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**Gendered and Ecological Representation in Masotsha Mike Hove's
'Confessions of a Wizard' and Wiseman Magwa's 'Jemedza'**

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Abstract

Literary works are one of the main avenues through which information, attitudes, values and behavioural patterns towards world phenomena are disseminated and processed. Characters in plays and novels serve as role models for the younger generation, especially when the texts are prescribed as instructional materials in schools. There is a gap regarding literature related to the representation of gender, culture, environment and pandemics in instructional materials prescribed for learners in Zimbabwe. The above variables are fast becoming global dictates and are part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that communities worldwide are grappling with. They have become cross-cutting themes in the Zimbabwean education system from Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) up to tertiary education. To this end, academia cannot afford to turn a blind eye and remain silent on the discourses that threaten world peace, well-being and continuity. This article argues that representations can either proffer constructive or destructive environmental ethics. The article is informed by ecological systems theory and African relational ontology. It seeks to qualitatively examine through critical content and discourse analyses, the representation of the four phenomena in the two purposively selected literary texts: Masotsha Mike Hove's *'Confessions of a Wizard'* and Wiseman Magwa's *'Jemedza'*. Findings indicate that culture is a liability that is serving as a pandemic super-spreader, a catalyst in fuelling gender-based violence and gender inequality, though it fosters some positive environmental ethics here and there. There are scenarios of life-threatening masculinity/ femininity and unsafe religious beliefs, which are a liability, shattering the hope of Vision 2030 in the run-up to the deadline for the SDGs. The article recommends a balance in character representations in literature to unwind gender inequalities and foster life-saving ecological ethics and responsible masculinity and femininity.

Keywords: culture, gender, religion, environment and HIV/ AIDS pandemic.

Introduction and Background

The term environment usually denotes multiple meanings because it includes the living and non-living entities which may be physical, social and cultural surroundings (Buell, Heise and Thornber, 2011). These form an ecosystem that sustains a healthy relationship. The African traditional conception of the special relationship between environment and humanity continues to survive and endure to date, although it is threatened by globalisation. The article argues that the relationship among humanity, the living, the dead and the yet-to-be-born and the general ecosystem must be understood in the context of a truly relational ontology where all things are recognised and respected for their place in the overall system (Taringa, 2019). While humanity, the environment and pandemics are differentiated, their relationships are neither oppositional nor binary, but inclusive, complementary and accepting diversity. They are complementary and Taringa (2008) proposes a caring environmental ethic basing on the argument that, “It is we humans that need the environment, not the environment needing us”. In resonance, Mbiti (1970, p. 135) observed a Kinship and ecosystem kind of relationship that extended to cover animals, plants, and non-living objects through the totemic system.

Considering humanity, the two human gender species are brother and sister, while they are also cousins with animals, plants, the dead and non-living objects. This idea of kinship is based on the belief that all people are descendants of a common ancestor who long ago lived in their territory (Paris, 1995, p.77). Everything is interconnected and interwoven; everything can relate to us, and we can relate to every ‘thing’ as one. Therefore, relations between humanity and physical and spiritual environments are more fundamental than the independent facets themselves. This flies in the face of substantivist ontology, which implies that males/females are ontologically primary and relations ontologically derivative (Wildman, 2006, p.1). The ontological primacy of relations is emphasised in *hunhuism/ubuntuism*.

Significance of the Article

If we go by Ngigi and Busolo’s (2018) view that culture gives a community uniqueness, then the relational African ontological position gives the Zimbabweans uniqueness. It is either that the relational perspective of the unique sister/brotherhood and cousinship in Zimbabwe, flying in the face of the new normal, is making Zimbabwe unique, or else the new normal is distorting the Zimbabwean uniqueness and polluting the authors’ literary works. It also warned that it should not come as a surprise that in emergencies or times of disaster, individual communities may require special attention, too. This ensures that they maintain special relationships with everything in a cultural power-sharing deal where no one is bigger than the ecosystem. This article seeks to mobilise Zimbabweans to reflect upon that special relationship that fosters life-saving masculinity and femininity and a positive environmental ethic. This is motivated by the argument that while cultures cannot remain constant, the transformation may not need to be abrupt but gradual to avoid cultural shock. As Africans, there is a need to avoid the unnecessary adoption of foreign ideologies, theories and their attendant frameworks without careful reflection, so that communities are safeguarded. The Zimbabwean ontology supports a complementary relationship that is best explained as an ecosystem where all the entities are parts of the whole and none is bigger or more important

than the other.

