

## The Rewriting of the Female Subject in Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire's *Zenzele: A Letter for My Daughter* (1997)

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### Abstract

During the colonial period, African written literature was almost exclusively reserved for men who produced literary works that addressed such issues as colonial politics and culture and in which they imposed images of women as mothers, grandmothers, girlfriends, maids, mistresses, and prostitutes. Therefore, the African female subject characters were seen through the eyes of male characters. After independence, while most of them continue to write about colonization and post-colonialization, criticizing the new leadership, the new wave of female novelists focuses on their condition and place in Western modernity with new write-ups and narratives. This article explores how Zimbabwean female novelist Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire reframes in *Zenzele: A Letter for My Daughter* (1997) the images and roles played by women in the traditional African society and the roles they played in the fight for independence, thus bringing to the fore new images of the female persona in literature. Resting on postcolonial feminism and afrocentricity, as theories, and axiology and discourse analysis, as literary paradigms, the paper analyzes how Maraire, through an epistolary novel, gives a voice to Black women who had long been silenced and 'devalued' in male writings. Therefore, it lays bare the author's rewriting enterprise as she brings to light women's contribution to the struggle for Zimbabwe's independence, and her reinterpretation of their roles as mothers, bearers and guardians of cultural traditions and values.

**Key words:** gender, motherhood, feminism, womanism, culture, tradition.

### INTRODUCTION

Any study about African women should take into account their social and historical situation. The relevance of the fact lies in their having not experienced the same living conditions as their colleagues from the West. Even if African women were facing hardships and oppression such as forced marriage, barrenness, gender inequality, polygamy, among other scourges, colonization has highly contributed in deepening African women's subordination to men under the colonial patriarchy that has introduced new gender roles and relationships in Africa. Not only has it contributed to women's profound marginalization in the field of education, colonization has also excluded them from politics and the economy. It is in this context that the Zimbabwean novelist, Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire, has written *Zenzele: A Letter for My*

*Daughter* (1997)<sup>1</sup> in which she presents two types of women: the traditional woman and the modern one with new life challenges. In so doing, the novelist is adopting a double narrative strategy in which she presents Black women who face racial, economic and political oppression.

Female writers, under the umbrella of postcolonial feminism, befriend their male counterparts to challenge the political dominance of patriarchy. In their writings, they tell their own stories that one can label as "phallic criticism."<sup>2</sup> Though many are

<sup>1</sup> Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire (1997), *Zenzele: A Letter for My Daughter*, New York, Crown Publishers.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Ellman (1968), *Thinking About Women*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, p. 28.

the African women writers who refuse to be called feminists because they think the term is rather a Western concept conceived by their women counterparts from the Global North to socially and culturally subvert their societies. For them, this should be about reclaiming their right place and roles in indigenous African societies, valuing, rewriting, and reinterpreting them. That is why many of them feel more comfortable with African-American novelist Alice Walker's coined and theorized term 'womanism'. If the feminism is against the discrimination of women based on gender, *womanism* is against the discrimination of women based on both gender and race. Thus, they feel the need to go back to traditional Africa so as to restore Black women's images and dignity. Like Walker who conceived a womanist as "a black feminist, or feminist of color [...] committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female [but who] loves herself,"<sup>3</sup> Maraire joins the group of African female and male writers who have adopted this new type of feminism which, for black women, is the most likely to unite patriarchal indigenous traditions with modern Westernized concepts of human rights and gender equality.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire, as a writer born during the transition of the country from colonial Rhodesia to the independence of the country as Zimbabwe, has chosen in her novel *Zenzele: A Letter for My Daughter*, a long letter written by a dying mother Amai Zenzele to her loved and young daughter Zenzele who is getting ready to leave her home to undertake medical studies in the United States of America. Like her counterparts, Senegalese novelist Mariama Ba in *So Long a Letter* (1981)<sup>5</sup> and African-American Maya Angelou in *A Letter to My Daughter* (2008)<sup>6</sup>, she has written an epistolary novel that is full of advice and experiences whose objective is to allow the young protagonist to arm herself in order to face new life adversities marked by cultural globalization, identity crisis, racism, homelessness, and unhomeliness, etc. In this long letter, she explains the roles of African women in keeping with traditional and cultural values and then rewrites their images by highlighting their roles in the struggle for independence next to men and their future ones in Zimbabwe in particular and Africa in general.

