

**MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY**

**FACULTY OF ARTS  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION**

**DISSERTATION TOPIC**

**Adulthood in Zimbabwean literature for children: an analysis of the  
representation of adult characters in *Takadini* (1997) by Hanson B,  
*A Visit to the Gods* (1987) by N.S Sigogo and *Tapiwa and the  
Kidnappers*(1997) by G. Hozo**

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## **Dedication**

This is dedicated to the heavenly father and all the guardian angels. To my father wherever you are hope you are proud of the person I am today.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank with all my heart my supervisor Mr. C Tagwirei for his support and guidance. I am also grateful to my family for making this possible and by giving me this chance in life. Special thanks to my friends MendyMoyo, Nyashadzashe and my sister Mutsa who encouraged me all the way by providing a shoulder to lean on. Last but not least Ian Mapira thank you so much. Gratitude to those who have not been mentioned by names your effort is greatly appreciated.

## **Abstract**

The study looks at the representation of adult characters in Zimbabwean Children's literature. It mainly focused on the depiction of women from various geographical settings. Issues affecting the representation of women were therefore brought to light from a feminist literary perspective. Children's literary works which include Hanson's *Takadini*, Sigogo's *Visit to the Gods* and Hozo's *Tapiwa and the Kidnappers* were used as the basis of the research.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **General introduction**

#### **1.0 Background of Study**

Children's Literature is literature to educate and entertain. It covers many different themes such as war, fantasy and mystery. Many themes are apparent to the younger reader, whereas some are more likely to be noticed by an adult reader. This means that children's literature is accessible to all ages, with different pieces of information within the text becoming clearer each time it is read. After studying various children's texts, many themes that most, if not all books shared, were noticeably similar. However, it is the lessons that children borrow from the portrayal of adult characters particularly the presentation of women that is of essence to this dissertation.

Fox (1993) states that in everything we read we are constructed; it shapes and makes who we are by presenting our image of ourselves as girls and women, as boys and men. Children's books pay a significant role in transmitting a society's culture to children with gender roles being an important part of this culture. The gender portrayal in children's books contributes to the image they develop of their place in society.

According to Sutherland (1997) children's literature has been used to improve language literacy and inventive thinking skills. He further goes on to say that it works as a character development tool to shape behavior and attitudes. Adulthood, like many terms we use for describing data, is a very poorly defined and a somewhat arbitrary concept. When does an organism become an adult? The answer in general would be "it depends on how you define adult." On that note is it of

great importance that authors should give attention to the adult characters in as much as they give to the heroine/protagonist as the adult characters many a time represent the culture and embodiment of the people of older and past generations which are of paramount importance to the development of the child reader.

Adulthood is also a stage of psychological and personal development by which time it is assumed that individuals have established their identity and are well on the way to being independent, responsible, self-disciplined and purposeful. Weitzman (1972) states that:

“Through books, children learn about what boys and girls say and feel. They learn about what is wrong and they learn what is expected of children their age. In addition books provide children with role models and images of what they can and should become when they grow up”.

People may argue correctly that there is no single definition of adult that would satisfy everyone or that there is a magical time point at which it occurs, the representation of adults in children’s literature should be given serious thought as this can play a major role in the shaping of the future of the child. What children read and see contributes a great deal as they can tend to copy such behaviors as they will deem them as the right way of life. Currently, major sources of texts on children in Africa are an inter-governmental and non-governmental organization which means that data are collected within the framework of programs rather than theory.

In this century of increased gender equality where man and woman are accorded equal opportunities, gender role stereotypes are still present. According to Gooden & Gooden (2001) gender stereotypes can be defined as “assumptions made about characteristics of each gender such as physical appearance abilities, attitudes interests or occupations”. These stereotypes are still prevalent in children’s books with special regard to the inferiority of the portrayal of women.

Researches being done over contemporary Zimbabwe on gender issues suggest that gender bias is still present in terms of adult representation particularly to females, even though they are being pictured in instrumental activities. That is to say contemporary Zimbabwe is not being adequately represented in children's literature so as to give hope to the girl child and avoid the bleak portrayals of females that carry negative connotations.

The world over, children are regarded as the most vulnerable group. This is more so in cases where they do not have parents or proper guardians. This has inspired a lot of literature by scholars and authors seeking to contribute to the effect of adult influence (adulthood) on the well-being, survival and outcome of children. *Osazee* who focuses on African/children's literature says that it is that piece of literary creation that draws its subject matter from the African world view with the language and style which the African child can understand and comprehend. It must be seen as promoting African culture and enable the child or young adult to understand or appreciate his/her environment better.

According to Mwanzi (1982:3) literature is crucial to the mental psychological and social development of the child. Literature stimulates children's imagination and sharpens their awareness of the world around them. It is through literature that one sees themselves through the eyes of the other. Reading about others helps one to have self-discovery.

It is against this background that the researcher seeks to take a closer look at how various authors particularly Hanson, Sigogo and Hozo portray adulthood paying close attention to the portrayal of adult women in children's literature as a way of teaching the target audience of the past and creating role models of who and what they should aspire to be.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Children are said to be a product of their environment and that environment is shaped by the adults that surround them, be it at home the parents and guardians take up that responsibility and at school or church teachers and church leaders take over respectively. This research seeks to take a closer analysis into the relationship between the representation of adulthood in various texts and the lessons that the child gets from that, that is to say, what does children's literature say about the father, mother, sister, brother, or the community. The research will also respond to the question, "what role do adults play and of what significance are those roles in the molding of a child's life?" as represented in various children's texts.

## **1.3 Objectives of the study**

**The research seeks to:**

- How works of literature work variations on the theme of adulthood
- Examine the portrayal of the traditional female adults in texts for children
- Examine the presentation of the urban woman in children's literature.
- Examine the presentation of the adult male in children's literature.

