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Anglophone Zambian Prose Fiction: Tradition or Transition?

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Abstract

Zambian literature is characterized by publications both in English and indigenous Zambian languages across all genres. It would be possible to investigate the emerging trends in Zambian literature in general. However, this paper explores and questions, whether an identifiable tradition has developed with regard to Anglophone Zambian prose fiction. Or could it be that Anglophone Zambian prose fiction has not yet developed an identifiable writing tradition and is merely undergoing a transition to some tradition? In seeking answers to these critical questions, the paper highlights trends in Anglophone Zambian prose fiction from the colonial era, which introduced western education and a writing system to Zambia, to the contemporary era. In essence this means tracing publications from the birth of Zambian publishing in 1937, when the quasi-governmental African Literature Committee of Northern Rhodesia was formed. In 1948 the body was transformed into an intergovernmental institution incorporating Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia, now called Malawi and Zambia respectively. Hence the new body was named Joint Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland Publications Bureau. In 1962 the body collapsed and its Northern Rhodesian branch assumed the name Northern Rhodesia Publications Bureau, becoming the Zambia Publications Bureau in 1964, when Zambia became independent. This paper, therefore, will attempt to determine trends in this body of published works in terms of themes, characters, subject, style and types of authors.

Keywords: Anglophone, postcoloniality, prose, trends, Zambia

1.0 Introduction

The use of the term "Anglophone Zambian prose fiction" presupposes the existence of "Zambian literature". However, what is meant by Zambian literature? What are the distinguishing features, if any, of Zambian literature? The questions surrounding the issue of Zambian literature are very similar to those characterising the debate on the definition of African literature. The challenge of defining African literature is captured by Tucker in his book, *Africa in Modern Literature*:

> The search for a definition of African literature unearths other questions. Is African literature that body of work written by Africans or by writers of African descent? Or is it the literature created by writers throughout the world about the milieu, essence, and the thematic and psychic peculiarities of the African continent? Is African literature restricted to works written in a language native to the African continent, or can certain works of an Engishman like Joyce Cary and an American like Ernest Hemingway be considered a part of African literature, at least in the broad view? (2)

As Banda-Aaku notes, the debate over the definition of African literature has haunted African scholarship for more than 50 years, having been first brought to the fore at the 1962 African Writers' Conference at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda (607). The conference was notably titled, "A Conference of African Writers of English Expression," and was attended by, among other notable names of African literature, Chinua Achebe, fresh from the fame garnered from the publication, four years earlier, of his ground-breaking novel *Things Fall Apart*, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, then a student of English at the host university. As Ngugi recalls in *Decolonising the Mind*, the first item on the agenda, "What is African Literature?" led to "animated" debate (6). Ngugi indicates that the debate was characterised by a daunting range of questions about the nature of African literature: "Was it literature about Africa or about the African experience? Was it literature written by Africans? What about a non-African who wrote about Africa: did his work qualify as African literature? Or were African languages the criteria?" (6).

Evidently the debate and controversy over the definition of African literature hinges on three main issues: Agency (who is the writer?); Language (what language does the writer use?); Subject matter (what does the writer write about?). It is the position of this paper that the debate regarding the definition of Zambian literature is burdened by the same three factors. Who qualifies to be called a Zambian writer? In what language should Zambian literature be written? Should a Zambian work of fiction only deal with the Zambian (cultural) experience?

Over the decades Zambian literature has seen writings by non-Zambians, especially in the first decade after independence, when "a cadre of expatriates, mostly of British stock" (Chilala 95) published works couched in Zambian themes and focusing on the Zambian experience. The list includes Beatrice Archer, whose novel *Poison of My Hate* was published by NECZAM (National Educational Company of Zambia) in 1978, as well as Robert Baptie, Fergus Macpherson, Carl Mason, Timothy Holmes, David Simpson and David Wallace (Chilala 95).

