

# The Image of Women in Es'kia Mphahlele's Chirundu (1979)

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**Abstract :** Many literary texts by African male writers were written in the 1960s and 1970s to decry the governance of African political rulers, a governance based on abuse of power, bribery, self-enrichment and dictatorship, among other vices. African masses who thought that the replacement of the white rulers by indigenous politicians, following the independences, would be mean a new and better governing system, have been simply disillusioned. Among these literary texts is Mphahlele's *Chirundu* (1979). But, can *Chirundu* not be also classified among literary texts such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (1962), Onuora Nzekwu's *Highlife for Lizards* (1965), Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966) ... in which feminists find a sexist perspective of the authors? From a feminist perspective, this article is going to deal with the image of women in *Chirundu*. Based on culture, sociology and psychology as theories and feminism as literary criticism, this study will firstly deal with the stereotypes about women and then analyze the latter's victimization.

**Keywords:** image ; women ; stereotypes ; victimization ; feminism.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s and 1970s, following the independences, many literary texts by African male writers were produced to denounce the rule of African political leaders. These writers, who hoped that African countries' political sovereignty would mark the beginning of the improvement of the populations' social condition, were disappointed by the governing system of the colonizers' successors. Abuse of power, bribery, self-enrichment and dictatorship, among other vices, have been used as mode of governance by postcolonial African political rulers who also privileged their own interests over the betterment of the masses' lot. Among the said literary texts are Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965), *Madmen and Specialists* (1971) and *Season of Anomy* (1973), Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966), Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), *Fragments* (1970), Yambo Ouloguem's *Bound to Violence* (1971), Kofi Awoonor's *This Earth My Brother* (1971), Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977), Es'kia Mphahlele's *Chirundu* (1979), to mention just but a few. Thus, critical works on *Chirundu* (1979) are often about the corruption of post-independence African political authorities and the betrayal of African people by these authorities.

However, can *Chirundu* not be also classified among literary texts such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (1962), Onuora Nzekwu's *Highlife for Lizards* (1965), Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966) ... in

which feminists find a sexist perspective of the authors? For example, dealing with *The Concubine*, Naana Banyiwah-Horne states: "What emerges from the world Amadi creates, then, is a reinforcement of stereotypical male chauvinistic impressions about African womanhood."<sup>1</sup> Emecheta, for her part, declares:

"The good woman, in Achebe's portrayal, drinks the dregs after her husband. In *Things Fall Apart*, when the husband is beating his wife, the other women stand around saying it's enough, it's enough. In his view, that kind of subordinate woman is the good woman."<sup>2</sup>

So, in other words, does the portrayal of female characters and their experiences in *Chirundu* not also reveal a sexist bias against women on the part of Mphahlele? In this regard, Peter N. Thuynsma observes in the introduction of *Chirundu* that: "Mphahlele also demonstrates a keen awareness of the strength of African women, but does not always develop his female characters in a manner which feminist scholars might prefer." (xii).

From a feminist perspective, this article is going to deal with the image of women in *Chirundu*. Feminism is defined by Patricia Lengermann and Gillian Niebrugge (2010) as "a range of social movements, political movements, and ideologies that aim to define and establish the political, economic, personal, and social equality of the sexes."<sup>3</sup> According to Sarah Gamble (2001), feminism "incorporates the position that societies prioritize the male point of view, and that women are treated unjustly within those societies."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, in short, feminism can be defined as the struggle against the inequality of sexes and the victimization of women. Based on culture, sociology and psychology as theories and feminism as literary criticism, this study will firstly deal with the stereotypes about women and then analyze the latter's victimization in Mphahlele's second novel.

<sup>1</sup> Naana Banyiwah-Horne. "African womanhood: The Contrasting Perspectives of Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*." In *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves, New Jersey, Africa World Press, 1986, p. 123

<sup>2</sup> In James Adeola. *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*, Nairobi, Heinemann, 1990, p. 42

<sup>3</sup> In Ritzer, G. & Ryan, J. M. (eds). *The Concise Encyclopedia of Sociology*. John Wiley & Sons. p. 223

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Gamble. "Introduction." *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*. Routledge, 2001, p. VII.  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminism>