## **1.4 Significance of the study**

The study is important because it offers a literary perspective to the notion of adulthood which is depicted in texts for children. Studies of childhood and adulthood do not focus on the part literary texts play in the construction of these identities hence the need to do so. Since the texts to be analyzed have the potential to educate children about adulthood. It is therefore important to understand what child readers are faced with.

## **1.5 Review of literature**

Literature review is the organization of texts that aim to assess previous researches on a particular subject in this case adulthood in children's literature. Literature review gives an indication of what has been said by key writers. This research is going to review literature available on children's literature on the subject of adulthood.

Knowles (1998) postulates that children's literature is an important and very powerful literature. That is to say what is said in children's literature is of high significance. This is so because its audience is far reaching and its influence in our society is deep and significant that is what is conveyed in children's literature must be seen as important.

Children's literature is not always looked at in the way other literatures like adult literature are. Its readership is viewed as requiring a form of protection. It is communication from an experienced adult to an inexperienced child and this relationship means that children's books carry an important and powerful literature. Childhood is seen as status and process, viewed through the prism of adulthood, a stage of becoming rather than a state of being

Wakatama (2007) states that "Child studies in Africa are fragmented and there is no developed discourse on African childhood". Very few of these studies have adopted conceptual approaches that examine the issue from children's perspectives, as well as those of communities from which the children come from.

Hunt (1994) states that children's books are an area of sites of play, entertainment and development and a book read as a child can make one feel nostalgic later in life. He sees children's literature as a crucial part of childhood with adulthood development. He further goes on to emphasize the crucial role played by children's literature books in culture. He states that

the characters in children's literature go deep into people's mind. On that it can be noted that it is part of what this research seeks to achieve, that is, to take note of how the representation of adult characters.

Furthermore, children's books or books read by children are seen as a site of socialization. Knowles (1998) postulates that socialization refers to the process by which values are transmitted to members of a society with a view of integrating them within the dominant value system and these values can be upheld through the adult characters who are the perpetrators of change and the more experienced members of the society.

On that note, children's literature may be used as a way of introducing societal normality's to children in order to ensure that a manner of behavior is carried forth into the next generation. It can be noted that naturally children learn from adults about how to behave and think hence the need to give special attention to the representation of adult characters in texts for children as they may tend to borrow behavior from them or aspire to be like them.

However it should be noted that children's literature is not a process whereby the author instructs the reader, telling them how to behave, speak or view the world but it is a nature of children's books whether they intend to be or not. They are always didactic in some way as they involve experienced adults conveying information to an inexperienced child. Hollindale (1997) states that children's literature is a genre that's inevitably didactic.

Children's literature as argued by Mpesha (1996:2) needs the same critical evaluation and theoretical attention that adult literature is accorded. It must be given the same attention or even more because the target group is more vulnerable as they are at a period of growth and

development. The literature must play a big role into their cultural lives, in this case the representation of adult characters.

Peter (1967) postulates that in the urban family the patriarchal authority seems to have become diffused. He observes that the fathers have to realize that the future of their children does not depend on fate or the will of God, but rather on the cooperation they give to the children to develop their initiative hence various literary works have to bring to light the above assertion

Various scholars have noted that critiquing children's literature is problematic precisely because it's for children. Hunt (1994) suggests that the reluctance to criticize children's literature is due to a fear that the innocence with which it is held will be destroyed. This is said to be so because literature read as a child is a cherished part of childhood and deconstructing it is feared to bring a loss of the innocence with which it was read.

Joy (2011) states that children's literature is a highly valued literature. This is so precisely because it represents the world as adults want children to see it and not resemble the world as we experience it. In light of that it can be said that the presentation of adult characters may not be truly a representation of adults in the real world yet in essence children's literature should be used as a tool to prepare children for adulthood or for them to learn from their pioneers.

Joy (2011) further goes on to say that children's literature "retracts adult consciousness offering and enabling us to pass on to our own children the world as we wish it and precisely not as we find it." this assertion shows that children's literature is biased as it does not give true reflections of the world, so that they can learn from it. Tucker (1981) observes that children have to learn resolutions and some stories with a clear conscience in order to help children who are trying to build up some ways of predicting the immediate future hence the transition into adulthood.

However various scholars seem to look at adulthood in passing and tend to focus on the child protagonist.

Benton and Fox (1985) point out that children project through their behavior what they read in stories and through such projections one determines the kind of image they form out of the story. This shows that what children read in various literary works can influence their behavior as adults hence the importance of the portrayal of adult characters. Each sex should be adequately portrayed so that no sex feels inferior to the other.

Studies have found out that in recent years there has been an increase on the presentation of female characters in children's literature. Gooden and Gooden (2001) have found that the representation of adult females is almost equal to that of males, which it is to say, attention is being given to both genders. However the issue of concern is the portrayal of the female characters, as they are still stereotyped and mostly being given domesticated roles while men are the sole providers and do the paying jobs.

Gooden and Gooden (2001) further postulate that literature, particularly children's literature, should be carefully presented as the children's identity and self-esteem could be affected by negative portrayals of their gender. Ochman (1996) has studied the effects of non-gender role stereotypes on children's literature saying that the 'traditional' portrayal of female characters in children's literature may damage the life experience young women allow themselves as they will limit themselves in terms of career choice.

The review of literature has shown is that in as much as various scholars acknowledge the sensitivity that children's literature has and its some aspects are still left out. Scholars don't seem to adequately look at the portrayal of adult hood in various literary works for literature.

Much attention is given to the aspects of socialization at the expense of the actual representation adulthood which children may borrow behaviors from.

## **1.6 Theoretical framework**

Tyson states that feminism is alarmed with the ways in which literature supports or challenges the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women. Feminism focuses on the patriarchal bias of a society. It looks at the oppression of women by their male counterparts. Its major activity is to try and change the world as gender stereotypes are socially constructed and not biologically made. The theory advocates for gender equality. The theory will help in analyzing the texts by looking at the gender issues present in Zimbabwean texts. Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society which is changing to suit the gender equality call.

