

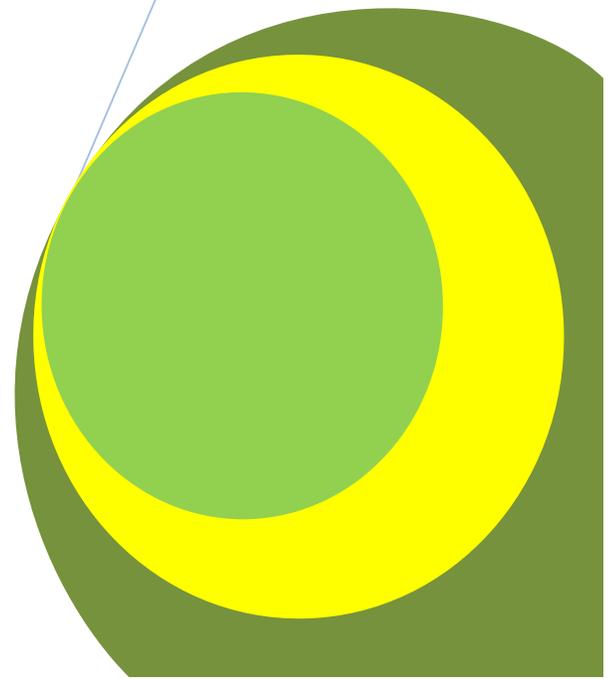
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Unpacking the Eurocentric Indictment of Pre- colonial African Socio- political Institutions in literary works; Pfumo Reropa and Gonawapotera

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Research Article

Unpacking the Eurocentric Indictment of Pre-colonial African Socio-political Institutions in literary works; *Pfumo Reropa* and *Gonawapotera*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the reliability and utility of Chakaipa and Zvarevashe's old world novels; *Pfumo Reropa* and *Gonawapotera* respectively as historical novels. The novels were examined with the view to making an academic interrogation of how chieftainship, law courts and polygamy institutions which formed the soul of the Shona people's culture in pre-colonial Zimbabwe are portrayed. An afro-centric analysis of the disparity between novels and other researches was done and it revealed a glaring distortion of the Shona people's culture in pre-colonial Zimbabwe. The study therefore, argues that *Pfumo Reropa* and *Gonawapotera* are far from pleasing when it comes to their historicity, authenticity of psycho-social thought and philosophy of the Shona people on the practices of chieftainship, law courts and polygamy. The article maintains that not all novels that are regarded as historical are really historical. There is therefore, need to be critical about the novels that are selected for use in Zimbabwean schools so that children are exposed to quality literature that helps them to appreciate that the Shona people had a systematic and elaborate system of role relationship, conflict resolution, social, economic and political control from which lessons can be taken to build confidence in our cultural heritage.

Keywords: Chieftainship, Afro-Centrism, Communalism, Oral Literature, Euro-Centrism

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between literature and society has long been recognised and writing a novel implies the imaginative capability of the writer to negotiate a loyal and authentic portrayal of social reality. Kahari (1975:6) points out that "Shona literary works are capable of expressing reality of a people's situation". In order to be able to do that, the novelist must have the ability to encompass the visible reality, explore objectively and to expose the inner reality of Shona life in terms of their psycho-social philosophy, dreams, beliefs and feelings that go beyond the visible. According to Chidyausiku (1966:44) "Literature is a perfect mirror of life in the sense that it depicts not only the surface of man and society; ... shows life in its depth, shows the hidden forces behind the everyday manifestations of life". Chidyausiku is alluding to the ideal situations but it has to be pointed out that not all novels are written in such penetrating vision, hence the *raison d'être* for this study. Flora Veit Wild (1993) asserts that literary works have the potential to transmit history, beliefs and the whole corpus of habits from one generation to another. What has to be made clear is that literary works can only transmit authentic history of a people if the writer of that work identify with his or her setting. That is because there is need for familiarity with the life, habits, customs and social institutions which affect the community and individuals in the day to day interactions. If the writer chooses to subscribe to other cultures and not the ones he or she is writing about, there are likely to be biases, deliberate omissions or misrepresentations of the life and history of the people being written about. Such a scenario would no doubt transmit distorted history and alienate people from their cultural heritage. A good novelist among other things, therefore, reflects the people's lives at a particular point in time and thus becomes an eye witness of his or her time. That also means that writing in a particular time within a particular setting implies capturing the social history of the people one writes about. From that view point the novel writer becomes an entertainer, an instructor and most importantly, a historian. Shona old world novelists should be able to capture the history of the Shona people before the advent of colonialism because a historical novel is expected to place its characters in the past with the writer attempting to portray that era realistically in both fact and spirit.

