

Gender Representation of Characters in ChiShona Old World Novels: Implications for Gender Socialization of Secondary School Learners in Zimbabwe

Beatrice Taringa

Abstract

Although scholars acknowledge that instructional materials are a vehicle for norms, values and models of social behaviour through the representations and constructions that they contain (Brugeilles & Cromer 2009:6), ChiShona literary prescribed instructional materials have never been vetted for gender messages the representations of the characters in the novels communicate to pupils and the possible educational implications of the gender messages in the novels, to pupils. This article sets out to qualitatively explore, through content and discourse analysis in terms of gender depiction, the statuses of characters in purposively sampled Zimbabwean Ordinary Level 2010 - 2015 prescribed ChiShona Old World literary texts. It aims to decipher what messages the statuses of the characters convey to 'O' Level pupils. It focuses specifically on the statuses of characters generally categorized as protagonists, heroes/heroines and villains. Findings reveal the depiction of characters is to a large extent sexist. There are forms of gender bias against female characters. As a result, the novels tend to provide positive role models for the boy pupil at the expense of the girl pupil. Overall, the study recommends that biased gender portrayals needs to be addressed through a broad based and gender-sensitive discourse in the classroom in the teaching of ChiShona Old World Novels.

Keywords: gender representation, content analysis, discourse analysis, social learning theory, and gender discourse.

Introduction

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, in Zimbabwe, through the Curriculum Development and Technical Services, identified education as an

area that should incorporate gender equity. Thus, in the Zimbabwean curriculum, gender issues are a cross-cutting theme which is meant to ensure equity and equality. The portrayal of women in low statuses in educational instructional materials does not only negatively affect girl pupils but also boy pupils. The aim of this article is to explore gender depiction of characters in four purposively sampled Zimbabwean ChiShona Ordinary Level 2010-2015 prescribed literary texts. These are Mavengere's *Akanyangira Yaona*, Chakaipa's *Pfumo Reropa*, Mugugu's *Jekanyika* and Chiguvare's *Kutonthodzwa KwaChauruka*. I explore the gender depiction of characters in order to determine the feminine and masculine scripts to which the Ordinary Level exposes boys and girls to, as well as the possible social structural effects of the gender scripts in the novels. I begin by giving the background. After this, I highlight the significance of the study, review related literature, and provides the theoretical and conceptual framework, and research methodology. This is followed by a presentation of findings regarding the gender depiction of male characters in Chakaipa's *Pfumo Reropa*; Mavengere's *Akanyangira Yaona*; and in Mugugu's *Jekanyika*; as well as female characters in Chiguvare's *Kutonthodzwa KwaChauruka*; Chakaipa's *Pfumo Reropa*; and Mugugu's *Jekanyika*. At the same time, I highlight the gender depiction's educational implications. I begin by presenting the depiction of male characters in these novels followed by females. Finally, I draw conclusions from the findings.

Background to the Study

Globally, educational materials, school organisations, school content and curriculum structure, among other elements of education processes and practices, are said to play important roles in socialising learners into different sex roles (Mustapha 2014:69). The study's major assumption is that, literary texts – in this case novels – are key instructional materials in educational processes and practices. The place of the texts in socialising pupils cannot be overemphasised especially as texts are often viewed by pupils as authoritative and therefore have a potential to influence a significantly large and impressionable audience (Mburu & Nyagah 2012). Literary texts also serve as means to facilitate the integration of gender consent among ethnically, racially and culturally diverse populations (Mustapha 2014). These texts serve as basic reading materials and sources of examination in the curriculum, are constantly referred to by pupils as providing guidance in gender relations, and inevitably influence the pupils exposed to them, in terms of gendered livelihood and

behaviour patterns (Mukundan & Nimehchisalem 2005). Thus, the Ordinary Level ChiShona prescribed literary texts, Chakaipa's *Pfumo Reropa*; Mavengere's *Akanyangira Yaona*; Mugugu's *Jekanyika*; and Chiguvare's *Kutonhodzwa KwaChauruka*, play their part in socialising Ordinary Level pupils into gendered sex roles according to the essentialist view (Mustapha 2014:69). So, there have been calls to reform gender-biased learning materials to ensure achievement of the set goals of gender equity and equality (Brugeilles & Cromer 2009; Unterhalter 2005). In this case, it is difficult to start reforming the texts when their gender contents have not been studied.