In literature feminism looks at the portrayal of the relationship between men and women and the power relations between both genders. Feminism exists under a number of categories. Namely cultural feminism attempts to revalidate undervalued female nature. Another category of feminism is liberal feminism. It seeks equality of man and women through politics and legal reforms. Marxist feminists fight for the class struggles between man and women. Radical feminists fight for the equity if not domination with man.

The feminist theory further explores the social construction of masculinity and its implications towards gender equality, this aspect will be seen in chapter four where the researcher will look at the presentation of males in relationship with the female counterparts. The way, in which genders are represented in children's literature impacts attitude and perceptions of gender appropriate behavior in society, it forces boys and girls to accept the way in which they see and read the world. The feminist theory naturally characterizes patriarchy as a naturally characterizes

patriarchy as a social construction in which can be changed by critically analyzing. The research in looking at the portrayal of adult characters particularly women will use the feminist theory.

### **Research design and methods**

Meredith (1998) defines research design as a master plan that specifies the methods and procedures for analyzing needed information. The research will be qualitative in nature hence qualitative methods will be used. The researcher will use the descriptive method. The project will focus on three primary texts, that is, Hanson's *Takadini*, *A Visit to the Gods* by Sigogo and *Tapiwa and The Kidnappers* Hozo and for secondary sources there will be the use of articles, journals and the internet. Desk research is a technique that will be used. It involves collecting data from existing resources. In this research I will use the library and the internet to undertake my research on the presentation of adult characters in children's literature.

## **Chapter layout**

Chapter one will look at the introduction, background literature review and theoretical framework among other elements. Chapter two will look at Hanson's *Takadini*. It will look at the presentation of the traditional female. It will look particularly at the relationship between the traditional female and the patriarchal society. Chapter three will look at Hozo's *Tapiwa and the kidnappers* by analyzing the presentation of the urban woman as a departure from the traditional women. Chapter four will look at the presentation of the male characters in Sigogo's *A visit to the Gods*. It will also try to look at the relationship between the male characters and their female counterparts. Chapter five will conclude the research.

## Chapter 2

### **Adult females in the context of Shona traditional culture in *Takadini* (1997)**

This chapter focuses on the portrayal of the traditional female adult in *Takadini*. The way in which females are presented is of great importance. Hallandale states that children's literature is didactic hence its motive is to teach a lesson to the young reader. The presentation of female adults, in this case those in the rural areas, should give a reflection of the fast changing era of gender equality amongst both sexes. In recent years females have been given central roles in literary works but the concern is the way in which they are presented.

The novel *Takadini* is set in a century when culture and tradition were the order of the day; it is set during an era when taboos were taken seriously. *Takadini* is about the birth of an albino into a society which believes that all albinos should be killed and not given time to see the light of day. The birth of such children was believed to be a curse from the ancestors most probably because of an ill that the society or the individual would have done. In the event of such, the blame was given to the females. It also focuses on the female protagonist Sekai who flees from tradition in order to save her child. Not only does she flee from tradition but also attempts to free herself from the manacles of patriarchal society.

Ben Hanson's *Takadini* is a novel that can be said to look at the rejected or the inferior in the society, in this case the plight of the albino together with that of women under the patriarchal society in what one can term as a plea to be accepted in society. According to Tagwirei (2012) *Takadini* is of great significance as it holds an important position in Zimbabwe's education system. It is part of the literature set books for the Zimbabwe Junior Certificate (Z.J.C.) level in Zimbabwe. This can be interpreted to mean that the novel *Takadini* needs to be given very

critical attention. For the purpose of this research, attention will be drawn to the portrayal of the adult female characters.

Tagwirei (2012) further postulates that in *Takadini* Hanson re -writes the Zimbabwean past and seems to celebrate patriarchy by reproducing it and re-establishing the male at the center of society. In light of the above it can be questionable the use of *Takadinias* a children's text. In a society fighting for gender equality books should try to minimize still stereotypes that the position women as the inferior sex.

Gender inequalities are culture based and not biological. Tradition views that biological differences are the basis for masculine domination. According to feminist beliefs, girls are socialized from an early age to take up roles that are inferior or unequal to boys as will be seen in this chapter. . This suggests that male ill treatment of women may possibly be out of ignorance and it can be reduced through education in the form of literature.

According to Pang (2001) cited in Gwirai (2010:73) “culture shapes the way in which we see the world and interpret it”. Gwirai (2010:74) states that children rely on their cultural background to determine the relevance of their learning experience. In *Takadini*, Sekai the female protagonist represents the traditional female whose destiny and fate is in the hands of the patriarchal society. Culturally, part of a woman's traditional role was to bear children for her husband. Failure to do so results in ridicule in the society as can be seen in the text where Sekai's co wives openly say: “..... Only a witch could keep a man so long without giving him a child” (2).

The name given to the female protagonist carries a negative connotation towards the female character “Sekai” which when directly translated to English is “laugh.” This in itself puts the females represented as subjects of ridicule. Hence Sekai is trying to escape from the reigns of

patriarchy and tradition, in as much as she escapes her husband she still lands in the hands of yet another patriarchy where man has to decide whether she should be accepted or declined. What this can mean to the young reader is that women can never escape from the wrath of men no matter how much they try.

According to Chigwedere (2005; 1) traditionally children's development is important at all stages from childhood to adolescence. He notes that "...no later stage was independent of the earlier stages for the education given at all the stages together was calculated to produce one healthy, confident and useful adult." The above assertion therefore means that what is portrayed in children's literature is of great importance in determining one's future. In this case the portrayal of females in *Takadini* may not be able to produce confident woman. The book seems to suggest that being a woman an acceptable one in society one should be a child bearer and most importantly should be able to bear a son.