<sup>3</sup> Alice Walker (1983), *In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose*, San Diego, Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, Preface xi – xii

<sup>4</sup> Carrie J. Walker (2012), "From Harare to Harvard: Education, Gender, and Citizenship in J. Nozipo Maraire's *Zenzele: A Letter for My Daughter*," *JENdA: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies* ISSN: 1530-5686 Issue 20, p. 107.

<sup>5</sup> Mariama Bâ (1981), *So Long a Letter*, London, Heinemann Educational Books.

<sup>6</sup> Maya Angelou (2008), *A Letter to My Daughter*, New York, Random House.

## I. African Women as Bearers and Keepers of Cultural Traditions and Values

Rewriting the image of African women has been the concern of both many male and female writers in post-colonial Africa. Through the main protagonist Amai Zenzele, Maraire castigates the 'passiveness' of the colonial mother as a result of the coloniality of gender. In her castigation enterprise, she showcases in the narrative a mother who cares more about her child's future than about herself. For the narrator, being an African woman "is to be strong [...] It is to measure your words; to balance your works with your gifts carefully; it is in some ways to be selfless, to serve others yet to know and defend your rights to the bitter end."<sup>7</sup> She delves into indigenous African society to indicate that women's place and roles have been turned upside down by colonization that excluded and turned women into 'passive' beings, thus slamming that colonial image that has been reproduced in African literature.

However, to reframe the real image of the African woman, the heroine engages her daughter Zenzele and the reader in an/a (un)learning process, whereby she revisits the female subject in her traditional roles and the female subject in her so-called modern status. In fact, to shift the paradigms, she bestows upon herself, as mother, the role of educator, and introduces her daughter as an educated child, and tries to convince her about gender-specific customs, such as hand-washing rituals, respect for elders and the bride price (*lobola*) she loathes. This is the reason why when her daughter says "I will never be bought! Mama, how could you possibly accept some cattle and cash in exchange for my freedom,"<sup>8</sup> she calls on her to see *lobola* "not as a purchase but an expression of how well [her parents] have brought [her] up"<sup>9</sup> and as part of their Shona identity, while warning her against adopting the "Western anthropological perspective"<sup>10</sup> which maintains that *lobola* "identifies women as property"<sup>11</sup> as is the case in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*<sup>12</sup> when she uses the word "inherited"<sup>13</sup> to show that men consider women as "properties" or "commodities" that can be transferred or owned. He explains to her daughter that to "reject a custom because it is vulnerable to abuse. It is like not going to church because there are so many hypocrites there."<sup>14</sup> Amai Zenzele assumes the lofty role of number-one adviser to her culturally and psychologically deviant daughter adroitly assisting her and she eventually gains confidence and self-esteem, and respect for her society and culture

In so doing, Shiri is reminding the reader of one of the roles of the mother, be she a traditional or modern one, which is to arm their

<sup>7</sup> Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>8</sup> Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>10</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>11</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>12</sup> Buchi Emecheta (1976), *The Bride Price*, London (UK), Allison & Busby.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 32.

children with advice and experiences when they are on the verge of leaving home to confront new life challenges. In this respect, the indigenous mother as protector and keeper of the tradition and playing her role is highlighted amidst a tit-for-tat narrative perspective. *The African Child* (1955)<sup>15</sup> by Camara Laye follows the same trend through its portrayal of a socially and culturally strong mother, the main character's mother, who is seen as a guardian of Muslim and ancestral traditions, an expression of ritual power, and an African power-type and teaches her children respect for family prayers, totems, and rituals. In addition, she decides to send her girls to the Koranic School in order to take care of the tradition but also to highlight and reclaim equality between men and women and denounce *gender stereotypes* that persist in all walks of life, notably at home, in education, and politics.