Although the expatriates were not Zambians, it would be possible to include their works in the basket of Zambian literature. This is because they were part of the pioneering group of writers called the New Writers Group which was formed soon after Zambia's independence. The Group, which operated as a cooperative between 1964 and 1975, published Zambia's first literary journal called *New Writing from Zambia* (NWZ). The New Writers Group drew is strength and depth from its multi-ethnic composition. Thus, apart from the expatriates of British stock, the group also included Chiman Vyas, an Indian-born expatriate, and exiled Zimbabwean journalist, Bill Saidi. The indigenous Zambian members of the group included Sundie Kazunga and Elias Chipimo, both of whom were school principals. As Primorac argues, "the group was close to the mainstream of African literary developments at the time, when the textual and cultural contours of Africa's literary canon were still emergent" (584-5). It may be argued that the New Writers Group rode on the tide of the euphoria and nationalistic spirit of the newly independent nation of Zambia. The group contributed immensely to laying the foundation for later developments in Zambian literature. There would therefore be no justification to remove the works of the expatriates or non-indigenous Zambians from the list of what would be considered Zambian literature. It is important, however, to note that some of the members of the New Writers Group took up Zambian citizenship at independence – one such person being David Simpson, a journalist, who at some point edited the New Writers Group journal, *New Writing from Zambia* (Primorac 585).

With regard to the issue of language, Zambian literature constitutes works written in both the colonial language, English, and the indigenous Zambian languages. It is worth noting, however, that most Zambian writers use the English language because, as Mwansa argues, "it is the official language" (138). However, the focus of this paper is only on Zambian prose fiction written in English, although it does recognise that there has been a growing corpus of literary works written in the local languages by a growing number of local language writers. This paper also seeks to explore the question of whether this genre of Zambian writing has no distinctive features and is still in transition. Is it characterised by particular trends in the course of its development – that is to say, in relation to theme, character, subject, style and types of author?

2.0 The Question of Tradition

According to Cuddon's *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, tradition is "that which is passed down from generation to generation through custom and practice" (982). Hence, in the context of writing, tradition "denotes the inherited past which is available for the writer to study and learn from" including the native language, codes, literary forms, devices, conventions, and cultural forms from the past" (982). Cuddon adds that a writing tradition means "something fairly specific in spirit, matter and style" and which is "established" and "has often been tried and is constantly returned to" (982). By implication, therefore, no one becomes a writer without learning from the existing corpus of works. Every writer's starting point is the existing literary tradition, whether in their own language, or indeed another language they can read and understand. Thus, every writer develops his or her writing career by "being imitative" (Cuddon 982) – that is to say, by imitating what others have already written in terms of style and content. Apart from imitating the existing writing tradition, however, a writer "modifies or influences that tradition" (982). Zambian prose fiction has been influenced by two main traditions: the Zambian oral tradition and the western literary tradition. Indeed in every human society the oral form preceded the written form, a fact acknowledged by VanSpanckeren with regard to the development of American literature:

> American literature begins with the orally transmitted myths, legends, tales, and lyrics (always song) of Indian cultures. There was no written literature among the more than 500 different Indian languages and tribal cultures that existed in North America before the first Europeans arrived (3).

Hence Anglophone Zambian prose fiction is syncretistic in nature – a blend of traditional and western artistic forms of expression (Chilala 161). Schipper notes that African theatre exhibits the same blend of western conventions of theatre and aspects of the African oral tradition (1982). Hence, there is reason to proceed from the premise that Anglophone Zambian prose fiction developed by imitating both the oral tradition and the western tradition, although oral literature is of course larger than written literature since it includes aspects of performance (Okombo 8-9). The African continent has "its own fictive traditions…the tradition of story, narrated orally" (Ogutu and Roscoe, quoted in Miruka 133). Thus, while the traditional fictive forms existed from time immemorial and were "principally handed down from person to person and from generation to generation through word of mouth" (Miruka 134) the western forms of fictive literature came with the introduction of written literature by Europeans.