The traditional female was taught to be patient and urged to respect her husband. Hence any sign of rebellion would result in the male being looked down upon. He would be perceived as a failure that is not able to tame his woman. The woman was regarded as a part of his property hence showing the inferiority position of women resulting in the inferiority complex of females due to this stereotype.

Chigwedere (2005) further notes that ".....undoubtedly there is much in traditional education that should be retained in principles. The past should however be adapted to suit our changed and changing society." In the case of *Takadini* the past seems to be celebrated and does not change to suit the new and changing society where women have been uplifted and given better positions.

The author should have been seen to at least sympathizing with woman instead of celebrating their fate.

According to Pleck (1981) women's movement is not a question about women at all but rather a question about men, as to why men oppress women. This should be visible in children's literature so as to help children understand the inferiority position of females. In the text there are no incidences that can be pointed out to show why women are treated as passive members of the society.

Chinua Achebe in *Anthills of the Savannah* through the character Ikem states that "they are their own worst enemy, women are" (37). This statement can be taken to mean that as much as a woman suffers from the chains of patriarchy, they are themselves the vehicles through which oppression is extended to other women. In *Takadini*, Sekai as much as she is oppressed by the males or patriarchy, it is the other women who give her so much grief. By extension, Achebe here is arguing that women lament the evils of patriarchy not knowingly that they also help in keeping the wheels of oppression lubricated.

Women in *Takadini* are portrayed as chief gossipers, as people who rarely have feelings for each other. Hence it teaches the child to seek solace in people of the opposite sex as the male characters like baba Chivero and the chief. These characters pity Sekai as she is the subject of gossip amongst the fellow women who are supposed to be embracing her and giving her comfort. This portrayal can also teach the girl child that one must never confide in a fellow woman but instead in the male figures, which is not a true reflection of the traditional female in contemporary Zimbabwe.

Scholars have argued that male oppression on women goes back to the male child as he perceives his mother and his predominantly female elementary school teacher as controlling and dominating, so in growing up the cycle reverses. If this is a true assertion, then it must be visible in children's literature so as to justify the oppression of women by the male counterparts.

Women in *Takadini* are depicted as the laborers. We are constantly told about their going to the fields till sunset so as to be able to fend for their husband and children's whilst the husband most of the times are sitting in "dares" discussing important matters. What this can mean to the child is that marriage for the traditional female is about child bearing and hard labor in order to survive.

Women as represented by Sekai are looked at with suspicion. They are perceived as potential prostitutes even in their innocence as can be seen in the protagonist when she gives birth to a "musope" child. She is first accused of being a witch and then to have been unfaithful as can be seen when her husband Mukwati thinks to himself: "... His hearts was heavy with worry about the child and with doubts of Sekai's faithfulness... a wife who had defied tradition and probably had been unfaithful? His humiliation was too great."(18). Nielsen (1971:918) claims that "...books for our youngest and therefore most impressionable. Children not only fail to represent the real world of today but also combine into an almost incredible conspiracy of conditioning.

The above in *Takadini* is seen in the sense that in as much as Sekai escapes her fate she still finds herself having to venture back in the end to a land where she was rejected and called a witch amongst other names. Her escape is short lived as in the new village. She still faces the same ridicule as the one she flew from as people question her being without a man to be her protector.

This can be translated by the child to mean that in the Shona tradition a woman without a man was considered incomplete and she always needed the guidance and protection of a male figure. This is no longer true of contemporary Zimbabwe where even in the rural areas there are single mother headed families that manage well without the protection of a man.

Veit-Wild (2006: 145) postulates that women have to surrender to patriarchal norms of behavior and authority they also have to share the intimation of what could be the invocation of new gender roles. This statement should help in ensuring that the portrayal of female characters in children's literature should be presented in such a way that they are seen escaping the patriarchal world not the short lived one that is presented by Sekai and the few women like Tendai.

Tendai the chief's wife briefly confides in her new friend Sekai about how she is not pleased to be the chief's wife even though it is regarded as a great privilege and honor to be the wife of a chief; a very powerful man. Lack of sufficient role models leads to the continuation of such processes that continue to oppress women

Bramwell (2005) states that the historical fiction in children's literature does not give a true reflection of the past. It consciously addresses present day issues by making contrasts between the past and the present. Hanson's *Takadini* though it has a setting of the past is written in present day Zimbabwe where gender equality issues are rampant hence it can be said that the author in a way satirizes women's position even though he is aware of the changes that are being channeled towards the upliftment of the females.

Hunt (1994) observes that women have dominated children's books from the beginning. He goes on to say there are a number of reasons for this and among them are that women are

regarded as children's natural caregivers. As can be seen in the text where Sekai is so protective of her son Takadini where she keeps her close to him at all times.

In *Takadini* women are blamed for their children's failures yet the fathers should be equally blamed in failing to give proper guidance to their children. When Shingai fetches water for Takadini's mother, her father blames the mother for not being able to teach the girl properly as her deed is an indication that she wants to get married: "He said in a horse whisper. Did you not teach your daughter the meaning of such action, woman" (111)? This clearly indicates that a child's failure was not blamed to both parents but it was deemed as the mothers failure to teach the child societal expectations.

*Takadini* as a source of children's literature falls short in addressing or encouraging the uplifting of women as the girl child steps into the shoes of the women characters. The child character is obliged to see how women are destined to suffer at the hands of patriarchy because they have accepted this position. It can also be that the position has been deemed for generations to be the rightful position for women. In the novel it is seen when Shingai's mother gives Shingai advice as she tries to detest against marrying Nhamo. She says:

where did you get the idea of being happy with a man? Have I not told you that a man is a woman's connection with a good family and her protection from other man who would want to use her? In return you look after him, satisfy his needs and bear his children it is the only happiness you will ever have (124)

In conclusion, Ben Hanson celebrates the traditional female fate as hopeless of change. Shingai and Sekai's attempts to flee patriarchy are short lived as we see the in the end Sekai and Shingai travelling back to the old village. This can be seen to represent the old tradition where

patriarchy was even stiffer. The lesson that children can draw about adulthood particularly female adulthood is that in the fight for emancipation women cannot totally break free from the bondage of patriarchy despite the many efforts.