Maraire's narrator Amai Zenzele proceeds with the discussions and warns her daughter Zenzele against the perils of severing ties with her culture. For that, she asks her to think about where she comes from. The author chooses the kitchen as a location to present the exchanges between the mother and her daughter. In Western feminism, the kitchen serves as an oppressive tool against the female subject, an area where women are subjugated and exploited by their men. In introducing the kitchen, the author subverts Western feminism, and turns the controversial place turned into a classroom where daughter and mother can talk about education and knowledge, global warming, identity, history, tradition and modernity, production and reproduction, rituals, etc... The kitchen is also presented as a classroom and a refuge for both the mother and the daughter and a place where love, care, inspiration, and remembrances are provided in equal measures.<sup>16</sup> In addition to playing the role of cooking area, the kitchen also symbolizes the place where the girl's education in traditional African society can take place: "*The kitchen was my world. I could make sense of things there.*"<sup>17</sup>

As traditional values were transmitted by word of mouth from generation to generation through father to son or mother to daughter or grand-parents to grand-children, Maraire's narrator educates and 'mothers' her daughter through oral tradition, teaching her cultural values through folktales and other oral elements in order to fill in the gap between the indigenous modes of education through 'orality' using storytelling and the Western modern one which is the 'written' form. The aim of this education project as Mariama Bâ has stated it is to allow "*the virtue and greatness of a race to take root in this child.*"<sup>18</sup> This accounts for the fact that Zenzele used to ask her mother about many things in

African culture, especially places. To remind her of their old days together when they would sit in the kitchen arguing for hours while sipping their drinks, she says that "*This was your stage and my refuge. It is there that we encountered each other.*"<sup>19</sup> The mother emphasizes that abundant benefits accompany the practice of Shona cultural traditions, especially those involving the institution of the family and accounting for African and Western conceptions of family. She explains the idea, arguing that "*the extended family is your community, your own emotional, financial, and cultural safety net. It is Africa's most powerful resource.*"<sup>20</sup> In addition, Shiri asserts that there are responsibilities to which Zenzele must also subscribe as a member of this extensive family tree, especially because she is the oldest daughter of the Shungu family

[There are] hierarchy and customs attached to each specific relationship in our ubiquitous family tree. It will take time, but you will learn. As my daughter, it will be your responsibility to maintain those links for all of us. Do not be discouraged by its breadth. Therein lies its beauty [...].<sup>21</sup>

As an African mother, the aim of this extended letter is to arm her daughter Zenzele and African children as well with strong advice in order to resist Western cultural influence or at least not let the latter take it over from the former, but be at least able to reconcile the two. To that end, Amai Zenzele gives relevant and various kinds of lessons to her daughter and she accepts to share her wisdom and some of her experiences, both here and abroad, for a strict respect and remembrance, by her daughter, of the rich cultural values and traditions of her people in Zimbabwe and what it means to be a Shona woman in a modern world. For example, Shiri reminds Zenzele of an incident in which Sekuru Isaac, one of the Chakowa elders, wanted one of his sons to marry her. To convince her daughter after her violent and disrespectful answer to this demand, Shiri argues that "*Sekuru Isaac is a simple and honorable man, an old friend of your grandfather's. The old man had meant no harm. On the contrary: he meant to give you the greatest compliment he could.*"<sup>22</sup> With these words, she urges her child to show to respect for the elders of his Shona community and consider things from a better-informed perspective, especially as the elders "*are our living history.*"<sup>23</sup>

Through her narrator Amai Zenzele, Maraire explains that *the African mother should behave as a captain of a boat who worries about the security of the crew.*<sup>24</sup> That is to say that it is up to the mother to tell her daughter that all the cultures and traditions are valuable and worth taking. Whether traveling with her children to Chakowa or recording anecdotes in her letter, Shiri imparts a more distinct understanding of specific cultural practices and family

<sup>15</sup> Camara Laye (1955), *The African Child*, London, Collins.