Most studies in ChiShona literary texts recount stories of marriages (Tatira 2008), represent desirable and undesirable images of women (Gaidzanwa 1985) and comparatively narrate stories of life and death (Taringa 2014). Neither of the two studies that supposedly deal with gender equity, engaged concerns of the representation of the feminine and masculine statuses of characters and its possible effects on young impressionable learners exposed to such representations. It is in this gap, that this study's focus on the gender representation of male and female in the four novels, is imperative. Following the outcome of the findings, it will be proposed that instructional materials for Ordinary Level literary texts be vetted for the feminine and masculine statuses they portray to the boys and girls exposed to them. Such an endeavour is not only in line with the Global and Regional conventions of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and the Southern African Development Community, but also the Zimbabwean National Gender Policy (2004) and critical views from scholarly literature, such as Stromsquist, Lee and Brock-Utne (1998).

Significance of the Study

The research serves a threefold function. *Firstly*, based on Mustapha's (2014) assumptions, schools are powerful educational institutions that transmit dominant values to societies, and function as mechanisms of social control. According to this scholar,

schools transmit values that not only reproduce social class but also maintain gender structures ... and contribute to the reproduction of gender inequalities through its knowledge, methodology and medium (Mustapha 2014: 83).

Thus, the literary texts need vetting to assess if the gender statuses portrayed

by authors in the prescribed novels, foster equity and egalitarianism, which the nation strives to achieve.

Secondly, the study gives insights to stakeholders on the possibility of a gender checklist that may be useful during the vetting of literary texts, and the selection of prescribed literary texts at school.

Thirdly, the point needs to be made that by not vetting instructional texts, is tantamount to leaving the desired goals of the achievement of a Shona society beyond gender inequity and inequality, to chance.

Overall, there is dearth of literature that represent males and females in equal relationships, and of females having the same statuses in society as males. If such texts can be produced, they may provide feminine and masculine characters, that can serve as role models to the Zimbabwean Ordinary Level pupils exposed to them, especially at their impressionable, adolescent developmental stages. Coming next is a brief review of related scholarly literature.

Review of Related Literature and Rationale: Gender Sensitivity of Educational Materials

In her *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature* (1985), Gaidzanwa explores the images of black women in ChiShona, iSiNdebele and English literature in Zimbabwe. She analyses and explores the images of mothers, wives, and single, divorced and widowed women, as well as rural and urban women. She discovers positive as well as negative images of women in literature. Her work does not relate this to gender and education, however. Her research also only concentrates on exploring images of women in literature in general, and not in Old World novels. In contrast, I explore the state of gender representation in relation to both femininity and masculinity of the Zimbabwean secondary school Ordinary Level ChiShona literature texts prescribed for 2010 – 2015, and that in Old World novels. The present study also assesses how such representation may possibly affect both male and female pupils in their learning and general socialisation.

Closer to what I do is the collaborative work of Gudhlanga, Chirimuuta and Bhukuvhani, *Towards a Gender Inclusive Curriculum in Zimbabwe: Opportunities and Challenges* (2012). In this work the three authors set out to critique the gender responsiveness of the curriculum in Zimbabwe focusing on the nature and content of textbooks. Their main objective is to find out the extent to which prescribed textbooks for history, literature and other subjects

in general, have balanced the capturing of heroes and heroines in their content. Their work employed a gender and development (GAD) conceptual framework and analysed English, Maths and History textbooks on their representation of male and female heroines. The authors concluded that both men and women were still depicted in stereotypical ways, depicting males as heroes.

The work takes a general approach regarding the portrayal of males and females in prescribed literature texts for ChiShona, iSiNdebele and English, and concluded that the literature texts supported the oppression of women. This is clear when they say,

Some prescribed literature texts for the three languages Shona, Ndebele, and English support oppression of women and glorify male promiscuity on the grounds that this is our culture, and it is not supposed to be questioned (Gudlanga, Chirimuuta & Bhukuvhani 2012: 45).