The special relationship phenomenon explains the family ties between the living and non-living. *Hunhu/ubuntu* turns attention to we-ness. *Hunhu/Ubuntu* is against the individualistic framing of males and females as discrete individuals. It does not take the axiomatic biological split between husbands and wives as essential. It also refutes the gender essentialist position where anatomical arrangement differentiates wo/men. The Zimbabwean person is in a composite of relationships. The person is conceived as a dividual and not an individual. In that case, a person (*munhu/umuntu*) has a holistic collective identity. In essence, dividual means a person is constitutive of relationships. So, there is a consciousness of relatedness. The central idea is that one shares space, things, and actions with others. There is a strong sense of sharing with others (the living, the dead, those yet to be born and the environment) versus the distribution of rights.

For the past centuries, gender issues in African cultures have been hijacked by Western worldviews and have been interpreted from Western feminist perspectives in order to maintain the individualism at the heart of Western culture. The “I” in the often-cited “I am because we are” is not the primary axis of *hunhu/ubuntu*. The “I am” is smuggled from Western individualism. The correct rendering is “we are because we are”. This is consistent with the Zimbabwean culture, where the primary unit of society is not the individual (Taringa, 2008). His being is based on or coupled with that of others. Next to – or behind – or in front of him, there is always someone through whom he is associated. The concepts of plurality and belonging are always present. For example, a person is always viewed as “*Motho aw batho*” (person of person or belonging to persons) or “*Motho weso*” (our person of person that is ours) (Paris 1995, p. 101).

The African person is defined as a member of a family, and so is never alone in self-concept or in the perception of others. The life of a person is wholly dependent on the family and its symbiotic functions of biological lineage, communal nurture, and moral formation (Paris 1995, p.101). Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am. This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man. (Paris 1995, p. 111). In short, it means we are because we are.

This is difficult for Western minds to grasp. Africans have no conception of a person apart from a community. This means more than the maintenance of a symbiotic relationship between the individual and the community. Such implies a prior separate state. No such separation is possible in African thought. The two are related as opposite sides of the same coin. The one implies the other (Paris 1995, p. 111). In this case, the four variables: gender, culture, religion and pandemics are intricate. Thus, the article seeks to uncover how these are represented in literary instructional materials prescribed for learners in Zimbabwe.

Traditional African cultures are ordered in accordance with the principle of community that was hierarchically arranged, with the community of ancestors as the primary ruling power,

followed by the descending authorities of tribal and familial communities respectively. The African person can only be understood in that tripartite communal relation. Interdependent relations among persons, families, tribes, and ancestors comprise the nature of African humanity. Since each is a part of a whole, all are related to one another reciprocally. As the value of the individual derives from the community, the goal of the community is to promote the life of the individual. Thus, individual rights and liberties cannot be determined apart from this communal context and the necessary responsibilities and obligations implied by membership in it (Magesa, 1997, p. 114).

This type of thinking is difficult for the Western mind to appreciate because the latter alters the relation by giving primacy to individual persons and lesser value to either the family or the larger community. Such thought virtually reverses the African understanding of the relationship between person and community. Much of Western society has tended to view the sanctity of the individual as the highest moral good (Magesa 1997, p. 114).

Through Western ontology, Western feminist interpretations have tended to dichotomise male and female. After all, who knows what is good or bad? The major problem that Zimbabwean communities face is about imports of conceptual frameworks which seem to refute the African gender cultural orientation. In this case the gender ontological perspective that understands gendering to be a fundamental social distinction like in the case of Western society. This contradicts Shona African society's "understanding" in which gendering is not of such fundamental importance, obviously, misrepresentation and misunderstanding will result (Hallen, 2002, p. 106) which comes from the community's cultural shock. It may be that among some traditional Zimbabwean families, each individual accepts his or her sexuality and gender roles with grace and ease, without any undue embarrassment nor the feeling of wanting to be or to imitate the other.