## II. STEREOTYPES ABOUT WOMEN

A stereotype is “a generalized belief about a particular category of people.”<sup>5</sup> In many African societies, particularly in patriarchal societies, it is believed that the place of women is at home. This means that women are not expected, for example, to work in regular employment and therefore earn a salary. Thus, in *Chirundu*, the male protagonist, Chimba, asks his wife, Tirenje, to give up her employment as a sewing teacher in a primary school because he now has a full-time-paying job and because: “There are two children to look after too.” (41). Yet, Chimba and his wife have at their disposal Auntie, a middle-aged maid, who is taking good care of the children. But Chimba believes in the confinement of women to the home: “... I believed firmly that woman’s place is with her family, in the house. I wanted to be looked after so that I could function effectively. My children needed constant attention from a mother.” (42). For the same reason, he also turns down his wife’s proposal to do his secretarial work for him as an alternative to her renunciation of her job. This stereotype about women reminds of the observation of Robinson and al. (quoted in Rohrbaugh, 1981: 80) that: “... housework is for women only. Regardless of how busy his wife may be with a paid job, the husband rarely takes on any of the household chores.”

Tirenje submits to the will of her husband: “I will simply do what you direct me to” (42) and illustrates thus another stereotype about women which is recurrent in African literature, that is to say submissiveness or obedience. This is confirmed by Amara E. Chukwudi-Ofoedu (2017: 2) when, referring to literary texts by African male writers, he posits that: “Female characters were given stereotypical roles, portraying women as obedient, passive and unintelligent, and most importantly as a physical object of men’s sexual desire.” Consequently, Tirenje becomes an example of the stereotypical image of women as dependent on men: “The gist of the matter is that in traditional African society, women were looked upon as perpetually dependent beings who always had to be directed and protected by men.” (Baloyi, 2010: 2). In effect, Tirenje relies on the money which her husband sends her regularly and when Chimba has stopped this marital duty for four months, it is Tirenje’s father-in-law who gives her food. Men’s directing role is stressed when Tirenje laments her desertion by her husband in these terms: “– do you know what it is like for a woman to feel the children are too much for her they need a father who can talk to them show them the way – children of your own blood Chimba?” (78). Judging from her words, Tirenje is unable to assume this role.

As for Monde, Chimba’s concubine, even if she works, her job as a secretary (in the Ministry of Commerce and Industries) makes her dependent on men as well. She works under male bosses and it is illustrative that, when Chimba met her for the first time, she was serving tea at a committee

meeting. But it is Monde’s stereotypical image as a sexual object which is more pronounced. According to Chukwudi-Ofoedu (2017: 1), “One of the most durable and damaging stereotypes propagated in African literature is that of the woman as a sexual object.” Monde is chosen by Chimba to satisfy him sexually in the city, as his wife is in the village, and to be his companion in his political life. The man is living with the secretary without telling his wife anything about his new relationship, but when expressing his fear that Tirenje might catch them, Chimba has shown his objectification of Monde: “Yes, there were nights when I did not enjoy Monde at all, because I dreaded the possibility that Tirenje might track me down to her lodgings.” (44). He could have said ‘enjoy Monde’s company’.

Tirenje ended up meeting Monde and they quarrelled bitterly, causing people to talk and amuse themselves. This is how Chimba was pushed to marry her. Contrary to the description which Chimba makes of Tirenje, the one which he makes of his second wife likens the latter to a prostitute:

However exhausted, she’s always ready. Easy to trigger off. She will moan and gasp at the first touch, almost swamp you with her eagerness. Every movement of hers in the house, any time of the day, seems to say to you, ‘Come in, it’s moist and vibrating for you.’ Anywhere, in the kitchen, bathroom, in the middle of the lounge – anywhere. (22)

Besides, Tirenje wanted to tell Monde “how cheap she was” (60) and the easy way Chimba got

her proves Tirenje right. In effect, the male protagonist recounts: “... I told myself, ‘Chimba, here she is. Go get her.’ I did. To me it was not even conquest.” (43). Monde is actually an illustration of how stereotypically a city woman is presented in the novel as a whore: “... a city woman is like a road – when you come to it it is foolish to ask who has walked here before – more than that, just bear in mind also that someone else may come and walk there after you.” (89). These words have been told to Tirenje by her father who got them from a friend of his. Msuweni, Chimba’s cousin who is living in town, is no exception. Her one-to-one discussion with Chimba in her room in order to reconcile husband and wife makes Tirenje suspicious: “(What is he saying in such a loud voice in there? Is that how you think of yourself msuweni? I can believe it – you are a widow but I am sure – I can see it – you know how to overcome loneliness... A woman turns into a goat path because she is afraid of loneliness...” (89).