The acknowledgement of the syncretistic nature of African literature is the bedrock of Henry Louis Gates Jr's acclaimed Theory of the Signifying Monkey. He argues that the black writing tradition is "double-voiced," meaning it has "complex double formal antecedents" – that is, the western and black (Gates Jr. xxiv-xxv). Although the Gates theory focuses on black literary tradition in general, what he says also applies to Zambian literary works since, apart from being written primarily by "black" people, they are double-voiced; they are "mulattoes" (xxiii). In his theory Gates also postulates that black literature is characterised by "repetition" and "revision" – meaning, in essence, that black writers "repeat" and "revise" what is in their double-voiced tradition (xxiv). Anglophone Zambian works of prose fiction, therefore, are intertextual in nature since, as Gates argues, "intertextuality represents a process of repetition and revision" (60). It is important, however, to note that writers of Anglophone Zambian prose fiction have also imitated other African writers, especially Chinua Achebe and his seminal work, *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Part of the appeal of Achebe's famous novel lies in the fact that it was written in a peculiar type of English never before used: a form of English which, despite having an "Africanness" about it, remains grammatically correct. In defending the use of the English language in his writings Achebe famously said:

> I have been given this language English and I intend to use it…. I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings (Moody 15-16).

It would be justified to assume that the Zambians who write their fiction in English believe that the language is able to carry the weight of their Zambian experience, and that, in writing their works, like Achebe, they face the challenge of adjusting the language to the African surroundings without however breaking the grammatical rules of the language. Thus, some Zambian writers have imitated Achebe, not only in terms of using Zambian cultural contexts as subject matter, but also in terms of Africanising the English language. One Zambian writer, Kabwe Kasoma, once admitted that Achebe was a "great influence" on him, adding: "When you read Achebe you recognise a lot of Ibo patterns of thought in his writing" (Sumaili 96). Kasoma gives an example of how he also used Africanised English in one of his unpublished novels entitled *Society is to Blame*:

> In my own novel the beginning of it is: "Our nakedness has grown very big." That's a very typical Bemba expression. When the Bemba are writing letters to their children in the towns and they are in the village, they talk about their

> nakedness being very big – I'm not being pornographic. They are talking about the clothes, that their clothes are torn and the children should remember them back in the village. This is a typical Bemba thought. An Englishman reading this sentence would get lost unless he continues reading to find out what I mean when I say, "Our nakedness has grown very big" (Sumaili 84).

Kasoma also gives an example of another Zambian writer whose novel exhibits influences of Achebe – *Before Dawn* by Andreya Masiye, which, as he rightly observes, "is a novel that portrays the Zambian cultural image," adding: "You can see the Nsenga, or is it the Chewa, thinking in the sentence construction" (Sumaili 84). Other Anglophone Zambian literary works written in Achebe-esque style include John Luangala's *The Chosen Bud* (1991) which also provides a glimpse into Nsenga cultural life and norms, and Kachinga Sichizya's *Uneasy Yoke* (2005), which focuses on Namwanga life and customs.

3.0 The Question of Postcoloniality

Just like Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Zambian prose fiction works in English can be classified as postcolonial literature. Boehmer explains postcolonial literature thus:

> Postcolonial literature is that which critically scrutinizes the colonial relationship. It is writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonisalist perspectives. As well as a change in power, decolonization demanded symbolic overhaul, a reshaping of dominant meanings. Postcolonial literature formed part of that process of overhaul. To give expression to colonized experience, postcolonial writers sought to undercut thematically and formally the discourses which supported colonization – the myths of power, the race classifications, the imagery of subordination (3).

Postcolonial literature is a product of postcolonial cultures – by which is meant "all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (Ashcroft *et al* 2). In this regard therefore, postcolonial literature includes the literatures of all African countries, including Zambia, and even of such countries as Australia, India, Canada, South Pacific Island countries, Caribbean countries, among others:

> What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by

> foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial (Ashcroft 2).