It is from this background that this article examines *Pfumo Reropa* set in Mashonaland central and *Gonawapotera*, in the Midlands' Chirumanzu area with the view to making an afro-centric analysis of how Shona chieftainship, law courts and polygamy are projected. The thrust of the analysis however, is to establish whether these works reflect Shona institutions in a manner that demonstrates an objective and fair understanding of the philosophy, concerns and motives behind the practices. The assumption is that reading a Shona old world novel is actually reading Shona history in pre-colonial Zimbabwe and that if the fiction talks about certain institutions, the reader gets to know how the institutions operated the way they deed. This examination was done by making a comparison of the portrayal of chieftainship, law courts and polygamy in the two novels to other novels, other researches and Shona oral literature. However, greater reference was placed on oral literature, which according to Mutswairo et-al (1996) reflects a people's thoughts, conscious or unconscious, verbalise customary law and enunciate rules of conduct of the people who produce it. In that respect, it is from Shona oral literature that we can get the philosophy that persuaded their cultural institutions such as chieftainship, courts of law and polygamy. This is because the spoken word is not divorced from the life that produced it.

Theoretical Framework

Any research meriting academic attention should be predicated on a sound conceptual framework. Such a theoretical scaffold has the task of illuminating the thread of argument and the energy with which the research claims authority. Cognisant of this fact, this study is beholden to the Afro-centric theory in its attempt to interpret African art works. Enlisting the services of such a conscious and decidedly Afro- focused theory attempts to accurately project African socio-political realities as well as obliterate the well established but largely discredited Eurocentric indictment of African social institutions.

The Afro-centric theory is radical, revolutionary and is a fundamental shift in the way African people and phenomena have been viewed. It is aimed at placing African ideals at the centre of any analysis that involves African culture and behaviour (Asante, 1998). It is a theory aimed at decolonizing the African people from the psychological residuum of cultural, economic and political imperialism. The Eurocentric cultural logic has for a long time been masked and conveyed as a universal sacrosanct cultural model to be striven for by all people. This western standard has been entrenched as the nomothetic tool in literature to a point where it has become fashionable for some African authors to project the African past through the Eurocentric lenses as they churn out literary volumes to unsuspecting African audiences. An inordinate amount of energy has been invested in world literature in a bid to portray Africans as hopeless and useless people whose mission to life was at the service of the white race. Many Africans have purchased this malicious brand of thought to a point where distance from one's culture was celebrated as a mark of distinction affording one pride of place in the supplanting culture. It was very easy for an African person to look themselves in the mirror and see not their image but the European reading of the African image. The practice of pejorative and derogatory portrayal of fellow Africans by African writers and writers of African descent was received and celebrated as a trait of realism in literature. Black and African characters were paraded in literary corpuses as people of low psychology, uncivilised and desperately awaiting the saving hand of the white. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is a classic illustration of differential framing of characters where Crusoe (a white) represented the majestic, wise white colonialist while Friday was savage, ignorant back and colonial (Ani, 1994). The demonization of African cultures led to self abnegation and servility on the part of the African person thereby creating a strong case for the restoration of African hope and pride.

Conscious of the need to bust the sustained negative portrayal of the African past, the Afro-centric theory was born. Afro-centricity seeks to address the crises of repositioning of the African person and reality from the margins of European thought, doctrines and attitude positively located in the realm of science and culture (Asante, 2008). He further contends that there could not be any social or economic straggle worthy noting if Africans remained enamoured with the philosophical and intellectual positions of white hegemonic nationalism as it relates to Africans. This calls for a shift in the way Africans view themselves and their realities without reference to the west. The call for conscious African centring rhymes with Ngugi Wa Thiongo's call for relocation in *Moving The Centre* (1993) where the push for devolution of cultural centres is palpable. Asante (2008) states the five characteristics of Afro centism as follows:

- An intense interest in psychological location as determined by symbols, motifs ritual and signs;
- A commitment to finding the subject of Africans in any social, political economic, architectural literary and religious phenomena, with implications for questions of sex, gender and class;
- A defence of cultural elements as historically valid in the context of art, music, education science and literature;
- A celebration of centeredness and agency and commitment to lexical refinement that eliminates pejoratives about Africans and other people;
- And a powerful interpretive from historical sources to revise the collective text of African people. (Asante, 2008)