Research Methodology

The article sets out to explore the representation of gender, culture, environment and the HIV and AIDS pandemic in the literary works purposively selected for this study. The article is based on inductive theory, that is, it moves from data to theoretical principles. The relationship among the four can only be theorised basing on the data generated in the selected texts. The data is then content and discourse analysed on the basis of their resultant impact on Zimbabweans' possibility of meeting the set targets for achieving SDGs. The selected excerpts from the purposively selected literary texts lead to theoretical propositions. According to Bryman (2012, p. 6), the inductive theory "implies that a set of theoretical ideas drives the collection and analysis of data." In this article, it is the actual views of authors through the authority of the matter of the texts which lead to understanding the phenomenon of association among the four facets. "It also adopts an interpretivist epistemology, hence reality is a social construction phenomenon and there are multiple realities" (Morgan and Sklar, 2012, p.73). In this case, the study authors' experiences through the authority of the texts are the basis for coming up with theoretical constructs on the matrix among gender, culture, environment, and pandemics mirrored in the texts. The exploration sets out to uncover whether the characters' cultural acquisitions are assets or liabilities in hopes of

achieving a gender-equal society, positive environmental ethic and (ir)responsible and life-saving/threatening masculinity and femininity in the face of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The article argues that there is need for responsible sexual behaviour and that we are not yet past HIV and AIDS.

Ontologically, the article is informed by constructivism, which further adds that, “there are varied and multiple truths leading the researchers to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing the few categories or ideas” (Creswell, 2009, p.8). In this case, there is no one-size-fits-all set of gender conceptions, positive environmental ethic and responsible and life-saving masculinity and femininity that is universally agreed upon communities to be adopted worldwide. Hence, the article is not taking an exclusive position but rather is arguing for the possibility of an alternative Zimbabwean breed that uniquely suits and hooks nicely to the people’s cultural context regarding the phenomena under investigation. In tandem with the constructivist ontology, the article uses the dual revelatory case study to reveal the kind of representation of the four variables as they are presented by the authors. This entails a selection of the excerpts that support the theoretical proposition that the Zimbabweans have something that communicates the genderedness of responses to the environment and pandemics, which, if ignored, may render intervention strategies and efforts futile. The purposively sampled excerpts are screened in cycles until saturation is reached. The two literary texts have been chosen as a representative sample to offer insights into the cultural assets that Zimbabwe relies on in interpreting and interacting within and between gender species, and with the environment and in an effort to contain and manage HIV and AIDS. The selection is made in line with Punch’s (2009, p.162) assertion that “we cannot research on everyone, everywhere, doing everything” as the scope may be too wide. As noted by Punch (2009, p. 133), “data collection and analysis are done in cycles and stop after two repetitions and even continue until theoretical saturation is achieved.”

In organising data, the article employed the thematic web-like data analysis and interpretation. Thematic networks allow the derivation of themes from the selected textual data and the unearthing of resilient themes salient in the texts at different levels. This also assisted the authors in extracting data, grouping it into sub-themes, themes, and global themes that are eventually woven into a reportable story (Asttride-Stirling, 2003). The theorising about the representations emerging from the data collected and analysed takes advice from Charmaz’s (2014) grounded theory. Data analyses were done through critical content and discourse analyses of the excerpts, demonstrating how the characters have come up with the cultural frame that guides how they view and relate to gender, environment and pandemic. The data was also triangulated to help in describing, explaining and interpreting the representation.

Study Findings

The article’s findings are summarised in the discussion below.

Procreation and sense of wo/manhood in recreated Gender Spiritual Environments

From both texts selected for this study, womanhood is tied to procreation and giving birth to a child of sex in tandem with a recreated gender-cultural environment. Thus, the *Confessions of a Wizard* opens by narrating the desperation of the mother for a girl child after having had 3 boys in staggered succession. There is a celebratory mood at the birth of the girl child. The unnamed narrator says:

...my mother had gone to a lot of trouble to have me born a girl. As I was intended to be their last child, Mother was especially delighted to go through a series of medical rituals, however unpleasant, to ensure I should be born a girl and be the one girl in the family (p.6)

The determination and sacrifice by the mother to go through ‘a series of rituals’ demonstrates the Zimbabwean society’s faith in its belief system in having the powers to influence and determine even the sex of a child.

Similarly, the male child preference comes out in Magwa’s *Jemedza* through the character Josiah when he says, “If I divorce her, what will be of my child? If it was a girl, then it would have been better. But a boy! It is not possible to dump him” (p.19).

Josiah again says to Loveness, “You are the real wife because I have a child with you.” And Loveness says, “I feel pity for *amaiguru* Tererai. If it were possible, I would give her my baby, Langton.” (p.20)

In the scenarios above, procreation is important. The only difference is that in *Confession of a Wizard*, a girl child is important because the mother had to undergo a number of rituals, as opposed to *Jemedza* where a boy child is important; Josiah could not leave Loveness because she has a boy child. The finding resonates partially with Taringa (2018), who proffers that the Shona make every effort that a couple conceives. They will not rest until they have the piece of information on the sex of the child (*mwana*i?). This is clear evidence that the Zimbabwean communities create their own gender environment that defines women and womanhood through the sex of a child born to her. Women are a means to have children, with no value in themselves without children. In this case, to see a woman is to see a child, and the sex of the child depends on the gender environment they created. The finding resonates with Lynn (2011), who expressed that gender representations reproduce and legitimate traditional gender systems and the status quo.