As a former colony of Britain, Zambia was greatly influenced by the British imperial centre in terms of economic, political, social and cultural development. It learnt a lot from, and was greatly influenced by, the literary traditions and writers of the imperial centre. Postcolonial literatures such as Zambia's are ever engaged in the battle to extricate themselves from a condition of Otherness in relation to the literature of the imperial centre. The only way to achieve this is to weave works around Zambian culture and the Zambian experience – and indeed these are critical pillars of Anglophone Zambian prose fiction. Zambian literature is in transition, as all literatures are, but it can only develop its own tradition by learning from, then imitating and revising the tradition of the imperial centre to which it was once bonded, albeit unwillingly.

There are four models that have emerged for the purpose of examining and explaining the phenomenon of postcolonial literature. First, national or regional models, whose focus is the distinctive features of the particular national or regional culture. Second, race-based models which are concerned with common tenets across various national literatures, an example being "black writing" which cuts across various nationalities on the continent and in the diaspora. Third, comparative models whose aim is to account for particular linguistic, cultural and historical features across two or more postcolonial literatures. Fourth, more comprehensive comparative models concerned with features such as hybridity and syncreticity as key elements of all postcolonial literatures (Ashcroft *et al* 13). For the purpose of this paper, we shall apply the first and fourth models. Does Anglophone Zambian prose fiction constitute a part of what would be called a "national" literature? At what point, and on what basis, can a nation claim to have its own national literature? Some lessons may be drawn from the case of the United States of America, which – as Ashcroft *et al* acknowledge – was the first postcolonial society to develop a national literature (Ashcroft *et al* 15).

> The emergence of a distinctive American literature in the late eighteenth century raised inevitable questions about the relationship between literature and place, between literature and nationality, and particularly about the suitability of inherited literary forms. Ideas about new kinds of literature were part of the optimistic progression to nationhood because it seemed that this was one of the most potent areas in which to express difference from Britain. Writers like Charles Brockden Brown, who attempted to indigenize British

> forms like the gothic and sentimental novel, soon realized that with the change in location and culture it was not possible to import form and concept without radical alteration (Ashcroft *et al* 15).

It is apparent from the case of the United States that the evolution of a distinctively American literature, a national literature, could not be divorced from factors such as the relationship between literature and place or, expressed differently, between literature and society. If we are to accept the fact that literature is inevitably and inextricably linked to society, then the possibility of each society or nation developing its own peculiar literature is inevitable. In which case it is no longer a question of whether Zambia, as a unique nation with its own unique society and culture, has a national literature, but rather of the nature of the national literature. The words of Jacob Mwanza, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Zambia, come in handy:

> [L]iterature is a social institution with language as its medium. As a social institution, literature can best be understood in the context of the culture in which it was written – taking into account economic, political and social forces which are at work in a particular historical epoch. There is thus a clear relationship between society and literature (Foreword to Sarvan xii).

Obiechina, in *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, also refers to the relationship between literature and society and how it influences the development of national literatures:

> The relationship between literature and society has long been recognised; but it has not been fully appreciated how far a particular society both influences the themes and subject matter of its representative literary types and also profoundly affects their formal development (Obiechina 3).

Similarly, Soyinka says of the link between society and the artist or writer: "The artist has always functioned in African society as the record of the mores and experiences of his society and as the voice of vision in his own time" (Schipper 136). It would be justified, therefore, to argue that Anglophone Zambian prose fiction, which generally has Zambia and the Zambian experience as its subject matter, presents us with a vista through which to view Zambian culture; and that what makes the literature peculiarly Zambian, and therefore part of a unique national literature, is its Zambian cultural content.