This research draws energy from the Afro-centric theory in its sworn endeavour to interrogate the manner in which the historical novels, in context, estimate an honest and fair portrayal of African traditional institutions. The theory is helpful in asking critical questions of the research such as; how accurate are the authors projecting the institution of marriage from an African perspective? How can a positive story of the African people be told? What overtones are implied by the authors' portrayal of chieftainship among others? Such an interpretive enquiry of African art works calls for the engagement of a decidedly afro-focused literary perspective where Africans are allowed the space tell to their own history from their own point of view, a prescription recommended by P'Bitek (1986). As the African proverb aptly suggests; until the lions have their histories, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter (Hudson- Weems, 2008), it is the duty of African writers to recount their own history accurately. Asante (2008) also warns that not everyone born in Africa, who follows African styles, practises African religion is Afro-centric. They have to be deliberately afro-focused in their disposition than just by hair, colour and biology. We are therefore summoned to meticulously interrogate and locate afro-centricity in terms of agency, psycho-integrity and cultural fidelity in the African artist in the novels such as *Pfumo Reropa* and *Gonawapotera*.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses textual analysis as a tool in the interrogation of writers' portrayal of Shona institutions of polygamy, chieftainship and culture in general. The textual analysis method was considered suitable for the study of literature in an endeavour to examine the authors' socio-political fidelity in projecting African sensibilities. The research also employed Harold Laswell's content analysis guidelines: "who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect?" These questions were critical in the interrogation of Chakaipa and Zvarevashe; writers of the novels in contexts handling of African traditional institutions and processes.

The Depiction of Shona Traditional Institutions

Chiefs and Courts

The depiction of chiefs and law courts in both *Pfumo Reropa* and *Gonawapotera* is incomparable to the systematic and communal tradition of Shona society. The novelists paint a very ugly picture of these institutions. They portray the chiefs' installation as chaotic and always resulting in violence and destruction of human life as people stampede for the important position. Courts are also presented as iniquitous, where the chief and those very close to him abuse, oppress or kill their subjects without cause. This tendency to depict the Shona system of governance as chaotic and unsystematic strains credulity and is somewhat derogatory. Through the character Masango, Zvarevashe (1978) says,

*Sezvaunongoziva kuti panogadzwa umambo
Panorwiwa nekuurayanwa...*

(As you know that where a chief is being installed, there is fighting and killing of one another.)

That statement encapsulates the writer's lack of appreciation of the way chiefs were installed or chosen. Gombe, (1996) and Hodza (1979) state that the installation of a new chief was marked by a ceremony where cattle was slaughtered for consumption, with people offering gifts and celebrating the new chief. To say that there was always some fighting and killing like what Zvarevashe says is a misconception of the process. The appointment and installation of a new chief over Shona principalities was a power exercised by the Rozvi Mambo whose power and influence, although grossly exaggerated, was accepted and respected. Cases of conflict during installations were fairly common, like anywhere else where issues of power are involved but they were not of the magnitude portrayed. Mudenge, (2011). In *Gonawapotera*, Maenzanise, a cousin to Masango, is given as the Rozvi representative but lacks the power and authority which the Rozvi people were known to wield after they had taken over power from Munhumutapa. Bhila (1982) says that Shona chiefs were actually helping the Rozvi kings and therefore, no chief would defy their orders like what Masango does in *Gonawapotera*.

Shona chiefs are also presented as people who are head strong, ruthless savages whose incivility resulted in their domination of their subjects. This is shown by the behaviour of Masango and Mandi in *Gonawapotera* and also by the avaricious chief Ndyire in *Pfumo Reropa*. In *Gonawapotera*, Masango, at a chief selection meeting says,

"Ushe ndehwangu, handichadi kunzwa munhu anoti ushe ndehwake"

(The chieftainship is mine; I no longer want to hear anybody say the Chieftainship is theirs.)

It is said that the whole court was silenced solely by him.

Chief Mandi, a woman chief who dethroned her father's chieftainship at her court also had the audacity to say to her people,

Ndinonzi Makonongaavate ini mwana waSadzaguru, zvandareva ngazviitwe.

(My name is males should sleep, what I have ordered should be done)

Presenting a woman chief demonstrating arrogance without fear of reprisals in the patriarchal Shona society is a way of showing how chiefs abused their power. Likewise, Ndyire, in *Pfumo Reropa* is presented in the same manner. Haripotse the clever blacksmith asked the court,

Tinoona vanhu vachipisirwa misha yavo kana kudimurwa mavoko pamusana pokuba asi hatiratidzwi zvinhu zvinenge zvabiwa. Gororo kana kuti mbavha inofanira kuti igadzwe dare kuti munhu wese azvionere. Kunyangwe munhu ari muranda haafaniri kutongwa mhosva asipo.