This conclusion seems to be biased towards the flawed ‘gender equals women’ understanding. It appears there is no evidence of in-depth qualitative investigation, given that the authors do not even describe the sample of the literature texts that they based their study on. This study moves beyond their study by carrying out an in-depth exploration based on purposively sampled prescribed ChiShona literature texts covering Old World novels, and comparing how males and females are portrayed. Instead of beginning by imposing the analytical category of ‘stereotyping’ *a priori*, I allow gender representation to emerge inductively for both male and female characters, in order to leave room to theorise about the sex - gender dichotomy on the basis of the data from the literary texts and particularly as this potentially impacts the possible gender socialisation of learners.

Theoretical Background

Gender Representation

In order to define gender representation, it is imperative that I define representation first. Representation can be understood in two ways. *Firstly*, it may refer to ‘the action of speaking or acting on behalf of someone’ or the state of being represented by someone. *Secondly*, it may refer to ‘the descriptions or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way’ (*Oxford Dictionary* 2015). In this second sense, the possible synonym to ‘description’ and

‘portrayal’ is ‘depiction’. In this study, I am inclined to the second sense, because of the nature of my main research question. I assume that the concept of representation entails how something, or someone is described, portrayed, or depicted. This resonates with Durkin (1985:110), who says that ‘to represent something or someone, involves the process of description, depiction or symbolization’. In my study, I therefore use ‘representation’, description, ‘portrayal’ and ‘depiction’ interchangeably.

In the light of the above definition of representation, gender representation in this study, also means that gender, and the represented roles and statuses of male and female in literature, are social constructions, as portrayed, described, depicted or symbolized in ChiShona prescribed literary texts. In my view, gender representation is not synonymous with the depiction of gender roles associated with women characters only. Previous studies tend to suggest that gender representation equals representation of women (Gaidzanwa 1985; Gudlanga, Chirimuuta & Bhukuvhani 2012). This view is a fallacy, since it does not include the fact that both female *and* male characters, are socially constructed, as they are represented in literature according to certain prevalent, dominant, or even hegemonic, social values and norms.

Textbooks as Agents of Socialisation

Barton and Sakwa (2012) clearly articulate the role of texts in socialising learners within a school setting. *First*, they identify textbooks as one of the major agents in the transmission of social values and attitudes within the school setting. In relation to this they argue that ‘Curriculum design and textbooks are the most overt areas where gender bias can be detected and schools tend to present students with images of male and female roles that reflect the past rather than the present or the future’ (Barton & Sakwa 2012: 175).

Second, they draw attention to the authoritative status that schools accord to textbooks. They aver that,

Textbooks, in particular, which are presented to students as a preferred and authoritative source of knowledge, play a key role in shaping the students’ images of the social world and its actors (Barton & Sakwa 2012: 175).

Consequently, they are very particular regarding the role of textbooks in gender socialisation. They state that,

The gendered portrayal of social roles, social status, and personality traits in textbooks present a particular view of the social world to students (Barton & Sakwa 2012:175).

As a result, Barton and Sakwa (2012: 175) conclude that school textbooks represent a range of choices from any culture, but that in patriarchal cultures, males are represented in dominant and dominating ways. They further argue that textbooks frequently support the legitimacy of the *status quo*. I also take heed of their call to note that textbooks not only comprise a medium whereby hegemonic social reality is represented and reflected to students. Prescribed literature, are also tools for challenging existing stereotypes (Barton & Sakwa 2012: 175).

The objective of the present study is to examine how gender roles are portrayed in selected ChiShona literature texts prescribed for Ordinary Level learners in Zimbabwean secondary schools. I highlight the potential gender socialisation effects that the gender messages of the novels may have on both male and female learners. By determining the gender representations and highlighting the potential socialising effects I suggest possible teacher talk around gender issues in a bid to achieve gender equity in a learning environment. I agree with Barton and Sakwa (2012: 4) who note the importance of teachers' mediation of textbooks. They argue,

the impact of the textbook on learners is determined not just by the content but by the teacher's mediation that may influence students' interpretation of the text (Barton & Sakwa 2012: 175).