### **Chapter 3: The representation of the urban woman in *Tapiwa and the Kidnappers* (1997)**

This chapter will focus on the representation of the urban female adult in children's literature with a view of examining the gender issues which inform the representation of this adult in children's texts. It is critical to understand that in contemporary Zimbabwe the urban woman is more independent, as opposed to the traditional woman who suffered a great deal under patriarchy. Urbanization brought about change in the country, especially the uplifting of the position of women who are now allowed to get educated and earn a living for themselves through formal jobs.

The novel *Tapiwa and the kidnappers* is an adventure story with a protagonist Tapiwa who goes through a series of adventures ranging from running away from an abusive uncle to living with a rich aunt and being kidnapped by a gang of robbers. The focus of the chapter however is on the portrayal of Aunt Agatha, a representation of the urban woman, and a few other women characters in the novel.

The first time we are introduced to Tapiwa's aunt we are told of her success which is common to today's women where they step out of the role of being mere mothers. This shows that in as much as some women are still trapped in traditional roles, opportunities are being awarded to them to become business people among other professions. This is seen where it is said: "...Agatha lived in Harare and was now running several businesses, ranging from laundry to several departmental stores. She was rated one of the country's richest women." (8)

Personality characteristics of women in children's literature are largely stereotyped. In cases where the female is given an independent role she is voiceless or silenced. This is despite the

relative independence that comes with being an urban woman. Females have increased in central roles; the issue still lies in the way in which they are portrayed.

Children's literature is a tool that is said to be powerful as it often models thinking patterns by showing particular representations of gender, race, class or sexuality. The thinking processes instilled by children's literature influences the way in which children view the world particularly their own gender. Urban women, even when portrayed as having strong characteristics still conform to standard views of femininity and socially constructed ideals of what it means to be a woman, that is, being subject to the male counterpart. For example in *Tapiwa and the kidnappers*, Tapiwa reads in the people's paper about his aunt where it says:

Mrs. Agatha Gore had, a few years before, completed a business course in Britain. She had returned to her native land with the intention of helping her own people. Within five years she had managed to establish at least one departmental store in every major town of the country. At the moment she was living in Harare with her husband, Ralph Gore. The couple had no children  
(10)

The portrayal of females has shifted towards the creation of strong female characteristics that have attained economic independence. Johnson (2009) explains that "... as children's encounter new experiences, already existing memory structures in the brain or schema are reshaped, impacting the child's life linguistic, cognitive, social and emotional development"(24) The explanation is that children interpret the new information they are given by relating it to their notion of the world. The notion of women as child bearers might be the traditional role of the female. This then calls for the need to impact them with the knowledge of the new roles. That is

to say feminist ideologies regarding gender can be explained to children if the information is presented in a way that is engaging and understandable.

Wilkins (2004; 129) explains the relational identity of the category of women by saying that “women is no longer assumed but is always incomplete and unstable.” This is a true assertion of the urban women in children’s text for example in *Tapiwa and the kidnappers* where Tapiwa’s aunt is given a significant role as she is rich and owns vast businesses. Despite her being educated and rich she is not included in the action which is partaken by the male characters.

Stephens (1992:78) states that; childhood is seen as the crucial formative period in the life of a human being, the time for basic education about the nature of the world, how to live in it, how to relate to other people, what to believe, what and how to think in general as well as to shape their own perspectives of the world, the intention is to render the world intelligible.

If children’s literature expresses ideas outside of the hegemonic norms then children will be better able to understand those types of ideas and information when they see them outside literature. The misrepresentation of urban women can create a negative attitude towards the working female characters.

If children’s books have the power to limit choices and maintain discrimination then they also have the power to create choices and initiate change. The portrayal of the urban woman is still limited to the traditional roles of a woman which are being a mother yet the urban woman has gained lots of emancipation beyond just economic emancipation. Most urban woman are now decision makers and educated unlike the past traditional woman who was sidelined most of the time, everything was decided for her regardless of her feelings. For the sake of the child being taught through literature there is need therefore to provide them with adequate examples.

Such issues need to be adequately represented in children's literature so that the girl child looks forward to adulthood particularly the process of womanhood. Contemporary children's literature should adequately address most feminist concerns which include roles that include policewoman, headmistresses among the many common jobs. In the Tapiwa series there is a great bias against the modern day woman as we are only exposed to male policeman detective Wade and sergeant Kashiri and also Tapiwa's teacher is a male teacher. The women are almost absent in the professions.

Children's literature is said to be didactic hence it should be able to teach the child the empowerment of women as not all children are exposed to modern day life hence they rely on what they read in literary works. Taxel (1995) explains that "... like other cultural artifacts children's literature is a product of convection that is rooted in if not determined by the dominant belief systems and ideologies of the times in which it is created" (159). That is to say that contemporary children's literature should present the urban woman in regard to the position that a woman is allowed to hold in today's society which is not of passive beings as was in the past before feminist movements.

According to Gardiner (2002) feminists believe that the majority of literature portrays a masculine patriarchal view. She further states that feminist view women's roles as negatively minimized when they are positive or entirely absent where there is positive portrayal the woman is frequently devalued ignored or unimportant. In the text when faced with difficulties Tapiwa recalls a statement which he was taught by his teacher which says that "when in doubt or in trouble, the best person to turn to is a policeman" (14). The statement in itself seems to reflect that the police job is for a "man" hence limiting in portraying the girl child occupations in which to choose from in the urban world.