Other objectified women, this time by Chimba Chirundu’s grandfather, are the latter’s relatives who often came to visit the Chirundus. Each of these women, according to the grandfather, hoped that he would add her to his wives whereas he wanted to avoid in-breeding:

‘Get this baggage out of the house as soon as they have swept the homestead!’ grandfather could be heard shouting to his wives. The ‘baggage’ would be the women,

<sup>5</sup> Mike Cardwell. *The Dictionary of Psychology*. London and Chicago, Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1999

all relatives in one degree or another, who, my father related, were always hovering about hoping he would add one of them to his homestead. (31)

Chimba's namesake not only objectifies these women relatives by calling them 'baggage' but he also indicates that he has no need of them after they have served him by sweeping his homestead. Furthermore, the service, which the women give, is reminiscent of a stereotype about women which Miriam Tlali got from her grandmother and which she wrote on the cover of her novel *Mihloti* (1984): "to say woman is to say pot; to say woman is to say broom."

If Monde is an example of the cheapness associated with city women, through Tirenje, the stereotypical image of women as foolish people resurfaces. It is as if Tirenje had read her husband's mind when Chimba turned down her proposal to do his secretarial work. So she addressed him: "You think I am too stupid or I do not believe in the things you believe in." (42). Though Chimba neither admits nor denies openly what his wife has said, one can say that his following words are a confession: "She laughed as she said that. But the accusation in that laugh unsettled me." (42). What is more, who says nothing consents, as the saying goes. Anyway, the female protagonist does not delay in acting in a way that pushed Chimba to confirm her accusation. In effect, Tirenje asked Chimba's nephew, Moyo, to take her to Chimba's house in the city, where he is living with his concubine. Once there, she found Monde and they quarrelled and almost came to blows, in the absence of Chimba. Annoyed by this attitude of his wife, the man thundered: "Foolish woman! How foolish women can be! When they are not trampled underfoot they put up stupid meaningless fights!" (61).

This stereotypical image of the narrator about Tirenje in particular and about women in general can also be noticed in the letter the heroine sends to her husband and in which she recounts the quarrel: "I got angry I shouted like a mad woman I wanted to tear my clothes off my body and tell her how cheap she was." (60). One may wonder the relevance of her wanting to tear her clothes off her body. In fact, it is simply nonsensical to want to denude oneself just to tell your rival that she is cheap. Tirenje herself admits that she has shown foolishness by thinking that she could succeed in the disagreement which opposes her to her husband, that is to say his marriage to Monde Lundia. That is why she cautions herself: "Take care Tirenje walk slowly do not make a fool of yourself not more than you have already – you thought things could be talked over..." (89).

In many literary texts by African writers, particularly by male writers, the paramount importance of marriage for a woman is stressed. So much so that a woman who leaves her husband is stereotyped, as illustrated in Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and Emecheta's *Kehinde* (1994). In effect, when *Efuru* is deserted by her husband, Adizua, her aunt-in-law advises her to give him one year before divorcing him. Ajanupu is actually trying to spare *Efuru* psychological pressures because among their people, a woman who leaves her husband is considered a bad

woman. As for Mary Elikwu, in *Kehinde*, who left her husband because he beat her, this is how she is viewed by her compatriots in England: "To the men in their circle, she was a curiosity, to the women, a kind of challenge. To Kehinde she was a fallen woman who had no sense of decorum." (1994: 38). So one can understand Tirenje's father who advises his daughter not to let her disagreement with her husband put an end to her marriage: "Tirenje my child, do what you think will bring you relief from this big weight – you are still thirty years of age if you want to do it you can still begin another life – this way you are living you are wasting away – but do what you can to save this marriage –" (87). Tirenje prefers to take her husband to justice rather than divorce him and even when she knows that Chimba will not give up his second marriage, she does not leave him either.