Social Learning Theory

In this study I agree with Lee (2016: 4) in assuming that, 'gender role portrayals in teaching materials affect how learners think, feel and behave with regard to the two genders'. This assumption is based on Bandura's social learning theory (Lee 2016:4). The main ideas of Bandura's social learning theory are that, within the determinant of the environment, people learn and reproduce behaviour through observation. This extends to the possibility that if there exists any gender stereotyping in school textbooks that portrays men and women in different subcultures, this will be imitated and followed by school children (Lee 2016). As I have already noted in the background section of this paper, learners view textbooks as authoritative. In light of this, learners are

likely to absorb and assimilate what textbooks present without much criticism. What is important for me in this article, is Lee's (2016:4) observation that,

Repeated exposure to the written texts and visual images, consciously and subconsciously, will result in students' internalization of the textbook authors' gender perceptions. Any gender bias present in textbooks can create life-long egregious impacts on young learners at their impressionable age, including recall and comprehension of material academic and career choices and their understanding of social equality, and development of social values, behaviour and self-esteem.

The focus of this article is therefore on revealing the kind of gender messages to which secondary school pupils are exposed in ChiShona Old World novels, and in terms of which they engage in social learning. Once a ChiShona literature text is prescribed for Ordinary Level it means learners will interact with these texts for at least two years. The next subheading outlines the research methodology for this study.

Research Methodology

This study follows a revelatory case study design. Bryman (2012:70) identifies five types of case studies, viz. 1) a critical case study; 2) an extreme or unique case study; 3) a representative or typical case study; 4) a revelatory case study; and 5) a longitudinal case study. I employ the revelatory case study design.

The revelatory case study inclines towards dealing with a phenomenon that has not been explored previously, or which has not previously been available for scientific research, and that the data being generated reveals new forms of understanding of a social reality or challenge, for purposes of transformation. Gender representation in Old World ChiShona Ordinary Level prescribed literature has not been explored before. My focus seeks to fill this gap in research. Concomitantly, my unit of study is purposive sampling from the prescribed documents or literary texts, in line with my main research question. I agree with Punch (2009:162) that 'we cannot study everyone everywhere doing everything'.

I also engage qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis is 'a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying of themes or patterns' (Hsieh & Shannon 2005:1277). I opt for conventional content

analysis since I explore gender representation according to the revelatory case study approach, in selected ChiShona literature texts independently of existing gender representation theories. The conventional content analysis approach is suitable when existing theory or research on a phenomenon is limited (Hsieh & Shannon 2005: 1277).

Since the data is in Shona, I translate the Shona excerpts, phrases, and words, from the ChiShona source language into the English target language. As is the case when one deals with translated literature, no matter how much I may aspire to achieve equivalence, what I can achieve in my translation from the source into the target language, is only an approximate equivalence (Boushaba 1988).

I also triangulate the content analysis with critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis is both theory and method. It is a general term for a number of approaches ‘to analyse written and spoken discourse’ (Yule 1996: 139). In the case of this study, critical discourse analysis enables the researcher to deal with latent manifestations of gender representation. Therefore, in analysing data, I go beyond looking at words, sentences, and passages, and deal with the Shona general cultural framework within which the authors have formulated their gender representations. This enables me to explain the possible consequences or implications that the authors’ gender representations may have, for Ordinary Level pupils in the light of the ChiShona context and cultural influences that affect the way the authors uncritically portray gender. Below I begin by exploring the gender depiction of male characters in three of the novels, followed by the gender depictions of females in three others.

Findings¹

Male Characters in Chakaipa’s *Pfumo Reropa*

Chakaipa portrays a male character, Tanganeropa as hero. He portrays Tanganeropa as famous, renowned and worthy of glory. Tanganeropa leads a war against chief Ndyire and wins the war. Chakaipa writes; *Zuva rakachiti rogara miti, mambo akaona hapana chakadaro, hondo yaTangan-eropa ikati*

¹ Please note that in this study I refer to the real-life authors, of the novels, by name, and not ‘implied author’, ‘model author’, ‘inferred author’, ‘abstract author’, ‘authorial character’, or, ‘narrator’ for that matter. These concepts are important for the study of narrational communicative situations, but, as said, it is not the aim of this study, to deal with data, generated via these theorisings.

yasvika Tanganeropa akatungamirira irwo rumbo rokurwa richingoiimbwa (p. 103). In the word *akatungamirira* (he was leading) *a-* refers to Tanganeropa as the leader, *-tungamir* –a verb root that assigns the leading role to Tanganeropa. The word *rumbo* means song. The war song attributes fame to Tanganeropa as captured in the following excerpt:

Mbiri ina vashe tonorwa (Fame has the chief we will fight)
Yowerere tonorwa (Oooh, we will fight)
Mbiri ina Tanganeropa (Fame has Tanganeropa we will fight)
Yowerere tonorwa (Oooh, we will fight)
Tanganeropa ishumba tonorwa (Tanganeropa is a lion we will fight)
Yowerere tonorwa (p. 102) (Oooh, we will fight)

The key word in the song is *mbiri*. This word means glory or fame. Tanganeropa is therefore the subject of fame regarding his bravery in leading and fighting in the war in this war song. He becomes renowned because he won the war. This is clear when the author of the novel, Chakaipa, describes the reaction of Tanganeropa's enemies as follows; *Machinda akanga ashevedzwa akasvika akawana guta rangove dota. Zvavakazviona, vakabva vakanda mapfumo pasi ndokuzvipira kuna Tanganeropa*, (p. 104). (The sub chiefs who had been called arrived and found the village already in ashes. When they saw this they threw their spears down and surrendered themselves to Tanganeropa.) After winning the war, Tanganeropa also becomes a hero. He is installed as the chief. Chakaipa describes this development as follows:

Vanhu vose vakafadzwa nokuita kwake zvokuti vakabva vamuita mambo wavo. Ushe hukabva hwabuda mumba maGwiba hwoenda kumba kwahwo. Tanganeropa akafara chaizvo pamusana pokuti akanga aita zvainzi naHaripotse hazvigone kuitika (p. 104).

(All the people were delighted with what he had achieved and they made him their chief. The Chieftaincy passed from the house of Gwiba and went to its rightful home. Tanganeropa was very happy because he had achieved what Haripotse had said was not achievable.)

'*Vanhu vose vakafadzwa ... vakabva vamuita mambo wavo*' (People were happy ... they made him their chief), implies that the people are happy and therefore rewards Tanganeropa by making him their chief. He rules by the will

of the people. So, Tanganeropa becomes a unanimous people's choice. Tanganeropa does not impose himself upon the people. This makes Tanganeropa a hero considering how villainous Gwiba had become chief. It seems Gwiba had not followed the proper custom regarding chieftaincy. The following sentence insinuates this suspicion. '*Ushe hukabva hwabuda mumba maGwiba hwoenda kumba kwahwo*'. (The Chieftaincy then passed from the house of Gwiba and went to its rightful home.) This makes Gwiba villain, since '*Ushe hukabva hwabuda mumba maGwiba*' (The chieftaincy moved out of the house of Gwiba); and makes Tanganeropa victorious as, chieftaincy goes to Tanganeropa, the rightful heir, '*hwoenda kumba kwahwo*'). The phrase, '*hwoenda kumba kwahwo*' (goes to its rightful home), indicates that Tanganeropa is the rightful heir to the chieftainship and Gwiba is not legitimate.

Further, we consider the sentence, '*Tanganeropa akafara chaizvo pamusana pokuti akanga aita zvainzi naHaripotse hazvigone kuitika*'. (Tanganeropa was very happy because he had achieved what Haripotse had said was not achievable), Chakaipa represents Tanganeropa as heroic. Generally, most heroes do what others think impossible. In relation to Tanganeropa, Chakaipa insinuates this. Chakaipa writes, '*akanga aita zvainzi naHaripotse hazvigone kuitika*' (had achieved what Haripotse had said was not achievable). The phrase, '*hazvigone kuitika*' refers to what cannot happen or the impossible. But in Tanganeropa's case, he had done what Haripotse thought could not be done. *Akakanga aita* means he had done it. Generally, Tanganeropa is a hero as he is a great person with great courage (McIntosh 2013) who is admired for repossessing the chieftainship that has been lost to the Gwiba family, a possibility that VaHaripotse had ruled out.

Chakaipa also pits Tanganeropa's heroic achievements and fame against villainous chiefs (*madzishe*).

Izvi hazvina kufadza mamwe madzishe aakanga akaganhurana naye. Nokudaro vakaisa misoro pamwe chete kuti vamuparadze asi vakamutadza. Ivo ndivo vakazoparadzwa. Mamwe madzishe aitya akakanda mapfumo pasi asati asvika. Mukurumbira wezita rake wakapararira kumbvazuva nokumadokero, kuchamhembe nokumaodzanyemba (p. 105).