Theban (1994) states that “It was because of women taking over the household and working for a living while the men were at war that gender started to change.” The statement asserts that the position of women uplifted as far back as war times in Zimbabwe that would date to before independence yet their representation is still of great bias towards the males despite the assertive roles which have been carried out by women in modern day Zimbabwe.

Fox (1993) states that children’s literature usually views females as passive. Dependent roles given to male characters are usually adventurous and exciting whereas the roles of female characters are limited to those of caretakers which can be seen in a literary text *A Taste of Melting Chocolate* where the protagonist’s mother, one of the few females in the text, is given the role of a domestic worker. In *Tapiwa and the kidnappers* the aunt relies on her husband to speak to the police about the kidnapping of her niece Tapiwa. It appears as if she does not have the power to do so herself.

The above goes on to say the roles of women are still stereotyped in urban Zimbabwe. Gender stereotyping is of great concern when it is the educational system that promotes these inequalities yet it should be used as a tool to correct social ills in adequately positioning the female character in active and adventurous roles similar to those given to the male counter parts.

Nhundu (2007) states that research has shown that children acquire many preconceived ideas about the future occupational preferences during the development and socialization process. He goes on to say children develop and acquire gender identities and gender stereotypical roles which are further reinforced by gender typed socializing agents such as the television, movies, parents and most importantly children’s books.

Children's books have the power to change gender stereotyping of occupations so as to influence future occupational choices for the girl child who is looking forward to the stage of adulthood through the various role models presented in literary texts. Thus the presentation of the urban woman should show a shift from the entirely traditional woman of yesterday to the present day women by portraying more women in non-traditional work.

In the text *Tapiwa and the kidnappers* the author goes on to present two female domestic workers Meralda and Martha who are depicted as very lively and pleasant women content with the positions they are holding which is that of domestic workers.

Another urban female character in the text is not even given by name. She is the detective Kashiri's wife. The wife is merely mentioned in passing where it says "working against time as he was, he ignored the supper his wife had kept for him" (58). Besides being mentioned merely in passing her role in the text is to show that Sergeant Kashiri had a wife who did the traditional roles of a female, that is, to take care of her husband by doing domestic duties for him such as cooking. The above therefore shows that the girl child exposed to the text will not be presented with adequate female role models in positions of power hence limiting the career options of the child due to lack of female role models. Nhundu (2007) further postulates that:

Girls who are exposed to children's books that contain culturally relevant women in non-traditional occupations could benefit from their potential to alter pre conceived notions of gender typed occupations. This could help the child in pursuing traditionally male dominated occupations.

Portrayal of adult characters should be given much attention in this case the representation of the urban woman because children's literature is of great influence to life decisions unlike any other

literature that can be read. It has a more influential impact than the way an adult reads with experience and knowledge of what is happening in the adult world. That is to say the portrayal of the urban woman is an injustice to children's literature in terms of creating role models for the girl child.

Children's books are used as a site for socialization. Knowles (1998:54) states that socialization is a process by which values are transmitted to members of a society with the intention of integrating them within the dominant value system. In this regard the author fails to integrate the child into a dominant value system where the woman is part of every action. This could be achieved by depicting more independent urban female characters other than the domestic workers and the passive sergeants' wives.

Hunt (1994) states that children's literature is powerful and is neither innocent nor trivial, therefore children's literature must consider the implications it has on the targeted audience especially concerning gender bias. In this case that of the urban woman as children's are perceived to be a blank tablet and take in everything they read in books unlike adults who have the power to select what's true and what's not.

Moreover children's literature instead of having multiple ways of empowering ways of behavior for girls continues to be biased towards boys. In *Tapiwa and The Kidnappers* the author in representing the urban woman could have included policewomen taking part in the adventure. Contemporary Zimbabwe women now partake in such activities perceived as dangerous and adventurous in the police force and other careers.

Bender and Leone (1989) found that children's books are a powerful agent for the socialization of gender roles in children, that is to say, the development of children's gender identities occur

with the need emphasize certain things like gender presentation it is in doing so that particular notions are reinforced together with particular beliefs about the gender stereotyping of occupations. The Tapiwa series is a continuation from one book to another yet in all the series the urban woman continues to be represented negatively.

Reid (1995) postulates that role modeling is a powerful strategy by which children acquire new knowledge. Hence the book *Tapiwa and the kidnappers* do not adequately represent the urban woman in a role modeling way as she is virtually absent. . She is the insignificant other.

Arbuthnot (1984) also notes that modeling is conceived to children through books which serve as a socializing tool for transmitting values, beliefs and tradition to children. Children's books also represent important implications that help in identity development for the future in terms of occupational choices. Hence stories and characters portrayed in children's books have the power to break or promote gender role stereotypes. Adventure stories are very popular with young children hence the importance of the equal representation of different genders.

Achebe (1987 :91) states that "I see it is that giving women today the same role which traditional society gave them of intervening only when everything else has failed is not enough, you know like the woman in the Sembene film who pick up the spears abandoned by their defeated menfolk. The above shows that women's representation is still largely biased towards traditional roles. This is regardless of the changing roles.

In conclusion, women in the urban set up are represented as the inferior sex therefore instilling gender inequalities in the mindsets of children at a tender age. Thus there is need to give adequate role models through the presentation of the urban women in various job opportunities.

The portrayal of the urban women should suit the changing society so as to bring to light

the many feminists fight for gender equality. This could also encourage the younger girls to dream bigger instead of being confined to domestic jobs and passive roles

#### **Chapter 4: Representation of the adult male character in *A Visit to the Gods* (1987)**

This chapter focuses on the portrayal of the Zimbabwean adult male in children's literature and how this portrayal instills certain cultural values in the young reader. This will reflect how man from rural backgrounds is perceived to interact and the functions that they play within society. Young readers may try to draw most of their attributes from these adult male characters. For example boys may aspire to be like their favorite male characters while the girls might relate through learning how women are expected to respond to their male counterparts and what they should expect of their male counterparts.