(We see people's homes burnt and others have their arms cut off because they are allegedly thieves but we are not shown the items they would have stolen. A thief or robber should be taken to court so that everybody sees for themselves. Even if a person is your subject or servant, he or she should not be tried at a court in absentia.)

Haripotse's contribution and question is the same question which most of the people at chief Ndyire's court had. The contribution, because of its consistency with the Shona people's democratic taste, won the hearts of the majority of the people at the court which infuriated chief Ndyire who immediately stood up and commanded everybody to shut up. Ndyire said,

Nyararai vana vemakonzol Chii chamunoti chuwe chuwe?
(Shut up off springs of rats! What are you grumbling about?)

This portrays the Shona chief as a leader who did not like constructive criticism at all. Ndyire calls all his subjects off springs of rats and that demonstrates serious lack of respect by the chief. The portrayal of the author is inconsistent with the views of Vansina in Mudenge (2011:25) who states that, 'If the Nguni were famed for their military prowess, the Shona,... became masters of the peaceful arts..., building and creation of political and religious institutions.' By giving Haripotse the right words to say, words that are consistent with the Shona people's taste of democracy, it is cogent to conclude that the author knew how Shona courts operated but chose to paint a bad picture about them. In order to achieve his objective, Chakaipa presents Ndyire disregarding the views and feelings of all his subjects at the court. He also shows the chief sentence Shizha to death without taking him to court. Haripotse was exiled for making wise contributions at the court. All the actions by Ndyire are at conflict with the beliefs of a peace loving people like the Shona.

If Shona oral literature is a reflection of their thoughts and wisdom, then chief Ndyire should have realised that *Mazano marairanwa* (Ideas are shared). He would not have ignored the views and contributions of his subjects. The chief would also have known that his subjects would respect him more if he respected them as well and would not have called them rats. The Shona wisdom says, *Gudo guru peta muswe kuti vadoko vakutye* (Big baboon fold your tail so that the young respect you) meaning that people occupying big positions in society should be humble so that they earn the respect of the people they lead and Ndyire or one of his advisers should have known this and advised the chief accordingly. This was ignored by the author. Kahari (1997:30) makes a very important and correct observation and says, "Chakaipa's characters are made to live with negligible reference their parent community; they live in their own right, not as members of on homogeneous group. They are out of touch with their community." This implies that the behaviour of Chakaipa's characters is not representative of the people he writes for and about. The afro-centric assumption is that a novel writer is an eyewitness of their time as their work is a social barometer of the psycho-social and political history of their people. Therefore, creating characters that do not represent the consciousness of the community in which the novel is set is distorting the people's history. It also kills the dialogue which the writer seeks with his community and thus debases their works of art.

The way both Chakaipa and Zvarevashe portray chiefs and their courts differ significantly from what other novelists like Mutasa (1979) handles them. In *Mapatya*, Mutasa depicts the chief's court as a very democratic institution that afforded everybody presents an opportunity to air their views on the case in session without fear. This is what is consistent with what researchers like Gombe (1996), Gelfand (1971, 1973, and 1974) have observed. The way chiefs treat their subjects in *Pfumo Reropa* and *Gonawapotera* makes the chief a very unpopular figure in his area and with his people yet Shona chiefs did not want to lose the respect of their subjects. To the Shona people of Zimbabwe *Ushu vanhu or nyika vanhu*, meaning that they understood that without people to lead, there is no chieftainship or leadership. That deterred them from ill-treating their subjects like what chiefs Ndyire, Masango and Mandi do in the two novels. Any chief who ill-treated their subjects risked losing them as they would move to other chiefdoms. Shonas were a people who believed in the strength found in living as large communities and to them, for a chief to lose people to other chiefdoms was like losing power. For these reasons no chief would behave as is depicted in *Gonawapotera and Pfumo Reropa*.

The exclusion of *machindas* (the chiefs advisors) at all courts in the two novels, the silence about the fines that were paid and the total neglect of the Shona people's beliefs that governed their behaviour as

traditional leaders are signs that both artists did not appreciate the communal taste, spirit of participatory democracy, the social solidarity and sense of responsibility with which Shona and African courts were instituted.

It has to be remembered that the Shona people slaughtered goats (*marime fine*), roasted and consumed them at their courts as a reminder that they are one people despite conflicts.

