

# Introduction

## Manning the Nation

KIZITO Z. MUCHEMWA AND ROBERT MUPONDE

Masculinity and fatherhood in the context of Zimbabwe is a field of academic study that has suffered long and unnecessary neglect. To some critics, it is a superfluous and vexatious addition to patriarchal strategies of domination that rams another painful nail into the crucified body of feminism. Gender discussions in Zimbabwe traditionally inhabit essentialist spaces from which emerge descriptions and distinctions that stress ideologically inflected binaries, polarities, and exclusions. Zimbabwean scholarship and research on gender studies is currently skewed in favour of one sex and one gender. To discuss one gender usually implies an adversarial existence of unprivileged genders and a definition through negatives of the privileged one. Like the current nationalist political rhetoric on land, sovereignty, and imperialism, it is characterised by its invariable knee-jerk resort to binarising hate speech and hostile name-calling of the other sexes and genders. Scholarly attitudes of this nature have worked well in an atmosphere of crisis and lack, where society is reduced to the functions of oppositions of colonised and coloniser, race and class, sex and gender, poverty and wealth, patriotism and terrorism, sell-outs and party loyalists, survival and death.

Such critical practices deny the existence of marginalised and emerging masculinities that also seek to unmask the strategies of domination employed by hegemonic masculinity. Another assumption is that Zimbabwean/African feminism has consistently ameliorative agendas that deconstruct patriarchy without wanting to examine ways in which this embedded feminism shares the same nest(s) and reaps the same benefits with hegemonic masculinity.

There are points of convergence. There is need for the complex interlinking of gender studies from a variety of perspectives. Viewing masculinity as embodiment of the ultimate other forecloses the re-territorialisation of gender studies. Debates about gender can only be complete and meaningful when masculinity is brought under close scrutiny as it abuts discussions of other genders. A study of the representations of masculinities, manhood and fatherhood in Zimbabwean literature and society makes it possible to link and enrich productions in various cultural and political fields.

In *Manning the Nation: Father figures in Zimbabwean literature and society*, we view masculinities as sets of ideas that can oppress, repress or liberate, depending on historical and political imperatives. But as ideas and

practices, masculinities inhabit, and indeed, proliferate in other genders and sexes as well. They are not a monopoly of one biological sex or social construct. Praise Zenenga and Lene Bull Christiansen, in this volume, demonstrate the pervasiveness of these sightings of multiple masculinities in both men and women, and the systematic attribution of masculinities to particular genders, as well as denial and withdrawal of certain qualities associated with being a member of a particular masculinity, at different times and places in culture and society. Zenenga's chapter is a pained call for suppressed masculinities to find common cause with suppressed femininities in order to unseat oppressive and foreclosing hegemonic masculinities and femininities. Christiansen's paradoxically titled chapter shares with Zenenga some of his concerns, while giving a detailed and nuanced picture of the contradictory discourses surrounding types of femininity that can negotiate patriarchal masculinities and nest within them rather comfortably. Masculinity, manhood and fatherhood are associated with various cultures of performance cutting across many disciplines and spheres, genders and sexes.

The essays in *Manning the Nation* examine the performance and theorisation of masculinity, manhood and fatherhood from the perspectives of literature, history, politics, and social anthropology. What is salutary about these essays is that they depart from imperial and colonial gender constructions of the African Other that persist in different guises and mutations. Characterised by exoticisation and vilification, they provided grounds for administrative, statutory, and media management of African sexuality and manhood. In Zimbabwe, white European genders, masculinities and sexualities never really became objects of critical investigation, before and after black majority rule. Nor was it ever thought a viable project to develop an inclusive critical scholarly practice on the subject. Contributions by Jane Parpart and Ane Kirkegaard unpick the strategies that underpin powerful traditions across divisions of race, ethnicity, and class. What is often occluded, misrepresented, and simplified are finely nuanced masculinities and femininities whose boundaries are constantly shifting, and whose indebtedness to each other is not sufficiently acknowledged.

Most of the contributors challenge the hegemonic strategies that treat Zimbabwean masculinities as homogeneous and univocal. They instead capture the subterranean currents that ripple the beguilingly tranquil surface of the Zimbabwean cultural map. Above all, most contributors explore 'the complex nesting of masculinities within very specific places with histories, supports, threats, possibilities, dreams, and dangers' (Fine and Kuriloff, 2006: 259). Specific to constructions of Zimbabwean masculinities are sites such as traditional culture, colonial history, war, the family, and the body.

## **The male body**

Michel Foucault conceptualises the body as terrain for investing and contesting cultural symbols, values, and power:

*The body is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, train, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies and to emit signs* (cited in Epstein and Straub, 1994:14).