The novel *A Visit to the Gods* is a children's text that focuses on a fictitious Mophane people who are having trouble with the rains due to the lack of a cleansing ceremony to appease the God of rain. The text focuses on the attempt by Zulu and his friend to try and convince the chief and the society into carrying out the cleansing ceremony in order to restore rains in their lands. It focuses on male characters as they try to come up with a solution as to what should be done in their society to bring change. It also draws on the conflict between the traditional and the modern as Christianity gets into the African picture.

Gardiner (2002) states that feminist theories take a number of approaches towards the issue of gender equality. She further states that feminist theories endorse some aspects of traditional masculinity, critique some and ignore other aspects. In literary works traditional masculinity is emphasized in terms of physical structure of the males and holding position of power.

Rudman(1884) states that books that encourage male masculine behaviors and ignore or discourage female and feminine behaviors may result in the development of gender attitudes as is

the case of the novel *A visit to the Gods* which centers more on male masculinity while virtually sidelining women to non-existence. The novel focuses on the male characters as the decision makers and also as people who preserve culture. Males are often presented in leading roles where they are independent and powerful such as the protagonist Ndimma Zulu. It is stated that:

“It had taken Ndimma many years to raise these animals. He had become a rich man. Among the Mophane people a man with a lot of livestock was rich. And a rich man was respected.” (6)

Literature is sometimes considered a tool that plays a major role in shaping a child’s cognitive and emotional growth. Kagan (1984) postulates that cultural standards manifest in children’s books, that is to say, the reading process allows the child to identify with models who exhibit sex role behavior. The male adult in children’s literature is regarded as a role model to both girls and a boy concerning what society expects of a man and the standard requirements expected of a man especially in the way they treat others, especially their female counterparts.

The male adult in children’s literature is important than the male character in adult fiction because the adult reader is an experienced reader who knows how to deduce what to consider and what to leave out when aspiring for role models. The child reader, on the other hand, is an inexperienced being who takes in all he gets from various literary works. *A visit to the Gods* presents to the reader, particularly the boy child, that for one to be a real man he has to be a rich man. It is stated in the text that a rich man was a well-respected man.

The roles of females in children’s literature have changed more than those of male characters. Males continue to be the dominant ones in literary works whereas women are still being fitted in literary works to suit the changing times were women are now found in positions of power. Male

character's however continue to be the greater sex despite the many cry outs for gender equality and equal representation in literature particularly children's literature.

In the text the cleansing ceremony to bring rain to Mophane village is more of a male duty while the women are just participants because they are members of the society. The females are at the periphery of the society. This shows the male dominance over female counterparts. A man is portrayed as the head of the community. The text continuously reminds the reader that tradition was passed on from the father figures.

Male characters are portrayed in positions of power that are passed from one to the other through a family lineage such as chieftainship. In the text this is mentioned were Zondo wishes that his friend Zulu could be the chief because he is a responsible member of the society. The author explains that "A chief was born, not made. The first born son in the chief's senior house was to be the chief after the death of his father, this was the traditional law written in the hearts of the Mophane people" (9).

This is to say that in the traditional set up despite the qualities one can hold of being a leader it was an in born thing and only those of the royal blood could gain chieftaincy. Lesson that can be learnt by the child reader is that as an adult power did not come to every man but to those who are rich or born in the royal family. Were as in reality there were powerful man that were able to influence change in their societies yet they do not come from royal families or rich families

Mac and Ghail (1996) state that various theorists define male masculinity as to be affirmed within social and cultural arenas where most ideologies, representations and material practices always privilege men and boys. This is to say that males in general are the significant other unlike women. Men are always given preference hence showing that they have domination over

the females. In the text the women are sidelined hence showing the dominant position of men in a traditional society.

Bern (1981) argues that gender is a powerful tool that orders the cognitive world. It is important therefore that one must be aware of the continuous battle for a child not to fall into usual gendered attitudes and behavior. In *A Visit to the Gods* a man is portrayed as one who is wise and clever and very mature as opposed to babies. Zulu asks his friend Zondo "...you speak like a baby born yesterday. Are you not a man?"(15)

In Zimbabwe, traditional information is perceived to be passed from one generation to the other through the fathers as if to say women don't pass information from mother to daughter. It goes on to suggest that wise information that keeps society moving forward is through forefathers as if to suggest that there are no female mediums. This shows the extent to which men have power in societies. The texts unequivocally states that:

Our fathers told us this, which they were told by their fathers. Their fathers were also told by their fathers, who were also told this by the fathers of their fathers, who were told by the father of all fathers. The father of fathers was told by the creator of all things (13).

West and Zimmerman (1987:146) postulate that there is no femminity or masculinity, womanhood or manhood, but that once gender is ascribed by society individuals then ascribe to their gendered norms and expectations. *A Visit to the Gods* seems to be of the view that a wise man in Zimbabwean culture is one who has extra powers such as the wise old man Mlambo who is said to be a great healer.

This is also the case in *Takadini* where the wise man Chivero is also bestowed with power. A lesson that the child can get about adulthood is that a man is a man by virtue of some sort of

position. It is as if to say being an ordinary man is a weakness. Ordinary men will remain at the periphery of the society such as in the case of Zondo.

In a patriarchal society, a real man is expected to be a strong man; one who is emotionless and fearless. A man, especially one who is in a leadership position, is perceived to be tall, aggressive, handsome and courageous. The ideal man as perceived in literary works including adult fiction is a tough man who carries around the physical attributes that have been mentioned. When the chief is introduced in *A Visit to the Gods* we are told that:

He looked ... with the eyes of an angry bull. He was a tall huge man. He had a big head. But his ears were small. it was as if they had been cut off and replaced with those of a child... (11)

However the pressure for boys to appear strong as a lesson they acquire in various literary works may be of harm to them. This is so because too much emphasis on a big strong body will put the child under pressure to attain the perceived body. Yet one can still be man enough without the big strong body and the fierce look.