What Chakaipa presents about the Shona system of governance right on the first page of *Pfumo Reropa* attests to the suspicion that his Christian background influences him to see nothing positive in the culture he had abandoned. He writes,

*Mambo oga oga aitonga nematongerero aimufadza. Hapana aimuti nhai
iwe haugoni kutonga.* (Every chief ruled in the manner he or she desired.
There was nobody to question their leadership qualities)

Such a beginning reflects what we see at Ndyire's courts and other courts in *Gonawapotera*.

The abuse of power and butchering of people that is depicted particularly in *Pfumo Reropa* emanates from this kind of false start. As has been mentioned, Shona chiefs were answerable to, Munhumutapa and later to the Rozvi Kings, and the spiritual world of guardian spirits who were the real owners of the land chiefs ruled. Gombe (1996) says that guardian spirits could bring misfortunes to chiefs who violated certain rules and values of the land. That disapproves Chakaipa's presentation that chiefs were not answerable to anybody. To the Shona people, the link between the dead and the living was an important mechanism for social control and conflict resolution.

The severity of punishments which chiefs in *Pfumo Reropa* and *Gonawapotera* give to the law breakers is also difficult to understand and smacks of an alien culture inimical to the African sense of governance. In *Pfumo Reropa*, Ndyire kills Demamatsanga after falsely accusing him of witchcraft and theft. The same chief also cuts off the hands of a certain man, sends his army to annihilate Shizha's extended family for alleged theft without evidence or trying them at a court. It can be argued that no offence in Shona society warranted death penalty. Fines and payments were instituted to punish those who failed to keep the laws of the land. The punishments were pronounced at a *dare* (court) with the whole village council witnessing the proceedings. The cultural implications of the Shona proverb *Mhosva mwene wayo vazhinji vateereri* (The guilty is the offender and the rest are listeners) bears overtones of fairness at their courts where the innocent are not punished for an offence committed by somebody else. From that perspective, if Shizha was a thief, it was him alone who was supposed to be punished and not the whole extended family including old men and children. Chakaipa presents the chief killing Shizha and everybody else in his homestead for alleged theft.

The killing of lawbreakers is also depicted in Zvarevashe's *Gonawapotera* in a manner that sounds a mockery of the African judicial conduct. Zvarevashe writes:

*Kana dziri mhombwe, mhondi, varoyi kana vanoita makunakuna
vairoverwa mbambo nekumusana yobudikidza nekudumbu
ichipinda muvhu, vofa vakadaro. Kana vainzwirwa urombo
vaingosungwa vakabatanidzwa vokandwa muGonawapotera.*

(For the adulterous, murderer's witches or the incestuous, they were pinned to the ground from the back through to the stomach and into the ground using wooden pegs and were left to die like that. Those that were sympathised with were tied together and were thrown into *Gonawapotera* (pool to drown). There is disturbing incongruence between the severity of punishment which the adulterous and the incestuous were served and some cultural practices like *kupindira* and *kubvisa mombe yecheka ukama*. This makes it easy to note that the novelist captured the history of the Shona people inaccurately. *Kupindira*, that is raising generative seed into the wife of a brother who is barren without his knowledge, was done usually by the man's younger brother or cousin. In the Shona cultural practice that was not adultery. The common dictum in Shona communities that *gomba harina mwana* (a married woman's private lover does not have a child) also buttresses the view that Shona people tolerated but not encouraged adultery. What was dangerous was to be discovered or caught in which case one would be taken to court. Mudzanire and Mufanechiya (2011) also state that on the issue of fertility men can leap the marriage fence to test themselves with other women in the neighbourhood. All these facts confound Zvarevashe's thesis that adultery attracted cruel killing in Shona society. His allusion to the Shona people as being cruel, bearing in mind his missionary slant, can only be read as loudly Euro-centric if not severely anti-African.

The presence of the practice of *kubvisa chekaukama* in Shona society also shows that even incest breeding was not a serious offence as is presented by Zvarevashe in *Gonawapotera*. Literally translated, *chekaukama* is sever the relationship, and Shona orature has it that it is payment of a white beast to the father of a close relative whom a man wants to marry. From that point, what Zvarevashe depicts in his novel is not an honest reflection of Shona people's culture. Gelfand (1973) cited in Chowome and Gambahaya (1996:134) states that "The imperative of the Shona culture might be reduced to three basic guide lines; live together, keep the peace and multiply." This is an accurate observation which is consistent with the Shona social values and history.

The Shona were real peace lovers and the objective of their courts was to keep peace and tranquillity between individuals, families and community at large. Interaction among the Shona was strongly guided by the philosophy of *unhu* or *ubuntu* (Mapetere, Chinembiri and Makaye, 2012). Their proverbs, *nganos* and poetry also emphasise these same values.

