plea for the society to accommodate women as they conclude that women should be empowered through education and entrepreneurial skills that will equip them to leave abusive relationships. In this section, we have highlighted how literature acts as a vehicle for social transformation. Literature is used as a tool that advocates for the empowerment of women. In Dangarembga's *She No Longer Weeps*, the reader is presented with Martha, a young university female student who falls pregnant out of wedlock. She goes to stay with Freddy, her boyfriend but Freddy rejects her. Her family does not accept her, as they are bound by religious and cultural norms. Martha cannot be accepted in her family if she is not married because her father is a Pastor. The Christian religion does not allow her to be at her father's house whilst carrying what they consider a bastard child. Religion in this case becomes a tool of abuse, instead of the church acting as a safe space for women (Manyonganise, 2022). The church fails to protect Martha and, in the end, she is determined to complete her degree and fend for herself. This empowerment that comes with education is what is also advocated by Chitando as he has raised and mentored women scholars so that they can speak for themselves and other marginalized women. Literature in this case plays a significant role of exposing societal ills so that society can transform and act in a manner that recognises and accepts women as important members of society who should not be discriminated against based on their gender.

In this section we have made reference to Ezra Chitando's works of advocacy towards the empowerment of women in Africa and in Zimbabwe. Chitando's works acknowledge the vulnerability of women in post-colonial Zimbabwe hence the need to protect women and children. His collaborations with women scholars go unnoticed, and this has been applauded as Chitando does not only call for women recognition but walks the talk by collaborating with female scholars not just in theology but also

in creative works and literature, (Chitando & Chitando, 2005; Chitando & Chirongoma, 2021; Zvingowanisei, Chirongoma & Chitando, 2022; Phiri & Chitando, 2023; Manyonganise, Chitando & Chirongoma, 2023).

Reading through the Intersectionality: Implications for Women's Recognition in Africa

An interpretation of our argument in this chapter points to where such contributions may take the African nations to as far as women emancipation is concerned. We have acknowledged how women hold an integral part in the society, hence the need to consider women in policy implementations and nation-building programmes. If women could do it in the precolonial society, they can do it in the modern-day age.

There is, therefore, a need to ensure that there is equal access and control of resources among men and women in order to build a balanced economy from household level up to the national level. Our argument is also lobbying for a position where women are considered as equal partners in decision making processes that affect their immediate societies and the nation at large. We recommend that legal frameworks and policy frameworks be crafted in a way that addresses the imbalances between men and women and how these imbalances can be counteracted through initiatives that target women empowerment. Finally, we recommend the need to include issues to do with gender balances in the school curriculums to ensure that children are taught to see the value in women as potential leaders and policy makers.

Conclusion

We conclude that the challenges that women face today can be dated to the early periods in the history of Zimbabwe. We have highlighted how archaeological evidence is critical in the way we deal with the challenges bedevilling women and the factors that hinder women's emancipation. Our analysis has shown how the coming of Christianity altered the way women were viewed in the precolonial society. Our analysis has provided a background that links the past and the present and we argued that Ezra Chitando has contributed immensely to the emancipation of women in

Zimbabwe and that his contributions have been acknowledged and are relevant across the globe.

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