However, there are particular economic, political and social forces at work "in a particular historical epoch". This suggests that particular times produce particular types of literature. In other words, it is not just the geographic or socio-cultural context of a national literature that matters, but also the peculiar circumstances of a particular epoch of the literature – since every literature is ever in a process of transition. From this perspective, therefore, Anglophone Zambian prose fiction has transitioned through various stages of evolution, each shaped by the peculiar circumstances of the historical epoch it is associated with. As earlier noted, the transformation and development of Anglophone Zambian prose fiction is attributable to both the peculiar Zambian socio-cultural factors as well as the influence of the imperial centre. Hence it makes sense to discuss Anglophone Zambian prose fiction from the perspective of the fourth model of evaluating postcolonial literature which proceeds from the premise that postcolonial literatures are characterised by hybridity and syncreticity. Anglophone Zambian prose fiction is not only a hybrid or mulatto; it is also a product of syncretism – by which is meant "the process by which previously distinct linguistic categories, and, by extension, cultural formations, merge into a single new form" (Ashcroft *et al* 14). This syncretism is reflected in the style, literary devices, narrative techniques, and themes.

4.0 Historical Development of Anglophone Zambian Prose Fiction

The birth and development of Zambian literature cannot be delinked from the birth and development of western-type education in Zambia. This is because, while the prevailing oral tradition depended essentially on word of mouth for transmission, the western tradition introduced by western education depended on the written word for transmission. The first "school" in colonial Zambia was opened in 1883 by the pioneer missionary to Barotseland, Frederick Arnot (Snelson 4). The school struggled to recruit pupils, and it was only with the coming of the colonial government itself that reasonable western education could be offered. It was through the western education system that Zambian children were exposed to the arts of the imperial centre, including, of course, fictive writings. Before then the children were exposed to the pre-colonial or traditional system of education, which was concerned with history, folklore, vocational skills, moral and religious instruction, sex and family education, military training, dance and music (Carmody 2). As western education took root in colonial Zambian society, more and more people were able to write. Hence the first novel written by an indigenous Zambian in English, *Namu Siaya at the Mine*, was published in 1946 by the African Literature Committee of Northern Rhodesia, which was established by the colonial government in 1937. The author was Enock Kaavu. It is therefore worth noting that, from the

establishment of the first missionary school in 1883, it took more than 60 years before an indigenous Zambian could publish a work of prose fiction.

However, the African Literature Committee was not a prolific publisher of fictional works by indigenous Zambians and, after about a decade of existence, it metamorphosed into an inter-governmental institution jointly run by the colonial governments of Zambia and Malawi, then called Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland respectively. Hence it was known as the Northern Rhodesa and Nyasaland Publications Bureau and operated under the supervision of the Department of African Education. However, the intergovernmental body wound up in 1962, and the Northern Rhodesian offshoot assumed the name Northern Rhodesia Publications Bureau. Upon Zambia's attainment of independence in 1964, the institution was renamed Zambia Publications Bureau (Chilala 594). However, the Bureau had a short life-span, going into voluntary liquidation in 1969, three years after the new Zambian government established the Kenneth Kaunda Foundation (KKF). The company consisted of two subsidiary companies: the National Educational Company of Zambia (NECZAM) and the National Educational Distribution Company of Zambia (NEDCOZ), established in 1967 and 1968 respectively. While the former was concerned mainly with the publication of books, including works of fiction in both local languages and English, the latter assumed the role of distributing the materials to schools around the country.

Riding on the tide of nationalism, NECZAM raised hopes of flooding the market with fictional works in both local languages and English, especially after it published, in 1967, its first fictional work – Fwanyanga Mulikita's collection of short stories entitled *A Point of No Return*. NECZAM went ahead to publish a novel by an indigenous Zambian, Andreya Masiye's *Before Dawn*. However, NECZAM had its own challenges and was unable to flood the market with fictional works written by Zambians. That possibility only seemed likely when, in 1979, the company launched the NECZAM Library Series (NELISE), "an ambitious vision to publish novels written by Zambians" (Chilala 595). A number of novels and collections of stories were published under the NELISE label, including popular works such as *The Black Eye* by Smokey Haangala, *The Accusing Finger* by Nyambe Wina, among others. The company, however, could not sustain its ambitious dream of flooding the market with Zambian literary works, especially when the country's economic crisis, triggered off by the twin problems of falling copper prices and rising oil prices, deteriorated in the 1980's.