Some contributors in *Manning the Nation: Father figures in Zimbabwean literature and society* adopt versions of this Foucauldian critique to examine how cultures invest the body with sex and gender significance that generates specific body semiotics, economic structures, and power relations. Gender at its most intimate and visible finds the body as one of its most important sites. This intimate site is also the most vulnerable since it is also used as a site of dominance, misogyny and othering. Rape, torture, disfigurement, and killing are ways in which recalcitrant bodies are controlled. Although women and children are particularly vulnerable in an uncontrolled and violent patriarchy, men who belong to marginalised masculinities can be feminised through rape and torture. Current political cultures are sustained by the manning of many sites of identity so as to efficiently man women and children and to thoroughly unman other men. The body is a site of menace from which Zimbabwe's stories of sexually and politically vulnerable identities emerge, and it is also from the same site that new strengths can be constructed from a collapse of the menacing male body.<sup>1</sup>

Lizzy Attree's contribution in this volume problematises a hegemonic masculinity predicated on the fixation with an athletic, strong, healthy, masculine body. Disease, decay, hunger and death in the age of HIV/AIDS in contemporary Zimbabwe, and indeed Southern Africa, deconstruct this privileged figuring of the male body. Used as an instrument of domination in reproduction and in the public sphere, it has not benefited from a closer scrutiny of its built-in instabilities and incapacities. There are tectonic shifts in gender and power relations that indicate the temporality and instability of traditional semiotics of the body that are captured in most of the chapters.

Kizito Muchemwa, writing on father figures, shows how fatherhood is related to the performance of hyper-masculinity associated with violence, domination, and biological siring that does not have moral and social legitimacy. Accustomed to disciplining other bodies, the male body finds itself in crisis when confronted by the possibilities opened up by the demise of its virility and physical wellness and the collapse of the life-supporting fictions of its indomitableness. While the ideological imperatives that demand regulation of the bodies of women, children, and masculinities on the margins may exist for the maintenance of a patriarchal economy, conditions for the

existence of a narrowly conceived masculinity are consistently being undermined by disease, death, absence and moral and economic uncertainties.

Absence, literally and figuratively, is about the forced retreat of the male body from various sites of visibility and authority. Literally, because of the current economic meltdown and political mayhem, a new migrancy on a massive scale is dispersing and re-configuring Zimbabwean manhoods, fatherhoods and masculinities at an unprecedented pace, and will soon be associated with depressed local masculinities, and newer womanhoods and femininities abroad and back home. In the long and often indefinite absence of men, women left behind take on the roles of 'men'. The reverse is true in instances of women leaving men at home as they become international migrant labourers. Men take on the roles of 'women'. Metaphorically, absence is associated with men that have not been allowed to perform their masculinities as they conceive them. These are men who can no longer father their own living stories (children) because of disease and grinding poverty, and therefore are proscribed from manning the nation. This undermining of the popular myth of the male body as strong and healthy and reproductive can only be understood in the context of the forces that have shaped it.<sup>2</sup>

### **Wars of men**

Diachronic and synchronic approaches show how pre-colonial and post-colonial wars and the First and Third Chimurenga are important sites for the historical evolution of Zimbabwean masculinity. War consistently functions as a site of erasure and re-articulation of other sites of masculinity. Families and communities are fractured, erased and dispersed, turning individuals into drifters without allegiance. Outside the war ethic driven by an excess of masculinity, individuals whose gender does not contribute to the war economy are under threat (see also Chris Dolan, 2002: 57-83). There are pressures to discipline, militarise, and transform the male body into an instrument of surveillance and violence. Macho masculinity, in both the public and private spheres, may be understood as a phenomenon unique to the distempers of the Third Chimurenga but its aetiology as already stated can be traced to colonial and pre-colonial times as shown in the chapters in this volume that focus on history.

It is tempting to explain post-colonial violence in Africa using a Fanonian critique in which the colonised reverses the racial pattern of colonial violence as Mamdani's (2000) study shows, but theorising post-colonial violence in Africa reads like a taming and sanitising of black-on-black violence. The deterministic character of the Fanonian critique takes away moral agency and blame from perpetrators of violence. This critique is cyn-

ically adopted by violent patriarchy that has nationalised the male body and mind. Most of the contributions in *Manning the Nation: Father figures in Zimbabwean literature and society* attribute current cultures of violence to the insidious ways in which superphallicism predicated on physical power has invaded Zimbabwe's socio-cultural space instilling in women, children, and marginalised masculinities acquiescence, silence, and fear. War and violence as markers of power directly emanate from body semiotics in which the athletic, strong and healthy male body demands the performance of sexual, social, and political dominance. This performance of masculinity is part of a wider culture of spectacle (Mendible, 1999).

The trauma of rape and horrific physical violence has come to dominate post-1980 Zimbabwean fiction, and contemporary literary criticism reflects attempts to interrogate the sites that produce this trauma. War masculinity, celebrated as a cultural and ideological imperative, is the major source of the contemporary crisis of manhood.

