

Erasure of Girlhoods, Inscriptions of Womanhood: A Study of Erased Girlhoods in Selected Zimbabwean Fiction

*Hazel Tafadzwa Ngoshi**

Department of English and Communication, Midlands State University, Gweru, Zimbabwe

Abstract

This paper takes feminist literary criticism of Zimbabwean literature as its point of departure. Feminist studies in Zimbabwean literature have more often than not, critiqued womanhood as broad category and in the process, girlhood has been subsumed under the ambits of the general and aggregated experiences of womanhood. Girlhood has been relatively invisible as a category in feminist literary criticism of Zimbabwean literature and yet feminist literary theory could benefit from a comprehensive analysis of girlhood as a lens through which to perceive and understand the overall condition of womanhood and the implications of the depiction of girlhood in Zimbabwean fiction. This paper aims to construct an analysis of girlhood as a disaggregated category and how the very notion of girlhood is under erasure at both textual and discursive levels. The paper uses a cross-section of Zimbabwean fictional narratives to engage with girlhoods through the prisms of legacies of patriarchal power, the wake of HIV and AIDS, economic insecurity and lack of access to education, basic health and information services. I argue, using Laclau's discourse theory and Derridian exploration of the implications of Heidegger's concept of erasure, that increased responsibilities, the patriarchy and economic insecurity coalesce to erase the childhood of adolescent girls in the process shattering the perceived stability of the categories child/girl and adult/parent. The paper concludes that the concept of girlhood in the selected texts is paradoxical and undermining as the boundary between girlhood and womanhood is rendered undecidable.

Key words; girlhood, womanhood, erasure, feminist literary criticism, patriarchal power.

**Hazel Tafadzwa Ngoshi is a lecturer in the department of English and Communication at the Midlands State University in Zimbabwe. She teaches literature courses and creative writing. Her research interests are in gendered identities, autobiography, children's literature, nationalism and globalisation issues especially as they relate to literary studies. A number of her articles in these areas have been published in academic journals. She is currently pursuing doctoral studies in the interface between life narratives in Zimbabwe and the country's history.*