It is evident from this analysis that both Chakaipa and Zvarevashe exploit the literary space to present the Shona chiefs and courts as unsystematic, irresponsible and therefore, dangerous. They present chiefs as arrogant, ruthless and lustful. Their courts are portrayed as unfair, and chiefs do what they wish including imposing death sentence and exiling subjects who want to challenge their decisions. Such a wanton, morbid, and carefree portrayal of African institutions can only be attributable to a dose of Euro-centrism gulped from years of colonial education. Furusa observes that the two writers' sense of African reality is influenced by their missionary and educational background, schooled as they were in the crucibles of European missionary education. This background had the effect of warping the accuracy of presenting the pre-colonial history of the Shona people. Although the chief was the chief judge, decisions were reached after serious consultations with the chief's council and such decisions respected the continuity and tranquillity of the community.

The Portrayal of Polygamy

The manners in which both Chakaipa and Zvarevashe express polygamy in their novels differ. Zvarevashe's *Gonawapotera* only tells us that Murovasango, the main character in the novel accepted many wives and they produced many children for him. The novel does not say much about the interaction of the women in Murovasango's homestead. Nevertheless, the fact that the author makes reference to the many children of Murovasango is acceptable as history of the Shona people. Chiwome (1996), Gelfand (1973) and Gelfand (1974) indicate that Shona people valued children to the extent that a woman was expected to bear children till menopause. A man or woman was not supposed to die without a child.

It is Chakaipa's *Pfumo Reropa* that dwells much on the social life of women and children in a polygamous family. The novel presents polygamy as a practice that causes untold human suffering and brings nothing positive to a man's homestead. Through Munhamo, a character in his novel, Chakaipa says;

Unofanira kuziva kuti muri vana vebarika, vana vebarika havanzwanani.
(You must know that you are children in a polygamous family,
you don't understand each other.)

In the same novel, Ndyire the polygamous chief died because he ate a poisoned egg that his wife Handidiwe wanted to use to kill Munhamo, the chief's most loved wife. Dzinesu also poisoned Munhamo with whom she had always competed for the chief's love. What is unfortunate about this is that the writer chose not to make reference to any of the numerous social control institutions which the Shona people had in their culture to mitigate and handle challenges, grievances and conflicts in their extended families, polygamies and clans. From an Afro-centric perspective, silence on such critical social control institutions by an African writer estimates to connivance with the African people's enemies. Kahari (1997), Batidzirai and Chikonyora (1998) and Mukusha et al (2012) state that Shona institutions such as *chihwerure*, *bembera*, poetry; particularly *jikinyira* and *mavingu* genres, songs and pet naming were all ways of dealing with social problems that disturbed the peace and harmony of the people in their families and community. Chakaipa chose not to mention them even in passing in *Pfumo Reropa*. That is arguably a clear indication that he had no intention to present the Shona culture accurately but to paint a very ugly picture of it. Chiwome (1996) and Furusa (1991) argue that cultural practices are survival skills that benefit the society and individuals who practise them. Therefore, if polygamy was only a source of human suffering and death as is depicted in *Pfumo Reropa*, then no man or society would ever practise it.

Chief Ndyire and his counsellors in *Pfumo Reropa* are presented as polygamous only because of their lust and covetousness. The novelist chose not to give any other reason for polygamy or benefits of the practice yet Kahari (1990) argues that spousal inheritance was a way of making sure that widows and orphans are looked after within a community and it did not always involve sex. That is the point that musician Oliver Mutukudzi reiterates in his song *Nhaka Sandi Bonde* (Spousal inheritance is not about sex). The cultural practice was about offering support and social responsibility to widows and orphans. In *Pfumo Reropa*, Chief Ndyire and his advisors are presented as covetous to a point where they abuse the spousal inheritance to exploit the female sexuality more than assuming the social responsibility as enunciated by the Shona culture. They also killed men whose wives they coveted so that they could inherit their wives for sexual exploitation. It can be argued that the Shona people had a lot better reasons for practising polygamy. Like a people who were mainly farmers, having more than one wife provided manpower for their labour intensive farming activities like hoeing, harvesting, threshing and winnowing of small grain crops like *rapoko* and finger millet which they grew for food. The Shona people loved many children and to them having more than one wife raised the chance of having many children. In addition to all these reasons the Shona people were a people who believed in the strength and advantages of

living in large numbers and in groups. A study of their philosophy as it is reflected in their proverbs makes this point clear. They have proverbs such as the following:

Kuwanda huuya kunorambwa nemuroyi.