> The ensuing crisis therefore left a lot of upcoming and established Zambian writers frustrated….The number of writers had increased, but publishing capacity had dwindled. The number of unpublished works had already

> outstripped the number of published works, with more unpublished works than published ones (Chilala 596).

If few Anglophone Zambian prose fiction works were published, therefore, it was not for lack of writers or manuscripts. Rather, it was due mainly to the failure of the Zambian publishing industry to create enough capacity to publish the many available writers. What this means, therefore, is that a lot of brilliant works of fiction ended up at manuscript level without ever being published. While the rise in the number published Zambian literary works rose exponentially immediately after independence compared to the colonial era, the capacity for publishing such works did not grow enough to meet the demand. Between 1991 and 1998 I worked as Literature Editor at the Zambia Educational Publishing House (ZEPH), which was formerly known as KKF. During my tenure as Literature Editor (English) I had the privilege of receiving literature manuscripts produced by a variety of writers from all walks of life, both within and outside Zambia. I read many fictional scripts written in English during that period and can attest that some of them were as good as any written anywhere else on the African continent. However, most of the scripts – including the very good ones – could not be published because ZEPH simply had no money. The company discontinued the NELISE series and, at present, is unable to venture much into the publication of prose fiction beyond its preoccupation with the more profitable publication of educational titles.

One option available to Zambian fiction writers who could not be published in Zambia was to get published outside the country is self-published. The first Zambian to have his work published outside the country was Andreya Masiye, whose novel *The Lonely Village* was published in 1950 by the London-based Nelson and Sons (Chilala 595). Then Dominic Mulaisho followed with *Tongue of the Dumb*, which was published in 1971 by Heinemann under the African Writers Series, which was established in 1962, starting with the re-publication of Chinua Achebe's seminal 1958 novel, *Things Fall Apart*. Mulaisho managed to have his second novel, *The Smoke that Thunders*, published under the African Writers in 1979 (Primorac 578). A new generation of writers has since ascended to the arena of prose fiction writing in Zambia and a number of them have managed to be published outside Zambia's borders. This includes Binwell Sinyangwe, whose first novel *Quills of Desire* (1993) was initially published by Zimbabwe's Baobab Books. His second novel, *A Cowrie of Hope* (2000) was published by Heinemann. Perhaps the best known and most successful Zambian writer published outside the country – in the current generation of writers – is Ellen Banda-Aaku, whose acclaimed novel, *Patchwork*, was published by Penguin Books in 2011 and won the 2010 Penguin Prize for African Writing. It was also short-listed for the Commonwealth Book Prize in 2012.

Another option for writers of Anglophone Zambian prose fiction has been the avenue of self-publishing. This phenomenon has become commonplace in Zambia largely because of the failure of the local publishing industry to publish the many unpublished manuscripts. Some of the prominent names in the category of self-publishing writers of fiction are Sekelani Banda and Grieve Sibale. The former has published at least three fictional works: *Hey Days at Medical School* (1998), *Half a Turn* (1999), and the thriller-type *Dead Ends* (2000), all under the umbrella of his self-owned company, SSB Publishing (Banda 616). Sibale's best known self-published work is the 1998 novel *Murder in the Forest*. The list of self-publishing writers also includes Mwangala Bonna (*The Feller of Trees*) and Pamela Sinkamba (*Deflowered*). It is not a matter of debate that ZEPH's leading role as a publisher of prose fiction has diminished over the years. However, this is not because it has been overtaken by another publisher; it is only because it has not been spared by the decline in the Zambian economy, which has affected every sphere of Zambian life, including the book industry. It is now more inclined towards "survival publishing" – which really means concentrating mainly on the more saleable educational titles than "risky" fictional titles.