<sup>16</sup> Saliou DIONE (2019), "(His)story and Memory in Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire's *Zenzele: A Letter for My Daughter*", in *El hispanismo, en Africa Estudios en homenaje al Profesor Sosthène ONOMO-ABENA* (eds) Monique NOMO NGAMBA, Michel-Yves ESSISSIMA, Wilfried MVONDO, Editions Cheikh Anta Diop (Édi-CAD), p. 542.

<sup>17</sup> Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire (1997), *op.cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> Mariama Bâ (1981), *So Long a Letter*, London, Heinemann Educational Books, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>19</sup> Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>24</sup> *Idem.*

history. As such, she acts out the inter-generational transmission of knowledge that is commonplace in pre-colonial educational models.<sup>25</sup>

In traditional African society, education was not only a child-parent issue but concerned all the community as a whole. Thus, Amaï Zenzele explains to her daughter that she is much a product of collective experience of her family or community members as of her formal education. She highlights this point of view by sharing a lesson she has learned from her father as a young girl. She recalls how one evening after she had skipped school to go walking around with a boyfriend, her father had called her to tell her a story. Shiri, in turn, retells the same story to her daughter: "I have no idea to this day if my father knew of my deviant behavior or not. He was a man who saw much but said little."<sup>26</sup> The narrator ends the story, abiding by the traditional way of ending stories in indigenous African society, where folktales with moral contents were part and parcel of the educational system. Thus, without mentioning Shiri's truancy, her father simply chose to adroitly tell her a story about a woman whose lover had seduced her into killing her husband and child, and who after these crimes, had rejected her for being untrustworthy. In conclusion, the moral lesson that Shiri's father wants to teach is that:

You will meet many men in life. Allow none to tempt you to abandon your principles. Follow what is right. Stick to the path of honesty and integrity [...] There is not a man in this world who is worth your dignity. Do not confuse self-sacrifice with love.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, the aim of this story the narrator is telling her daughter is to sensitize her to value herself and her Shona culture. She hopes to see her unify her African identity as a Shona woman and would-be Harvard student experience. She uncovers African models of education that emphasize cultivation of knowledge and skills rather than inculcation of Western styles. Which is why, instead of punishing or interrogating his daughter, Shiri's father refers to story-telling providing advice for further self-examination and self-reorientation.

The question that troubles the distraught mother is "how could I allow you to grow up reading Greek classics, Homer's *Iliad*, the voyages of Agamemnon, and watch you devour *The Merchant of Venice* and *Romeo and Juliet* yet be ignorant of the lyrical, the romantic, and the tragic that have shaped us as Africans?"<sup>28</sup> Being an African mother has significant meaning as recalled by Mariama

<sup>25</sup> Abdi Ali A. (2005), "African Philosophies of Education: Counter-Colonial Criticisms." In *Issues in African Education: Sociological Perspectives*. Ed. Ali A. Abdi and Ailie Cleghorn, New York: Palgrave MacMillian, p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>28</sup> Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire (1997), *op.cit.*, p. 8.

Bâ in her epistolary novel *So Long a Letter*.<sup>29</sup> For her, "one is a mother in order to understand the inexplicable. One is a mother to lighten the darkness. One is a mother to shield when lightning streaks the night, when thunder shakes the earth when mud bogs one down. One is a mother in order to love without beginning or end."<sup>30</sup> The letter then plays the role of memory recollection and of reminder. Shiri also uses it to show and express her love for her daughter so that she can find the strength she needs in her African culture and sustain herself while abroad where she will have to face different challenges and important decisions to make.