(This did not delight the other chiefs with whom he shared borders. Thus they put their heads together in order to destroy him but they failed to overcome him. They are the ones who were destroyed while

the other chiefs who feared him put down their weapons before his arrival. The glory of his name spread from east to west and from north to south).

'Izvi hazvina kufadza mamwe madzishe aakanga akaganhurana naye'. (This did not delight the other chiefs with whom he shared borders.). this sentence implies other chiefs are not happy about Tanganeropa's heroic achievements leading to his chieftaincy. This is clear in the phrase, *'Izvi hazvina kufadza mamwe madzishe'* (this did not make other chiefs happy). These other chiefs' unhappiness leads them to plot against Tanganeropa as a team.

'Nokudaro vakaisa misoro pamwe chete kuti vamuparadze asi vakamutadza'. (Thus, they put their heads together in order to destroy him but they failed to overcome him). This sentence implies the other chiefs' evil intentions against Tanganeropa. It is also an idiom, *'vakaisa misoro pamwe chete'* (they put their heads together), which means they schemed together. The intention of working together is *'kuti vamuparadze'* (in order to destroy him). The word *vamuparadze* is from the word *paradza* which means destroy. The other chiefs' intention is evil and therefore villainous. The neighbouring chiefs plan to destroy Tanganeropa's empire.

In light of the above analysis regarding the evil intention of other chiefs, Chakaipa hails Tanganeropa's heroism. He indicates that the chiefs fail to defeat Tanganeropa. Chakaipa declares, *'asi vakamutadza'* (but they failed to overcome him) and *'Ivo ndivo vakazoparadzwa'* (They are the ones who were defeated). *Vakamutadza* is from the word *kutadza* which means fail. The import of *vakamutadza* therefore is that they failed to defeat Tanganeropa. In fact, this sentence implies that because of fear other chiefs just back down before Tanganeropa arrives in their villages for the fight, *'Mamwe madzishe aitya akakanda mapfumo pasi asati asvika'*. (The other chiefs who feared him put down their weapons before his arrival.). The idiom, *'akakanda mapfumo pasi'* (put down their weapons), means that some chiefs cowardly surrendered. The part that reads, *'asati asvika'* (before his arrival), insinuates that of Tanganeropa is so powerful that that other chiefs do not wait to fight with him but surrender after hearing about him only. Finally, Chakaipa crowns Tanganeropa's heroism by employing the word *mukurumbira*. Chakaipa writes, *'Mukurumbira wezita rake wakapararira kumbvazuva nokumadokero, kuchamhembe nokumaod-zanyemba'*. (The glory of his name spread from east to west and from north to south.) *Mukurumbira* means glory/ fame/ renown.

Chakaipa further indicates that Tanganeropa's fame (*Mukurumbira*) in all directions. He says, '*kumabvazuva nokumadokero, kuchamhembe nokumadzaneyemba*' (from east to west and from north to south). This phrase suggests that Tanganeropa, a male character, is a great hero, and has influence over a large territory in all directions.

The above analysis reveals Tanganeropa's heroic achievements. He is a victor in defeating other chiefs and also a victor in attaining chieftaincy. Through such portrayal, Chakaipa provides male pupils with a positive role model with regards to heroic traits and conversely denying such a positive role model to the female pupils. Chakaipa indirectly communicates to girl pupils the gender message that heroic activities are neither theirs nor concern them. The same portrayal may also communicate the gender message that there may be females who ventured in the activities but did not fare well as to be worth mentioning. Chakaipa empowers boy pupils and disempowers girl pupils through such unequal portrayal. Teachers need to take heed of Lee's (2016) observation that,

Any gender bias present in textbooks can create life-long egregious impacts on young learners at their impressionable age, including recall and comprehension of material academic and career choices understanding of social equality, and development of social values, behaviour and self-esteem.

They may need to engage gender discourse in the classroom setting with regards to 'the absence' of females, or silence about the different kinds of presences of females in and around battles. They may need to expose learners to how women's leadership in the winning of battles, have not, and do not necessarily involve physical fighting, but reason and persuasion, but, also physically, their other involvements, such as caring for the wounded, providing food and clothing, which is not written about. For example, in Zimbabwe we have a female spirit medium, Mbuya Nehanda who was involved in the first war of liberation (the first Chimurenga) through giving spiritual guidance. Below I explore how gender depiction plays itself out in males focusing on Mavengere's *Akanyangira Yaona*.