The New Writers Group – mentioned earlier in this paper – fared worse than ZEPH: formed in 1964, it collapsed in 1975, barely ten years later. Be that as it may, the group played a pioneering role in the development of Zambia's literary tradition – particularly with regard to prose fiction in English. The group produced Zambia's first literary journal, *New Writing from Zambia* (*NWZ*), whose content included book reviews, essays, poetry and short literary pieces. The range of themes covered by *NWZ,* as noted by Primorac, was "wide, many of them strongly politicised from the outset" (585). She also notes that the group was close to the mainstream of African literary developments and that group members travelled internationally and kept in touch with top international scholars of African writing at the time (585). The New Writers Group had limited capacity, however, and could only publish short forms of fiction; they had no capacity to fund the publication of novels. The successor to the New Writers Group was the Zambia National Association of Writers (ZNAW), whose members included non-academics like Moses Kwali and literary scholars such as Lewis Nkosi of the University of Zambia's Department of Literature and Languages. The association had limited capacity to publish, although it used national radio as an outlet for its poetry and short fiction. Dogged by financial challenges, the association collapsed in the early 1990s. It was succeeded by the Zambia Women Writers Association (ZAWWA), which has so far published two anthologies of short stories, *Heart of a Woman* (1997) and *Eavesdropping* (2000), thus providing a publishing avenue for some Zambian writers. However, its capacity to publish has also been checked by limited resources. Its contemporary, the Zambian PEN Centre, or ZamPEN, has fared much worse with regard to publication of fictional works.

5.0 Conclusion

A number of scholars have made efforts to evaluate Anglophone Zambian prose fiction, some of whom are John Chileshe, a Zambian scholar, Michael Chapman, a South African, and Ranka Primorac, a Briton who spent many years working in Zimbabwe and has in recent years exhibited growing interest in Zambian literature. I have also previously evaluated the genre in several works including my unpublished MA thesis, *An Analysis of Gender Issues in Zambian Literature in English* (2006) and an article "Through the Male Eyes: Gendered Styles in Contemporary Zambian Fiction" published in *Reading Contemporary African Literature*, a collection of scholarly writings edited by Reuben Makayiko Chirambo and J K S Makokha (2013). Opinion about the nature and worth of Anglophone Zambian prose fiction has been divided. As Primorac notes, Chileshe and Chapman represent a group of critics who view Zambian prose fiction writings in English as characterised by popular and journalistic forms and generally lacking in cultural and aesthetic value. Chileshe argues that this literature gives an impression of "woodenness, imitation, and cultural externality" (Primorac 582). Chapman, similarly, is of the opinion that Zambian literature in English is "unpretentious" and "journalistic" (Primorac 582). This view is echoed by John Reed, who wrote in 1984:

> All Zambian fiction so far has been quite free of literary pretention and self-consciousness. Its writers have not employed the studied simplicity and offhand quality which Hemingway carried to the point of caricature and which in modified forms has provided a second model for the best West African writing (quoted in Nchindila 112).

There are some contradictions in these arguments, however. In her assessment of the views expressed by Chileshe and Chapman, for instance, Primorac notes: "Zambia's writing in English is thus paradoxically described as both too out-ward looking and not out-ward looking enough, by the two key scholars who have paid it systematic attention" (582). It is also worth noting that, while Chileshe argues that Zambian prose writing in English is characterised by "imitation," Reed claims that it has failed to imitate the writing style of Hemingway. Does Hemingway have to be the standard? On the other hand, does the mere fact that Zambian writing in English is characterised by imitation mean it lacks a tradition of its own or that it is necessarily aesthetically unsatisfactory? As already noted in this paper, imitation and revision of other traditions is what leads to creation of a tradition. By its very nature, in fact, postcolonial literature is an imitation and revision of the literary tradition of the imperial centre, which also imitated and revised earlier traditions such as the classical tradition.