## **The family**

The family is the primary site for scripting of gendered identities and it is here that the iconographic investments in the body begin. Masculinities are largely connected to the fatherhood-paternity-manhood nexus where they self-perpetuate. They produce within families relations of anomie, hatred, and indifference. Familial violence marks the dystopia at the heart of the Zimbabwean family romance and *bildungsroman*. Zimbabwean literature has come to be defined by what we would like to describe as a search for utopian families.

Most of the contributors in this volume deal with dystopian families that have been made so by an aberrant masculinity that preys not only on women and children but also on itself. Robert Muponde locates part of this aberrant masculinity in the misfit between siring and fathering, revealing a gap between biology and morality that he subtly negotiates. Gendered identity, as conceived by and determined in the family, can be an ancestral burden at a site that has become claustrophobic as shown in Neil ten Kortenaar's essay. Kortenaar explores in intriguing detail how in Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* children struggle to free themselves from ancestral curses and the entrapment of the family. The family is a dystopian space in which secrets are experienced as atrophying and entrapping as Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo's chapter demonstrates. In her analysis of two stories by Charles Mungoshi, Dodgson-Katiyo unravels the tension that obtains in scripts of identity at both national and familial levels. This tension is largely caused by a father who demands an heir and clone from the son. Such an exacting demand unmans the son. The father-son relationship is complicated by marriage outside race, ethnicity, incest and xenopho-

bia in 'Empty House' and ethnic cleansing in 'The Sins of the Fathers'.

### **Fatherhood and paternity nexus**

The current crisis of masculinity in Zimbabwean culture and politics manifests itself through the deployment of violence to suppress all other masculinities and police other genders. It seeks to rewrite the history of the country and shape its destiny from a gendered, ethnic, and racial perspective. This brand of masculinity is underpinned by the fatherhood-paternity-manhood nexus taken as a semantic and conceptual synonymy. It is a confusion that deepens a crisis that finds articulation through violence in the public sphere, the family, unreconstructed parenting styles, lack of clarity between siring and fathering, unfulfilled quests for ideal father figures, and the denial of agency to marginalised groups in society.

The theme of manning captures many of the interstices at which themes constellate. The two key meanings of the verb man – 'to furnish with a man or men' and 'to strengthen or put manhood into' – give a sense of the direction discussions about masculinity should take, a direction that requires intricate negotiation. If the business of culture and society is to supply nations with men it is important that the sources, methods, and types of men recruited into the various enterprises of the nation be interrogated. Robert Muponde's chapter, and his work elsewhere (2006), provides instances in which certain fatherhoods and manhoods should never be allowed to stand for the gender, whether marginal, normative or hegemonic. The meaning of strengthening or giving manhood should be viewed beyond the limited scope of masculinity enhanced or distorted by testosterone, steroids, and Viagra. A clearer, more nuanced definition of manhood is urgently needed to address the crisis of manhood that has led to the over-manning of the nation.

Chapters by Kortenaar, Dodgson-Katiyo and Muchemwa on Charles Mungoshi's work, Musila and Muponde on Dambudzo Marechera's work, demonstrate that fatherhood and manhood are nestled precariously on a shaky life-support system, if they have not already placed their societies in the same position. There is a sense of depression and emergency, which only Memory Chirere and Mickias Musiyiwa's chapter on the quest for an ideal father figure attempts to ameliorate. But then, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni's brave chapter on Joshua Nkomo's posthumous resurrection as Father Zimbabwe, still portrays a rather too cautious egoist, who is depicted as not necessarily any better than his arch-rival Robert Mugabe. The latter presides over the unmanning of the entire folk as well as the burial of heroes year in year out as the chief and sole undertaker of the nation.

The contributions in this volume are not celebrating the demise of manhood but its reconfiguration and possible liberation. Muponde's 'Killing

Fathers' points the reader to this reconfiguration as it unbundles the fatherhood-paternity-manhood matrix to clear the conceptual space for debates on fatherhood. His analysis deploys the parricide trope to revise fatherhood by bringing its biological and social constructions into conflict. Biological fatherhood that emphasises sperm count emerges as unsocialised, morally deficient, and psychologically destabilising. The child as both passive product and victim of biological authoring can only recuperate agency, revise narrative of sacrificial obedience and closure through parricide.

Much as the thrust here is on fathering and childhood, writers in this volume constantly find themselves dealing with mothers and mothering styles. This is inevitably so since mothers cannot be left out of the father-child nexus. Mothers/women also define fatherhood in significant ways. Motherhood and fatherhood often find themselves in an embrace that is difficult to separate as shown in Lene Bull Christiansen's contribution on Joice Mujuru whose iconographic role during the Second Chimurenga and in contemporary politics is brought under scrutiny. Women in politics in other parts of the world who assume leadership positions do not seem to challenge the power men wield. The iconographic significance of such women is often lost in the patriarchal demands of the office of head of government in a patriarchal society.