Stereotypical Representation of Women

Similarly, in the two texts selected for the study, women’s vulnerability is portrayed in a similar way. In *Confessions of a Wizard*, Hove highlights the potential vulnerability of the girl-child who suffers manipulation by the school principal. The girl, who is the narrator, narrates her ordeal:

Late one night, the principal had called me out of bed to his office. He congratulated me on my school performance and undertook to finance further education of my choice (p.7)

This demonstrates how vulnerable girls can be, having to be called out of bed by a male school principal is quite scary. One would have expected such an intelligent girl to be treated with dignity and respect at least, because of her outstanding achievements but instead, this becomes a vice all under the pretext of ‘financing her further education’.

In addition to the girl’s unfortunate ordeal, she is also subjected to torment and isolation when her witchcraft is eventually exposed. This is how she expresses it:

I was cruelly tormented by the prospect that for the rest of my life I would be haunted by the demoralising isolation and melancholy that only those already accused of being, and regarded as witches, or wizards, know and understand...I could hardly enjoy what I ate or did...I felt better dead than alive...if only the ground under my feet could have opened up and closed me alive in the bowels of the earth... (p.9).

This is a demonstration by the writer that although witchcraft may have benefits such as facilitating academic excellence as outlined above, certainly society does not approve of it. Witchcraft, once exposed, leads to an individual’s isolation, rejection, and she becomes an outcast in the community. In Hove’s chapter titled ‘*Mother was a Witch*’, he explains that: ...her people had in turn disowned her...she therefore lived alone in a cave (p.10). This only demonstrates the gravity of the cultural offence. It is, however, also unfortunate that the writer uses female figures to illustrate his point. The effects are denigrating and demeaning to the feminine image, thus painting an unpleasant representation.

Similarly, in *Jemedza*, Josiah says, “Loveness, please come to my house for the weekend. ... Get out of my house! Leave my wife’s morning gown.” p.21. This also resonates with the above scenario that she is invited and later humiliated for coming when the wife comes back. As indicated in Kimario's (2014) view, literature raises complex issues such as biases, inequality, gender roles, discrimination and rights. This portrays women as victims and as sex objects that can be hired and fired, which refutes Mbiti’s (1970) kinship ties in the African relational ontology.

Wo/men being the ‘Other’ in Gender Cultural Environment

The society’s faith in their belief system in their spiritual environment is further demonstrated in how the girl child is later raised academically. This is exemplified by the narration of her academic achievements in *Confessions of a Wizard*:

...the explanation of my unusual achievements was simple. I had a team of witches, or wizards’ familiars, zombies, which, unseen, sat next to me in class and noted everything we were taught. They did my homework while I played or slept. When we had to write examinations, the familiars poured into my head all the information I needed to pass top of the class (p.7)

Accordingly, the Zimbabwean community has recreated a spiritual environment based on the belief system in which they believe in witches, God and ancestral spirits and *n’angas* are believed to be a very powerful and influential tool which can be manipulated to achieve

almost anything in life, solve procreation problems and give prophesy about their life experiences.

In *Confessions of a Wizard*, women are generally caught bewitching, for example, ‘I am caught bewitching’ (p.6) and ‘Mother was a witch’ (p.10) while men are portrayed as possessing powerful medicines as is the case with Muchape who possessed the ‘Water of Life’ (p.32) and descended upon Zimbabwe from Malawi with cleansing powers which saw some witches and wizards confessing their past evil deeds and surrendering their concoctions to him (p.33). This negative portrayal undermines the potential and capabilities of the feminine gender.

The writers of the two texts generally portray women in a negative light. All kinds of evil seem to brew from feminine figures. Most female characters in Hove’s text have no names. They are mainly identified by the roles they play, for example, Mother, Witch, and Mistress, while male figures have names assigned to them. The absence of names could suggest a lack of identity. A people without identity is a people without a culture, a people who do not know who they are, and a people of no value or significance. Such is the representation of women in *Confessions of a Wizard*. The treatment of the female gender by the diviner in his search for a witch confirms the same. When Grandpa had gone to the diviner to consult about his health condition, this is what the diviner did:

He asked questions after each bone-throwing. The questions suggested that Grandpa knew someone who was jealous, or nursed hatred or suspicion or something like that against him. The diviner was certain, from his bone-throwing, he said, that such a person existed and was a woman (p. 30).