Chapman notes that Anglophone Zambian prose fiction is dominated by the theme of "city vs countryside" (Primorac 582). This thematic inclination is not surprising, given the postcolonial nature of Zambian society – a condition which pities the traditional values and norms, generally epitomised by "country," on the one hand, and western values, generally represented by city life. However, as is the case with other national literatures of postcolonial societies, Anglophone Zambian prose fiction also places a high premium on exploration of the theme of cultural conflict between western and traditional norms in the context of colonialism. The preoccupation with such a theme is also hardly surprising in view of the fact that postcolonial writing cannot escape the tendency to revisit the colonial experience and interpret it from the perspective of the colonised rather than the coloniser. In his scholarly work *Home and Exile*, Achebe captures this view by quoting an African proverb: "Until the lions produce their own historian, the story of the hunt will glorify only the hunter" (73). The African writer has had to counter the negative images of Africa as portrayed from the perspective of the western writers such as Joseph Conrad who, in *Heart of Darkness*, as Achebe argues in *An Image of Africa*, projects the image of Africa as "the other world" (3).

The themes of Zambian fiction writing in English have of course been largely shaped not just by the cultural and socio-political context, but also events within and around Zambia's borders. For instance, during the early years of independence, Zambia was surrounded by countries still under the yoke of colonial rule. The conditions in these countries, and the conflict they fomented, influenced the thematic choices of members of the New Writers Group, for example. This stands in stark contrast to the colonial era, when writers, both indigenous and non-indigenous, could not venture into writings that would be considered oppositional to the colonial government. Thus, for example, as Primorac notes, the novels of Stephen Mpashi, though written in Bemba during the latter years of the colonial era, were "intended to bolster the colonial state" (580). As I note elsewhere, the Northern Rhodesia Publications Bureau, which published Mpashi's work, was "a means by which the colonial government controlled what was published and circulated in the country" (595).

With the attainment of independence by Zambia's colonised neighbours and the demise of apartheid, however, the cross-border theme of struggle against oppression took a back seat in Zambian literature. Zambian writers, in more recent decades, have broadened the thematic concerns of their work to include: general social issues (death, marriage, prostitution, crime, the struggle for survival in the city, race, love and romance, corruption, *inter alia*), gender issues, HIV/AIDs and politics.

Gender issues have mainly been the preoccupation of ZAWWA as evidenced by their two short story anthologies, *The Heart of a Woman* and *Eavesdropping*. This has

helped foreground female characters, or female protagonists, in Zambian fiction writing in English. Before that, this genre of writing was populated by male characters who took centre stage, relegating female characters to the periphery of the narratives. Even the first novel by a Zambian woman, Susan Chitabanta's *Behind the Closed Door*, published by NECZAM in 1988, features a male protagonist. In the male-authored works, female characters tend to be appendages of men or are portrayed as sexual objects. This for example is the case with *Ticklish Sensation*(1994) and *The Accusing Finger* (1992) novels written by Gideon Phiri and Nyambe Wina respectively. It is worth noting, however, that most Zambian authors are male – a situation which has led to the domination of Anglophone Zambian prose fiction by male writing paradigms and perspectives. As I note elsewhere:

> The history of the development of fictional works on the African continent is similar to that of the history of the development of fictional works in Zambia. In other words, female novelists appeared on the scene much later than the male novelists. In addition, the latter were influenced by the former. The late arrival of African women writers on the scene was due mainly to the fact that the education system, especially under colonialism, favoured males more than females (Chilala 92).

The agenda for the Zambian writing tradition, particularly with regard to the Anglophone Zambian prose fiction genre, was determined by male writers. Male published works of fiction dominated the shelves from the time Kaavu's novel was published in 1946 through to the time Chitabanta's novel was published in 1988, a period of over 60 years. When female Zambian writers came on the scene, they found themselves – in terms of style, theme and characterisation - largely imitating "the dominant male writing tradition" (Chilala 107) that had been cemented for over half a century. It can be argued, therefore, that Anglophone Zambian prose fiction constitutes a tradition with particular characteristics largely determined by Zambia's own peculiar historical, cultural, political, economic and social factors. However, in saying that Zambian prose fiction in English exhibits a writing tradition does not in any way mean it is confined to particular aesthetic spaces. What it does mean, however, is that this tradition is – as is the case with any writing tradition – in transition; that is, a constant state of repetition and revision. In other words, the tradition influences the transition, and vice versa.

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