(There is beauty in numbers, only the wicked hates it.)

Kuwanda kwakanaka museve wakapota nekumuzukuru.

(There is beauty in numbers, danger went to the cousin.)

Rume rimwe harikombi churu. (One man cannot encircle an anthill.)

Mukadzi mumwe inhehwe yomubinda ikakochekerwa pamuti unosara wava mukuna.

(A single wife is not reliable if she dies you are exposed)

Zvimhandara ita zviviri kufa kwechimwe unosara nechimwe.

(Better have two virgins if one dies you remain with the other.)

The first three proverbs show the importance of numbers in self defence and hunting while the last two indicate the need to have more than one wife for continuity of a man's family in the event of death by one wife. Like people who hunted wild animals without powerful weapons like guns, combined effort was the only thing that could help them hunt successfully and also in self defence against rival tribes. The strength of a king or chief was equally dependent on the population of state as it was depended on its military tactics. The idea of having more than one wife should be appreciated when considering that they did not have sophisticated healthy and child delivery systems and therefore one wife could die of child birth complications. What is made clear by the proverbs is that polygamy was a culture that was put in place to ensure family and clan sustainability rather than by lust as is presented in *Pfumo Reropa*. Hodza (1984), Mutswairo et-al (1996) and Chiwome (1996) give a number of good reasons why Shona people and their chiefs practised polygamy. All those reasons were not considered by Chakaipa in *Pfumo Reropa*. The novelist chose to present the culture of polygamy as caused by mere lust by African men, and that the culture resulted in serious conflicts, suffering and death in families of men who practised it. These mockery of the African culture rhymes with the Euro-centric agenda to project Africans as savage, callous and want-light.

The manner in which Chakaipa portrays Shona polygamy differs considerably with what other old world novel writers like Giles Kuimba and Mutasa show. In the novel *Tambaoga Mwanangu*, Kuimba indicates that wives in a polygamous family led by the first wife can work together to find a solution to a domestic problem. Likewise, Mutasa's *Mapatya* is a demonstration of how women in polygamy can team up to protect their family from external threats. In that novel, Mutumwa's twins Mirirai and Miriro were saved by the combined effort of his two wives, a thing a single wife might have failed dismally to do. That shows that the custom of polygamy was not as bad as what is portrayed in *Pfumo Reropa*. Furusa (1991) proffers a suggestion that when critiquing a piece of art like a novel, it is important that to begin by looking at the life that produced that work. This is imperative when one considers Mapara's (1997) view and warning that some novelists draw their work from other writer's work, others from their job experiences and others from their church doctrines and education. Flora Veit Wild (1993) also points out that the author is constituted by the forms and ideas of the discourses which he has experienced. These observations push one into purchasing the view that the two African writers are being driven by their background in presenting the African past in such a pathetic manner. Kahari (1979) observes that both Zvarevashe and Chakaipa experienced missionary education and were christened themselves. There is, therefore, likelihood that their work was a way to further their Christian doctrine. For instance in *Pfumo Reropa*, Chakaipa portrays all traditional diviners as liars and killed for their lies. It can be argued that other writers like Ribeiro, the author of *Muchadura* show that Shona diviners or nángas were very useful in predicting future events and helping people with social problems. Labelling the African institutions as diabolic, as Zvarevashe and Chakaipa do, can be seen as an underhand plot to inveigle Africans into hating their own cultures and arouse in them a proclivity for the supplanting European and Christian culture where monogamy is a celebrated virtue.

In *Pfumo Reropa*, Ndyire kills Shizha and other men after coveting their wives. He was then killed by Tanganeropa, who was also killed by Rwiriko, Zumbani and Nevanji over the chieftainship he had. Likewise, in Zvarevashe's *Gonawapotera*, Magen'a kills Shumbayaonda and Hamamiti and many more people of the Mhazi dynasty in order for him to become the new chief. He was also assassinated by Murovasango. It boggles the mind why both Chakaipa and Zvarevashe depict the Shona people as people who did not have respect for the sanctity of human life or other beliefs to deter them from unnecessary destruction of human life. Zhuwarara (1985) says all literature is propaganda done for the purpose of inducing or intensifying specific attitudes and actions, and is frequently accompanied by distortions of fact. If what is witnessed in *Pfumo Reropa* and *Gonawapotera* is such kind of propaganda, then the novels are a serious distortion of the Shona history. The Shona people's belief in avenging spirits (*ngozi*), and their fear of ancestral spirits and guardian spirits should have discouraged the ruthless and endless killing that happen in the two novels. It appears as though both writers wanted to teach their readers that the wages of sin is death, which is a Christian view. Kahari (1991) noted that in Christian writers' work of fiction the consequence of the characters actions is retribution. As Christians therefore, Zvarevashe and Chakaipa's plots are designed to magnify their negative attitudes towards