The stereotypical view about daughters can be noticed through the words which Chimba's mother addresses her husband before leaving the marital home: "It is enough Chirundu, enough that I have borne you three sons." (36). The point is that she has given birth to three sons in a row, which is likely a feat among their people. In *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, when Okonkwo's first wife did likewise, her husband slaughtered a goat for her to show his happiness. If Chirundu's wife had given birth to three daughters successively, she would not have bragged about it. What is more, when Chirundu was converted to Christianity and had to leave one of his two wives, he chose to stay with Chimba's mother and he freed his first wife who has first borne him a child (a daughter). Had this only child been a son, Chirundu's senior wife would certainly not have been abandoned.

In *Chirundu*, not only are women stereotyped by they are also victimized.

### III. THE VICTIMIZATION OF WOMEN

The victimization of women in *Chirundu* is manifest through the fact that, among the Bemba people, a woman cannot go back to her parents in case of a dispute with her husband. The Bemba law does not allow it: "She cannot of her own accord go to her parents." (7). If she does: "They would send her back to her husband, or tell her to go the local court to complaint." (7). Whereas the husband can "pack off" the woman to her parents, the wife has either to ask her parents to come and take her or to resort to justice. This is an overt breach of equality between man and woman before the law. Besides, if the wife was allowed to go to her parents, the husband would be spared the trouble of packing her off to his in-laws.

The way Chimba treated his first wife is worth analyzing here as well. Chimba asked Tirenje to abandon her teaching job in a primary school and he would not let her be his secretary because he believes that woman's place is at home. He reduced thus his wife to the status of housewife for his own interests, which Tirenje appreciated negatively: "even in the days of our forefathers a woman did not sit around on her buttocks to wait for the man to give her one baby after

another.” (79). Examples such as this one pushed Florence Stratton (1994: 25) to assert that “*women are systematically excluded from the political, the economic, the judicial and even from the discussions regarding community life.*” By making Tirenje a housewife, Chimba makes her economically dependent on him. Consequently, her financial situation became difficult when her husband had stayed four months in the city without sending her money. In the meantime, Tirenje depended on her father-in-law’s food. But as she did not want to be a burden to the old man, she went at her father’s.

In addition to Tirenje’s difficult financial situation, two negative effects of Chimba’s desertion on his wife are stressed by the narrator when he joined her at her father’s: she is thinner and sex-starved: “... *as I went into Tirenje that night, it seemed like a long long time since my last visit at Luanshya. She was warm, responsive, receptive as ever, but it felt as if she was giving more than ever before. A few tremulous seconds I felt as if it might be the last. The very last...*” (56). After her husband’s unsatisfactory performance, she becomes sure that he is cheating on her with another woman in the city. If the two women quarrelled harshly and almost came to blows when they met, the man is satisfied because this is the scenario which he imagined and wished. For him, this fight over his person shows how much both women love him: “*And when she found Monde she would rave and want to tear her apart in order to establish her claim. By the same token I would also ascertain if Monde’s love for me could absorb a confrontation and thereby prove its weight – both in tears and resilience.*” (58). This example illustrates the observation of Chukwuma (2012: 90) that “*women are there for the benefit of men and to make men happy, even if at times it is at the expense of their own integrity.*” Had Chimba’s gardener not been there, the two women could have come to blows and harmed each other in the name of their love for a man who puts his ego before their safety.

Living with Monde in the city, Chimba finds it more and more difficult to visit his wife and children in the farming town of Musoro, to the great disillusionment of Tirenje who is fiercely opposed to sharing her husband. Though she is a rural woman, Tirenje is influenced by her western schooling. Thus, it is out of the question for her to be a co-wife: “*How can I share my man with another woman?*” (45). To her husband who wanted to know why she would not be a co-wife, she explained that she is not an illiterate. So according to her, polygamy is for illiterate women. Besides, Tirenje interprets her husband’s new relationship as a wish to hurt her. In the second letter which she sent to Chimba, she wrote:

... why have you left me Chimba why? What have I done wrong? I have mothered your children I have been a good wife to you why Chimba? I keep asking why does a man want to hurt the woman he loves? Why when you knew that I could not live with a second wife did you go ahead and take her? (63)

So Chimba not only hurts Tirenje by living with another woman, by committing adultery but also by deserting his wife.