Throughout this epistolary novel, the narrator Shiri is teaching her daughter in particular, and African children in general to always remember that they are from Africa, to never forget their culture even if they far away from their home countries. She uses her life story and some stories of her family and friends to illustrate the struggle of Shona people aimed at preserving the strong aspects of their culture. In poetic language, the mother tells how the older generation has suffered and resisted colonial rule in Rhodesia. In analysing the Mukoma Byron's mother's behaviour, one can see that she is a selfless mother figure who cares more about the welfare of her son than anything else. Despite people's criticisms, she endlessly continues to love her son until the day he has returned home with cultural amnesia from his long stay in Britain.

## II. Subverting the Traditional Portrayal of the Female Persona through Women's Valorization in the Struggle for Independence

The African continent has been dominated by Western powers for many centuries, compelling both men and women to engage in the fight for independence. Unfortunately, this part of Zimbabwean history is rarely recalled and accounted for in literature. In fact, Zimbabwean women contributed a great deal to their nation's liberation. Colonial gender roles were subverted as many women were recruited as freedom fighters who actively participated in the guerrilla warfare. Therefore, they could be seen dressed in fatigues and often indistinguishable from their male counterparts. As guerilla fighters, they were also essential to the survival of the troops, both males and females, because they prepared food for them and provided them with clothing. These traditional duties received recognition and earned praise as contributions to the revolution.<sup>31</sup> Maraire's narrator Shiri's letter scrutinizes the roles as resistants that African women assumed during the period in which Rhodesia was seeking to make the transition to Zimbabwe. She recalls their memorable roles to show her daughter how brave and courageous they were. She delves back into history to tell her daughter that "it was an African woman, Mbuya Nehanda, who

<sup>29</sup> Mariama Bâ (1981), *So Long a Letter*, London, Heinemann Educational Books, *op.cit.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82 – 83.

<sup>31</sup> Lewis Gann (1981), *The Struggle for Zimbabwe*, New York: Praeger Publisher.



launched Zimbabwe's struggle for independence when she waged the war on British South African Company in the 1890s [...] To awaken her sense of pride, she urges her to look at "our women in Southern Africa: the Schoolgirls of Soweto, the fighters of Maputo, the mjibas, the young freedom fighters in Zimbabwe strong, heroic women who found the balance between cause, culture and self"<sup>32</sup> as women who embodied the role of female revolutionaries. These women muster the courage to stand up to fight against the colonial domination and racial discrimination. Hence, the narrator encourages her daughter to forge an "authentic expression" of her dual self, determine her own path throwing light up on the fact that there is no one monolithic "African woman": "Being an African woman is what you will make of it, Zenzele."<sup>33</sup>

In *Zenzele: A Letter for My Daughter*, Maraire's narrator, Shiri, describes some brave women who fought by the side of men and were even indistinguishable from them. Using the images of fierce animals such as 'bobcats,' 'lions,' she portrays these women as such:

On their backs, they carried not runny-nosed babies but the hope of a different generation in the form of runs of ammunition, maps, codes, and supplies to fuel the battle that ultimately was to lead up to independence. They were as foreign to our traditional image of women as Eskimos. They were a product of the armed struggle. These women too fashioned their own identity. They were feared and admired, for in battle it was rumored the women could be the fiercest of all. The Rhodesian troops called them the 'bobcats' because the Shona women were as fierce as lions.<sup>34</sup>

Indigenous African women were not voiceless and did not look at themselves as a second-class people. They knew that they had their voices and could make decisions even though not often public. Through the character Tinawo, Maraire has created a woman who uses the tactics of subversion and duality which are narrative techniques that have long been used as survival mechanisms in black communities. A case substantiates that idea insofar as she resorts to it in her plan to strategize for the guerilla fighters who are operating in Zimbabwean forests. Hired as a maid and nanny by Commander Bigotsworth's household, Tinawo, pretending to be an imbecilic, illiterate, servant, spies for the liberation forces by snooping in her [baas' or/(boss')] official papers and listening to some of the conversations that he has with military officials. She often resorts to mimicry, a literary device known in postcolonial literature, to subvert the authority of the boss-commander.