Women are therefore always on the receiving end and are perceived as potentially hazardous to harbour immoral tendencies like jealousy, hatred and suspicion. Such character representation plays a demeaning role on the feminine gender, thus socialising readers, particularly learners, towards an unbalanced cultural gender view.

Correspondingly, Magwa in *Jemedza* shows the same stereotyping of the female gender through Dzikamai who says, “There are no more real doctors...I realised it upon seeing that even women are now called doctors!... Is there a woman who would want to treat a patient and give injections like what real male doctors do?... Tererai! If you are instructed to get to the rooftop to do roofing, would you do it? ... Theirs is nursing” (p.35).

The scenarios reinforce differentiation between wo/men and put them in a binary, oppositional and hierarchical status that advantages and privileges men at the expense of women. This confirms Plucknette’s (2013) view that female and male will always be different but culturally society has imprinted the differences in such a way that they marginalise a certain gender through stereotyping and sexism that the society has created. Such a hierarchical differentiation affects both genders. This is against Ubuntu, in which wo/men are parts of the whole and none is complete without the other (Taringa, 2019).

Despite the fact that the patriarch had designed their own category of womanhood that fits all women, Tererai in *Jemedza* caused cultural shock when she refused to fit into the category hence Tete panicked and said, “Who had ever thought that a girl child would lose virginity without the parents knowing?” (P.6). Through Tete, *Jemedza* advances a culturally changed gender environment with shifting gender notions that brings a cultural shock. The cultural net that used to fence the girl child had weakened. The position, according to Lynn (2011), destabilises the comfortable assumption in that it opens room for female characters who refute to fit into constructed patriarchal categories. Instead, they affirm Taringa, Nyawaranda and Tatira’s (2019) monster female characters who are sometimes known as women with wings.

Relationships among Humanity, Wildlife and the Natural Environments

The natural environment is related to humans in a number of ways, as portrayed in the literature texts. There is a natural environment and female relatedness portrayal as indicated by Tete’s question, “Who is that man who would want an exhausted field?” Referring to Tererai when she lost her virginity (p.2).

Also in *Jemedza*, Dzikamai says, “My child has been taken by the soil” (p.40). The Pastor at Josiah’s burial says, “A human being came from the soil and therefore will return to the soil. The spirit will go back to the spirit” (P.45).

Similarly, in *Confessions of a Wizard*, Hove, throughout his text, demonstrates that witches and familiars can easily mingle with and manipulate the natural environment. This is evidenced by the witches’ ability to operate in darkness, in thickets and using water as a curative agent to the extent of calling it the ‘Water of Life’, which, when taken, makes people live forever.

The pronouncement in *Jemedza* is evidence of the relatedness of the natural environment to humanity, which fosters a positive environmental ethic. It has the power to ‘take’ people, and it is where humanity ‘came from’, hence related, and the relationship continues as it affords people the final resting place. On the other hand, *Confessions of a Wizard*’s representation of the manipulation of natural resources fosters a negative environmental ethic that may lead to environmental mismanagement, posing a challenge to the preservation of natural resources as they are subject to exploitation by anyone purporting to be magical. A community which has such a belief system is bound to suffer disunity instead of harmony. The scenarios reaffirm an intensified conception of an innate bond, whether biological, psychological or spiritual, conjoining the individual human being and the natural world, which is the phenomenological phenomenon of ‘deep ecology’. The indigeneity of the bioregional manifesto that deems American cultural memories and expressions crucial to the foregoing of another debate of ‘natural contract’ between humans and non-humans to stop the exploitation of the earth’s resources, which refutes the negative environmental consequences of industrialisation. This is the same as biophilia, which is the most basic human trait according to Buell, Heise and Thornber (2011).

Magwa in *Jemedza* has a special way of showing the intricacy between humanity and non-human wildlife environments. He does that in a way that blends well the Zimbabwean traditional culture and modern times. Through Josiah, who says, “A woman does not want to care for someone else’s child. She will take it as a wild cat” (P.6). Magwa, again through Tete says, “Thank you, Lion of the Jungle (*Chihwa*) referring to Josiah’s totem. The one who resides in the bushes (...*vemasango*). Also, through Tererai, who asks, “You want me to be thanking you as if you are an animal?” And through Josiah, who admits that, “Yes! I like that” (p.9). The environmental ethic proffered in *Jemedza* resonates with the ongoing discourse initiated by the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) in 1992, which is spreading across continents. Hence, this scholarship reinforces the discourse by igniting such key deliberations like this. This is furthering Meeker’s (1970) eco-historical stance of putting literature at the centre of understanding and transforming developments that endanger the environment. The discourse grew in lip and bound to the eco-centric and bio-centric stance that it is today.