She feels all the more victimized by her husband as the latter robs her of her right in favour of his concubine: “*why do I have to be the only one to wait and wait and wait when I need Chimba?*” (79). This explains why she too decided to commit adultery in reaction to this injustice. But she changed her mind at the last moment while she had her petticoat on and the man held her face between his hands because her husband’s image haunted her: “*there I was with Chimba’s face always in my mind – a face and eyes that seem always to be threatening and warning you.*” (80). To put an end to the uproar provoked by his relationship with Monde, Chimba marries her despite Tirenje’s objection to polygamy. He caused thus Tirenje to sue him for bigamy. In effect, Chimba deceived the registrar and married Monde under the British Ordinance after he had married Tirenje under the same law which does not allow polygamy.

While the trial was on, Tirenje’s pain became more and more unbearable, intensified as it was by the fact that the State Advocate, at the court, prevented her from saying all she had in her heart. Not only has her husband added a woman to their marital life, but he also rates this woman higher than Tirenje. The deserted wife confides in Chimba’s cousin:

It hurts – here in my breast, the pain only the person you love can give you. It hurts until I want my chest to burst open to drain the poison to ease the pain. Sometimes it is a pain in the head sometimes I feel as if there was a large hole inside me an empty hole that throws back your voice when you try to speak into it. (83)

Even if her husband is sentenced to one year of imprisonment, Tirenje has failed because she wanted Chimba to divorce her co-wife, which he has refused to do. So she suffers. Worse, Chimba has made up his mind not to keep his first wife when he comes out of prison.

If Tirenje is deserted by her husband in favour of another woman, Joyce Mackenzie is raped by the Minister of Agriculture with impunity. No matter her complaint to the police, she did not get satisfaction. The Minister denied flatly what the Englishwoman was accusing him of and the scandal was hushed up by the Minister of Internal Affairs and the President. Actually, Joyce Mackenzie was given five hundred pounds and compelled to leave the country. The Afro-American wife of the Minister of Education too, is also coerced into leaving the country because she did not get along with her husband. The deportation of the woman is all the more incomprehensible as Mr Muli could simply divorce her and let her continue to live in the country. The reason which the Minister of Internal Affairs gave the press reporters left them dissatisfied: “*She was undermining the authority of the government.*” (51). To the journalists who wanted him to be clearer, he answers: “*That’s all I have to say, gentlemen.*” (51). Less than two weeks after the woman was expelled, Mr Muli took a wife from his ethnic group.

Chirundu’s wives, for their part, are driven out of the matrimonial home by their husband. When Chirundu was

converted to Christianity and had to give up one of his two wives, he abandoned the first one. One can imagine the sorrow of this woman whose husband showed her that he preferred his other wife. But it should not be surprising that the first wife was freed insofar as she has borne only one daughter. If her only child who is also Chirundu's first child had been a boy, the senior wife would certainly have stayed in her husband's house. As for Chimba's mother, she could not put up anymore with the tyrant whom her husband had become after his conversion. Chimba remembers: *"He laid down restrictions. He commanded us to pray morning and night, go to three church services every Sunday. Boarding-school discipline had none of the sting and blistering rub my father's had. My mother must have looked like a Hebrew woman, so I imagined."* (35). This is how Chirundu caused his second wife to go back to her people for good after she had uttered these words: *"... this kind of life is not for me. My ancestors have not yet forsaken me... I am going back to my people."* (37)

Concerning Chirundu's only daughter, she has not succeeded in the challenge she gave her father. In effect, she would not yield to her father's opposition to her marrying her Tumbuka lover. The point is that Tumbuka people are known for their cowardice. Thus, she went to her lover without her father's agreement. The first consequence is she lost her first daughter and came to blame Chirundu: *'Papa, have you asked the ancestors of Chirundu to avenge the wound you inflicted on yourself?'* (35). He exonerated himself: *"I am not a heathen."* (35). The young woman was insistent: *"I lost my child because you never came to see us to bless our house in Bisa."* (35). Anyway, she knows that she is not the only one to have been victimized by Chirundu on the altar of his faith in Christianity: *"Yes, of course, I am not the first one to be thrown away because of Jehovah, am I? You threw my mother away when Jehovah claimed you."* (35). The second consequence occurred after she got three other children (a son and two daughters): she lost the youngest daughter. As if these ordeals were not enough, she stopped having children. Besides, her economic situation went from bad to worse. Her son, Moyo, recounts: *"One season we had food, another season we lived on charity or my mother grew pumpkin which she bartered for sorghum or maize."* (122).