non-Christian institutions, cultures and practices so as to dissuade their audience to abandon those cultures and join the Christian culture. It is not true to say that for an individual to become a chief in the traditional Shona milieu he or she has to kill all the rivals or the chief in power as is portrayed in the two novels. What the two authors present is propaganda meant to persuade Shona audience to adopt the Euro-centric attitudes and beliefs they espouse.

Of interest to note in *Pfumo Reropa* is the similarity between the killing of Shizha, Demamatsanga and other men by chief Ndyire who coveted their wives and the Bible story of King David who engineered the death of Uriah because he had coveted Uriah's wife Bathsheba. Likewise, in Zvarevashe's *Gonawapotera*, there is an apparent similarity between Murovasango's stay at Sadzaguru's area with his mother's people where he later married Mandivavarira and paid lobola by way of working for the in-laws and the Bible story of Jacob who ran away from his brother Esau only to grow up at his mother's people where he had to work for his in-laws in order to get Leah and Rachel as wives. All these are indicators that both novelists used the Bible as a source of their literary work. That has the danger of taking Jewish history from the Bible and writing it as socio-cultural history of the Shona people. That badly distorts history. Mlilo laments this kind of writing by Christian writers and says that such imitation does not lead to artistic excellence. From that perspective, in *Pfumo Reropa* and *Gonawapotera*, Chakaipa and Zvarevashe did not draw their stories from the lives of the people whom they intended to write for and about. That explains why the novels do not reflect a history of the Shona people accurately or at least fairly.

According to Chinweizu et-al (1980) African literature refers to work done for African audiences, by Africans and in African languages. Sadly, *Pfumo Reropa* and *Gonawapotera* do meet all these qualities but arguably lacks the psycho-social consciousness of the Shona people for whom and about whom they were written. Chinweizu et-al (1980) suggest that in novel writing, the audience are of primary importance and therefore their values and tastes should be conformed to and be furthered in the work. This means that historical novels should convey the flavour of African life in the place and period in which their action is set. That is what *Gonawapotera*, set in Chirumanzu and Gutu area and *Pfumo Reropa*, set in Mashonaland central fail to do satisfactorily. It would seem the two missionary writers are on a gallant crusade to paint a very gloomy picture of the African past, agitate for its obliteration, uproot it and broadcast the seeds of the alien culture to unsuspecting readers.

CONCLUSION

This study examined Shona old world narratives *Gonawapotera* and *Pfumo Reropa* with the intention of establishing their accuracy, authenticity and acceptability as Shona people's psycho-social history in pre-colonial Zimbabwe. The article's primary focus was on the manner in which Shona chieftainship, law courts and polygamy are portrayed. Both novels show that Shona chiefs were ruthless savages who killed each other for the chieftainship, who abused power, and whose law courts were unsystematic and undemocratic. Chiefs and their people are depicted as lustful lads who practised polygamy without the necessary resources with which to support the many wives. The article however, has demonstrated that both novels portray the Shona systems of governance, courts and polygamy in a way that conflict with what other researchers, other novelists and Shona oral literature like proverbs say about the same institutions. A conclusion was made that the writers misrepresented and therefore, distorted the history of the Shona people. The novels, though written in Shona language, Shona settings and for Shona audience, do not express a cultural consciousness and philosophy that conform to the democratic values and communal taste of their audience. This article therefore, maintains that both novels do not have the potential to transmit positive beliefs and the whole corpus of social history of the Shona people to younger generations. They therefore, cannot raise the image of Shona readers as worthy humans and are incapable of restoring national pride and dignity, a responsibility expected of such historical novels (Zimunya, 1982). Both writers' Christian instructed perceptions are the reason for the inadequacies on the manner they portray and vilify Shona culture. It is noticeable that both Chakaipa and Zvarevashe view Shona systems of governance and polygamy as bastions of the evil, which are disorderly, unfriendly, unsympathetic, irrational, wicked and designed to cause human suffering and death. This study argues therefore, that *Gonawapotera* and *Pfumo Reropa* are a Shona people's history distorted; a caricature and a desperate endeavour by Euro-inspired writers to depict African institutions as worryingly deplorable, awaiting the saving hand of more illustrious cultures of the world.

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