It is a common phenomenon in children's literature that role models in the form of adult characters help a child to develop. Purphell and Stewart (1990) state that the stereotypical characters in children's literature should be in a way that doesn't make them rigid or narrowly defined. This is so because stereotyping may result in children turning out to be unhappy adults. In *A visit to the Gods* the male characters are aware of the fact that there are some things that they need to do simply because they are man and society permits them. This then proves to the reader that most of the things that define a man are socially constructed. In the text Zulu and Zondo mention that they carry clubs because culture permits them to do so. Zondo informs that "the little clubs in our hands are not war knobkerries. They are sticks we are allowed by our

custom, as men, to carry wherever we go". (11) This was a practice only allowed for man hence defining a man. Women were not allowed to move around carrying any sort of weapon as in the text it is mentioned in the incidence when they do so where not allowed. The writer explains that "Men carried knob-carries, clubs and axes. Some women even heard sticks; they were not required to carry any hunting weapons" (17).

A man is defined by his surname hence his father's surname as this carries a name to which family you belong to. Hence manhood according to the text is partly defined by the father; this goes on for generations. When Zulu and Zondo visit the old man he asks them whose sons they are and they define themselves by their father's names and surnames. Zulu answers, "It is Ndimba Zulu, son of Sibezwile. I am with Khakhayi Zondo, son of Nkonkoni." (15) This also shows the position that patriarchy has in this society.

Whilst men are defined by their fathers, women are defined by their husbands hence showing the inferiority position of women and the superiority of males in the text. When Zulu is talking to Mlambo about MaMoyo they refer to her as "the wife of Vinkiza?" (28).

The state of being a man is one that is associated with being a boy as long as there is one person who is older than the rest. In the text the wise old Mlambo keeps referring to chief Mkukhi as a young boy in matters of tradition. This assertion is seen where the old man says: "Mkukhi is a boy; he does not know what his doing" (17). Well respected men are reduced to mere boys. This can be seen when Mlambo rebukes the chief's advisors. Hence a man is a man at the level of his family. Zulu a well respect man among the Mophane people also reduces himself to a mere boy when he seeks advise from Mlambo he mentions that he is nothing but a boy born yesterday, that is to say great wisdom is for the extremely old.

Men are perceived as somber whilst women are the gossipers. During the chiefs court on Zulu's hearing day there is constant mention of women giggling when there was a serious issue at hand. This is seen where Mlambo rebukes them by likening them to children. He says "Those of you who came here to play stand up now and go to your homes! This is not a children's playground!". The same sentiment of women being regarded as gossipers is seen in another text *When Evil Reigns* where a man when caught by his wife killing someone he also murders the wife. He does so for fear that his wife will tell people about the act. Despite this act women are seen gossiping about the murders. Hence men are deemed as the secret keepers unlike their female counterparts.

In conclusion, the text emphasizes so much on male masculinity. It does not give much on the relationship between male and females. Much emphasis is given to the masculinity of man and the cleverness, bravery they have. The texts should at least give a close relationship between the male and females as this is a stage they will be transition into they need to prepare themselves. The relationship between the male counterparts and the females is close to no existence in the text.

## Chapter 5: CONCLUSION

### Summary

This research set out to examine the portrayal of adult characters in children's text. The portrayal is of great significance as it helps to socialize the children into a world they are preparing for.

Chapter two looked at the presentation of the traditional women. It sought to seek what lessons being given to the child whether to praise or ridicule such times. The representation of the traditional female as helpless to change in Hanson's *Takadini* may give a wrong impression to the child reader. The lesson that can be drawn by children is that adult female victory lies in the hands of the patriarchy. This can be seen in the character Sekai whose attempts to flee from the bondage of patriarchy is short lived as in the end we see her travelling back to the village of her oppression. This is to say to the child reader female adulthood is of a fight for emancipation which can never be fully achieved. Moreover the author seems to celebrate this inferiority position of women. He does not sympathize with them as if to say things should just stay as they were with women being dominated by their male counterparts.

Chapter three looked at the presentation of the urban woman with reference to Hozo's *Tapiwa and the kidnappers*. On that note information perceived is of great significance as its motive is to teach a lesson. In *Tapiwa and The Kidnappers* the author acknowledges the upliftment of the position of women through the character Agatha a businesswoman. However he in a way stereotypes the position of women. Agatha is successful but she still does not partake in the actual adventure of trying to save her niece. Despite being a rich woman she still is under the domination of men. This is as if to say the girl child can be rich and successful but will remain confined to the patriarchy. Although females have increased in terms of representation in

children's literature they are still largely portrayed in traditional roles where they are dominated by patriarchy as can be seen in the three texts used in this research.

Chapter four looked at the representation of the male characters In *A Visit to the Gods*. Male masculinity is largely celebrated. Women are actually passive and men are the active members of the society. The relationship between the male counterparts and the females is close to no existence in the text. Children's literature influences the way in which children think and view the world.

On that note the literature should give critical attention to the adult characters both the females and males. The representation of adult males should be seen to be that which works hand in hand with their female counterparts. Children's literature should at least give a close relationship between the male and females as this is a stage they will be transition into they need to prepare themselves.

## **Conclusion**

The findings however revealed that adult characters are somewhat represented in a stereotypical manner. This was seen in that most literary works for children do not represent the adults as we see them in the world. Such issues were seen in the presentation of the urban woman. In as much as women are not on the same level with some still trapped in traditional roles; it is important to also represent a fair share of the urban woman in various job opportunities. Children's literature can be used to correct social issues in generations to come as it prepares children into the adult world. This is to say that it can help children to view adulthood with a different eye with special regard to gender issues particularly the treatment of women.

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