Magwa, through the character Josiah, shows that men equate women to sex objects. Also, women are a means by which to get sex. *Lobola* is meant to buy sex and is never a sign of love. This is captured when Tererai says, “He is after sex. Can I give him his parcel so that he knows what he is paying *lobola* for? This further confirms the conception of *lobola* as entrapment (Taringa, 2019a). If I continue denying him access to sex, he will leave me” (p.2). Tete, in reply, is dejected and denounces Josiah, that, “He is pastoring for sex with my niece as if he is married. No marriage, no sex!” On the other hand, women feel that if they cannot offer sex packages, they may lose relationships. At the same time, they fear that if they refuse, a man later realises that they are not a virgin. Ngwarai says, “The *lobola* that my brother paid cannot just go down the drain.” (p.64). Women are defined by patriarchal standards that disempower them regarding their sexual rights (Taringa, 2021b).

Culture, pandemic and Gender Stereotyping

Zimbabweans, in particular, believe in God and ancestors. The modern biomedical and African traditional belief systems are complementary. Magwa, through the character Dzikamai in *Jemedza*, demonstrates that when he says, “Have you tried African traditional medicine since the biomedical means have failed? ...you may be employing biomedical means when the conditions are better addressed by appeasing the ancestors.” The view resonates with Nathan (2020) in that humanity deploys all the cultural and traditional resources to try and contain pandemics. Thus, communities revisit their cultural systems and restructure them for survival. Initially, communities battle to know the causes, behaviour, and treatment and reduce the effects of a pandemic. There is usually a blame game on who brought the infection. The narration below shows that the characters have more questions than answers.

Concerning the presentation of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, culture and gender stereotyping, Magwa in *Jemedza* portrays HIV and AIDS as indiscriminate, as it knows no gender, profession, age or innocence. This is captured in the narrations by the characters of the experiences during the height of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Josiah says, “God did not

do it well. On all the body parts, he puts AIDS at the body part loved by all” (p.20) while Tererai says, “Spencer, a medical doctor himself, contracting HIV and AIDS yet he is the one who treats the AIDS patients?” (p.33). The sentiments are evidence of fear and blaming God for the infection. Similarly, Haruchemwi in *Jemedza* (p.5) laments, “What is this kind of creature? What kind of ailment that cannot be treated?” This is evidence of her being hopeless and in despair.

Dzikamai says, “cloth for ancestral appeasement was bought...we brewed beer, ...a bull was named after his uncle.” (p.42). In this case, the character is forced to reflect on their cultural beliefs, which are falling short in addressing the pandemic. The pandemic portrayal in the literature shows humanity’s experiences and how humanity develops resilience and reconstructs its cultural behaviours into life-saving ones. This is related to what Poe (2020) says concerning the Red Death pandemic. It is also in tandem with Nathan (2020), who describes literature as relating to causes, behaviour and effects of pandemics like the black Devil that was virulent and came in sporadic outbreaks with Italy, its epicentre, as a way of making record of their experiences and how they navigate the pandemic infested terrain.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the representation of gender, culture, environment and pandemic in selected literary texts through the lens of ecological systems theory and Shona ontology as an indigenist research paradigm. This is done against the backdrop of a strong distaste for Western liberal feminist approaches. The paper decries such types of Western approaches that view the four phenomena above individually and treat them as independent units. They oppose and alienate one from the other, which is unAfrican. In the Zimbabwean culture and African culture, in general, the four are understood in the context of a truly relational ontology where all things are recognised and respected for their place in the overall system.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that authors, publishers and selection panellists exercise caution as they select set books for schools. This can be achieved through identifying good role models and characters that model responsible life-saving masculinity and femininity in the face of pandemics. Texts that promote rather than denigrate/demean the feminine gender should be preferred during selection to eradicate gender inequalities and stereotypes in an effort to fulfil the dictates of Vision 2030. Also, considering that there are calls for greening the curriculum, selection panellists, authors, and publishers should consider positive environmental ethics as they select literary texts for schools.

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