### **History and its ceiling**

History, it would appear, places a ceiling, to use a phrase from Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins*, on men and women who construct their identities and the discourses that sustain these. Most of the contributions explore the historical roots/routes of masculinity in Zimbabwe and interrogate what Grace Musila describes as 'masculinisation of national history'. Musila argues that Dambudzo Marechera and Yvonne Vera not only subvert this monolithic history of the nation but also subvert normative notions of gender. In *Butterfly Burning* the colonial urban space is viewed as the epitome of colonialism and symbol of Western modernity. While it triggers a crisis in black manhood, it opens up new exhilarating opportunities for black women who, although controlled and constrained by the colonial system and traditional black patriarchy, find in the urban instabilities and insecurities cracks through which to reconfigure black womanhood outside of matrimony and maternity. This rearrangement of ontological signposts in the city leads to an alienation of men that produces violence. This leads befuddled and emasculated men in Dambudzo Marechera's fiction to beat their women to a stain. The excess of violence as a defensive mechanism marks the reaction of 'native' men whose psyches have been challenged and damaged by colonialism and new realities.

But history with its regressions and fast forwards reveals many connections across times and cultures, and the violence of depressed masculinity in colonial times is not very different in severity from that arising out of the post-colonial present and does strangely have several points of intersection with white hegemonic masculinity (see Parpart and Kirkegaard in this volume) that in the past treated it as the primitive Other.

While fatherhood in the West appears to be in decline and there is alarm attached to its presumed demise, fatherhood in Zimbabwe is alive and carried on a resurgent wave of patriotic paternity and patri-mony despite legislation that promotes the rights of women. Fatherhood is highly visible and feminism that is tolerated is that which does not threaten the official discourse of fatherhood. Lene Bull Christiansen demonstrates that the iconographic significance of Joice Mujuru can be read as an example of officially sanctioned feminism. In the charged atmosphere of gender ideologies negotiations of a gendered identity become highly problematic raising questions and doubts that surround her fathering/mothering role. Christiansen places her iconographic assessment in the larger context of what she describes as a 'metaphor of kinship [that] can be seen as feeding on 'traditionalist' versions of pre-colonial versions of pre-colonial social structures', a kinship discourse that has given rise to political constructions of patriarchal and matriarchal icons.

Perhaps in the same way that Musiyiwa and Chirere painfully excavate for what constituted an ideal father in pre-colonial and colonial times, in itself a very urgent quest in our depressing times of false 'amadhodha sibili' ('real men'),<sup>3</sup> Anna Chitando and Angeline Madongonda recover a vision of a less dystopian, and perhaps hopeful, fatherhood in Zimbabwean folklore and literature that presents the father as hero in the father-daughter nexus. The psychological growth of the girl child and her gender identity are closely linked to the image of the good father. Their approach shows how dominant conceptions of fatherhood depart significantly from traditional ones.

While *Manning the Nation: Father figures in Zimbabwean literature and society* is not meant to be exhaustive and conclusive, the insights gathered in these excellent essays pose enough questions that should help us to review subjects that, in spite of dominating our lives, and very often endangering and poisoning our politics and economics, are

surprisingly taken for granted. It is time we get fathers we *want* (we have agency, vision and choice), not the ones we *deserve* (a question of fate). The same can be said of the nature of society, and how we man it.

## ENDNOTES

1. Perhaps the most menacing male body is that which Robert Mugabe presents at his birthday on the 21 February every year. His octogenarian's body is increasingly being presented as a fighting machine with lots of punch; earlier when he was approaching his late 70s, and was faced with a youthful opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai, his advanced years were converted to horse power; when he turned 82, he conjured a grotesque picture of himself as a 28-year-old inhabiting the body of an 82-year-old; in 2007 when he turned 83, he was quoted in the press as saying he is only 8 plus 3 years old (he is getting dangerously younger at a time when every suffering Zimbabwean wants him to retire!). This is not just denialism, but a very strong tendency in Zimbabwean patriarchal nationalism and politics to seek self-renewal by constantly engaging in violent, militaristic adventures and rhetoric. In the domestic sphere, 'the strong healthy man' is associated with the acquisition of gadgets, more cars, cellphones, and what is now known as 'small houses' (extra-marital affairs).
2. We are sure future studies will examine how Zimbabwean masculinities are configured by sport, schooling, as well as the experiences of land invasions and reform, migrancy, forced homelessness and the current Zimbabwean diaspora.
3. An Ndebele term popularised and abused by Robert Mugabe in 2000 when he created what he called 'A war cabinet' to deal with the opposition and accelerate land invasions.