Therefore, he manages to see to it that her boss has a very low opinion of her, "believing her to be incapable of something as sophisticated as spying."<sup>35</sup> They had underestimated the indigenous

as explained by Tinawo, "They do not believe, based upon all their collected scientific data, that a native African could ever think rationally or develop any sort of military or political strategy, and so they do not really take us seriously."<sup>36</sup> In a conversation with one of his British peers, who suspected that Tinawo looked like a spy, the commander unworringly and unsuspectingly tells them that "the girl has been in my employ for over one year [...]. In the entire twelve months, she has not displayed one whit of intelligence. She cannot read. And God knows she can barely write out the grocery list."<sup>37</sup>

To highlight female bonding and collective solidarity, Maraire brings to the fore the friendly relationship between Linda and Tinawo. Their sisterly bonding has been very important in the success of the struggle for independence. In recounting for the strength of their friendship, a kind of sisterhood, Amai Zenzele tells her daughter that the two sisters were "the same age and very close; even to this day, they are virtually inseparable."<sup>38</sup> The story of these friends and brave African women has allowed to show the protagonist the image of women who have dared to engage in a struggle for their own self-respect and dignity, a struggle often achieved collectively through the bonding and sisterhood of women.

As the narrator was convinced by her daughter's commitment to gender equality, she recounts women's involvement during the bush war by throwing light upon Linda and Tinawo's experiences as *mjiba*. The aim of this fiction is to allow Zenzele to understand the women's contributions to the liberation struggle. She honors, even praises the women who devoted their lives to armed struggle.

[The mjiba were] women of a new generation who wore trousers like men and could aim just as steady. They were women who killed. They were fit and strong, running through the bushes brandishing AK-47s and machine guns...On their backs, they carried not runny-nosed babies but the hope of a different generation in the form of runs of ammunition, maps, codes, and supplies to fuel the battles that ultimately was to lead us to independence...<sup>39</sup>

In addition, by sharing this story of Tinawo, Linda, and women's activism with Zenzele, Shiri guides her to contemplate intersections between her personal ambitions, family, and Africa itself as she defines herself as a strong woman. It allows to enhance Zenzele's understanding of women's participation of the independence war. The fact that Tinawo left her widowed mother and disabled brother (after her father had been killed in an attack) proves her dedication to the cause. It was not easy for girls to leave their parents and particularly her mother, but she gave up their personal needs after her two form exams. She even endangered her family in order to achieve freedom:

<sup>32</sup> Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>35</sup> Lena M. Ampadu (2006), "Black Women Writers as Dynamic Agents of Change: Empowering Women from Africa to America," *Forum on Public Policy*, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire (1997), *op.cit.*, pp. 139 – 140.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 148 – 149.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>39</sup> Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire (1997), *op.cit.*, p. 168.

One day, she was playing by the riverside with us and the next day she had completely vanished...In those days, many young boys and girls suddenly disappeared from the village. One speculated that either they had been captured by the Rhodesian army or they had crept over the border to Mozambique to join the struggle. They said nothing to their families. It was an act of charity to spare them the burden of knowledge that, late one night in a raid, they might be beaten senseless to reveal.<sup>40</sup>

Tinawo's motivation to join the freedom fighters is due to the humiliation she suffers. Her father promised to buy her the pink dress hanging in the window of a European store after her success to the exam to enter form two. However, when, after his death (he had been killed in an attack), Tinawo passed her tests to enter Form Two and went with her mother to buy the dress, the European clerk refused their patronage because they were African. Tinawo explained that the dress "*became a symbol of my progress, my determination, and my father's dream of a better future for me.*"<sup>41</sup> She explains how, after suffering this humiliation, she transformed from a consumer to a nationalist:

My ambitions had grown beyond the little outfit to encompass the nation.... I could not buy freedom—I knew that at fifteen—but I knew that I could fight for it. I realized that once we had the land, the rest would come with it, for it was from the red earth of the veld that the richness and beauty of Zimbabwe grew. If we gathered the soil to us, if we grew the cotton and spun the cloth [...] if we sewed the prints and owned the shop, then never again would we have to beg.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, Shiri, the narrator rebels against women's domesticity; in the same breath that she praises her family members' courage as it is labeled:

There is a vision of some "greater than this" that you share but that I cannot see—some snapshot that you carry around like a soldier of his beloved, which gives you the courage to fight, to cast away this domestic tranquility that I have created for you, and to seek out life's difficulties. I stood apart from you activists. It was as if I had skipped through some critical developmental milestone in the metamorphosis from precolonial clone into the post-independence Zimbabwean.<sup>43</sup>

By creating Sister Africa as character, Maraire extends the struggle for independence and shows women's contribution to both the struggle for liberation and the Pan-African agenda. Sister Africa, then, serves as a bridge between Africa and her Diaspora and is introduced to the reader as an African-American who travels to various African countries searching for her Nigerian father and,

who during her trips, is taught African culture and tradition. As someone who "*lived with many families that took her in and taught her their ways,*"<sup>44</sup> contrary to Mukoma, this special symbolic character is proud to have recaptured her African roots and surprisingly enough, is while bravely participating in the struggle for independence that she has met her father in jail and has finally decided to stay in Africa and continue the struggle as her father has done. Throughout the character Sister Africa, the author shows that the liberation, development, and future of Africa must rest in the hands of both her children in Africa and those from her Diaspora.

### III. Conclusion

The article has described the roles of women as guardians and bearers of African culture(s) and traditions. In Maraire's novel which is an extended letter from a Shona mother to her daughter, the narrator Shiri has explained to her daughter, Zenzele, the roles, places, and functions of indigenous women in Africa. She has told her how colonization has been a double slap on the face of African women. It has also scrutinized how the latter have been portrayed in early African novels by male writers and the need to rewrite narratives that give them their right places in African society. This is due to the numerous stereotypes and misconceptions about African women framed and nurtured during the colonial period, and which have been perpetuated up to the present time. According to Maryse Condé "*The personality and inner reality of African women have been hidden under [...] a heap of myths, so-called ethnological theories, rapid generalizations, and patent untruths.*"<sup>45</sup>

Thanks to the new female and male writers that have emerged in the literary landscape, the destruction of these stereotypes is in process, even if many male writers have denounced the bad images of the African women by their colleagues. Yet, some women writers like Maraire have come with a vengeance to voice out and to demystify the colonial roles assigned to women under colonial patriarchy, by rewriting their own stories and portraying themselves not only as protagonists but also as characters playing various important roles like educators, mothers, and freedom fighters. The ultimate objective of this attitude is to write women's personal and specific stories from a female perspective and sensibility that allow African women writers to touch on the vices of the phallogocentric society during the colonial and post-colonial eras. As strongly asserted by the narrator and heroine Shiri, Black women have highly participated in and fully contributed to all the struggles for the national liberation of the African continent and this (hi)story and memory must be revisited and rehabilitated<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>45</sup> Maryse Condé (1972), "Three Female Writers in Modern Africa: Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo and Grace Ogot," *Présence Africaine* 82, p. 132.

<sup>46</sup> Saliou DIONE (2019), "(His)story and Memory in Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire's Zenzele: A Letter for My Daughter", in *El hispanismo, en Africa Estudios en homenaje al Profesor Sosthène ONOMO-ABENA* (eds) Monique NOMO NGAMBA, Michel-Yves

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>42</sup> Jacqueline Nozipo Maraire (1997), *op.cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

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