The woman's difficult living conditions led to the deterioration of her health. Moyo observed his mother without being able to change the course of things: *"My mother was beginning to drag her feet around the homestead."* (122). Thus, she addressed her two children: *'Moyo, I cannot even bend down to pick up a pot of water at the river or put it down from my head.'* And to my sister she said, *'My little aunt, you are going to do more things in this house than before, you are going to be a woman even before you are ready for it.'* (122). The boy was even impelled by the situation of the family to stop his schooling after three years in Secondary and work in order to help his parents financially: *"Because I could see that our house was falling, I left and took a job as an office clerk at my school in order to support the family..."* (132). Her

mother passed away at the early age of forty-three, leaving behind a bereaved and impoverished family. Last but not least, Letanka's wife is severely beaten by her husband for refusing to open the door for him. She was blaming him for drinking too much: *"... the way you drink disgusts me."* (145). The wife was also angry with the man for moving her from South Africa to England where their economic situation was not good: *"Gave her a nasty beating once, which I've ever regretted since."* (145)

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In *Chirundu*, Es'kia Mphahlele denounces British colonial rule in a central Africa country (which makes one think of Zambia) and demonstrates how the native politicians of this country, who waged campaign against the colonizers' governance, became corrupted by power after having taken over from the British. He also deals with the disappointment of the masses, particularly the workers, about the behaviour of the indigenous political rulers. But a feminist reading of Mphahlele's second novel enables to see that women are stereotyped and victimized in *Chirundu*. One stereotype about women is the belief that their place is at home. The hero of the novel is among those who share this belief. Thus, he makes his wife abandon her employment to become a housewife. Also, the stereotypical image of women as dependent beings is seen through Tirenje who depends financially on her husband and through Monde who is a secretary. Tirenje obeys her husband and gives up her job at the expense of her financial development, in accordance with the fact that women are expected to be submissive, obedient.

The objectification of women is noticeable in *Chirundu* as well. Chirundu rejects his women cousins who, according to him, want him to marry them and calls them "this baggage." Monde, for her part, is a sexual object whom the hero did not "enjoy" some nights because he feared that his first wife *"might track me down to her lodgings."* (44). Even if Chimba has chosen her because she is a suitable companion in his political life, not once does the reader see her accompanying him in a political activity or ceremony. However, she is there mostly to be used sexually anywhere in the house at any moment. She does not even cook. As for city women, the image that the reader keeps of them is that of prostitutes. Concerning the portrayal of women as unintelligent, Chimba, who thinks that Tirenje is stupid, voices this thought after her quarrel with Monde; a quarrel through which he has seen how foolish women can be.

While in Nwapa's *One is Enough* (1981), Amaka wants to disprove the erroneous belief that without a husband, a woman is nothing by refusing to remarry after the failure of her first marriage, in *Chirundu*, Mirimba advises his daughter, Tirenje, to do all she can to save her marriage. The young woman has heeded the advice in the sense that she has struggled to get her husband back and she has not asked for divorce despite her husband's unfair behaviour towards her. Additionally, the stereotyping of daughters can be seen via Chimba's mother who brags about the fact that she has given

her husband three sons while his first wife has given him one daughter. Also, when Chirundu adopted the Christian religion and had to choose one of his two wives, it is his senior wife who did not have a son that he abandoned.

As for the victimization of women in *Chirundu*, it is stressed in the fact that Bemba law does not allow a wife to go to her parents in case of a dispute with her husband whereas a man can “pack off” his wife to his parents-in-law. If the wife does, her parents will send her back to her marital home. Thus, her options are to go to a local court to complain or to ask her parents to come and take her. Tirenje’s example too is another illustration of women’s victimization in *Chirundu*. Her husband makes her give up her teaching job and depend financially on him before deserting her for another woman. Hence, Tirenje’s difficult financial situation and suffering. Joyce Makenzie, for her part, is raped by the Minister of Agriculture with impunity and obliged to leave the country. Because, she does not get along with her husband, Mrs Muli has been compelled to get out of the country while Chirundu’s first wife is “thrown away” with her daughter by her husband after his conversion to Christianity. Unable to put up with his tyranny any longer, Chirundu’s remaining wife, went to her people for good. Concerning his daughter, she challenged her father by marrying without his agreement and consequently faced misfortune after misfortune until her death at age forty-three. Lastly, Letanka’s wife is given a nasty beating by her husband for repeatedly complaining about the way he drinks which disgusts her.

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