Male Characters Mavengere's *Akanyangira Yaona*

Mavengere, in *Akanyangira Yaona*, depicts Tarusariranhemo's heroic

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achievement. Tarusariranhamo saves his father, chief Musuruvari, himself and many others from death after overhearing a conspiracy by Tarurera to kill them. Tarurera wants to kill chief Musuruvari and his heir apparent, Tarusariranhamo, in order to wrestle chieftaincy from Musuruvari. The conspiracy is clear from the following:

Ndange ndichida kunobaya Musuruvari nepfumo rangu iri tigonyatsotora ushe hana dzakadzikama....ndikabata kamwana kake kaye Tarusariranhamo ndinokapwatisa. Ndakanzwa kuti ndiko kanonyanya (p. 82).

(I wanted to stab Musuruvari with this spear of mine if I catch his child called Tarurera I will crush him. I heard that he is the one who causes trouble.)

Tarusariranhamo hears this plot and decides to warn his father and the rest of the family members about the impending danger. He says;

Zvotoita pano ndezvizvi Tokurasei. Wanzwa vachiti vanoda kunopisa dzimba dzedu. Saka iwe wochimhanyira kumusha kunotaurira variko. Iniwo ndonoudza vanababa avo vari kuridza ngoma vakananga kuChidziva.p82.

(This is what we must do Tokurasei. You heard them saying they want to burn our houses. So you run home and tell those that are there. I will go and tell our fathers who are beating drums going to Chidziva.)

Tarurera panics upon realising that Tarusariranhamo has discovered his plot. He worries,

Hevo varume, tinenge tanyanga yaona (p. 83). (Hey gentlemen, it looks like we are ambushing people who have already seen us.)

In light of the above background Musuruvari acknowledges Tarusariranhamo's heroic achievements. He says,

Tinotenda imi Save nokuti ndimi makazviponesa mukararamisawo navamwe vazhinji kwazvo. Makaramba kufa pamwe nesu matera tinovata nokukanganwa kwatakaisa nhahwamaringa. Tinokutendai

baba nokuti makaramba kumonyororwa mutsipa sehuku ... (p. 88).

(We thank you *Save* because it is you who saved yourself and saved the lives of many others too. You refused to die together with us cowards who sleep and forget where we have put the *nhahwamaringa*. We thank you, father, because you refused to have your neck wrung like a chicken....)

In ‘*Tinotenda imi Save*’ (We thank you *Save*), *Save* is a totem. In Shona culture great achievements is recognised by thanking a person through totemic praise poetry (*chidao*). So in mentioning *Save* Musuruvari is thanking his son Tasariranhamo in the traditional special way. The use of the totem ‘*Save*’ indicates that chief Musuruvari is really grateful about Tasariranhamo’s role. Tasariranhamo’s role is clear in the following; ‘...*nokuti ndimi makazviponesa mukararamisawo navamwe vazhinji kwazvo*’. (...because it is you who saved yourself and also saved many others too.) The key words are *makazviponesa* and *mukararamisawo*. *Makazviponesa* is from the word *kuponesa* which means to save and *mukararamisawo* is from the word *raramisa* which means to let live. Mavengere seems to be communicating to the Ordinary Level pupils the gender message that heroic achievements are a preserve of males. In the next section I explore male characters in Mugugu’s *Jekanyika*.

Male Characters in Mugugu’s *Jekanyika*

Mugugu depicts the male character, Jekanyika in terms of male heroism. Jekanyika goes out to look for his father. He ends up involved in a war between chief Chipezvero and chief Mupambawashe. Jekanyika fights as one of Chipezvero soldiers. In the war, Jekanyika puts up an unparalleled fight. He is therefore very instrumental in the way that Chipezvero becomes victorious against Mupambawashe. For example, Mugugu describes Jekanyika’s fighting prowess as follows:

Jekanyika aiti akazunza chiuno, akasimudza tsvimboyake, waizongoona munhu ati zvambarara pasi, afuga rake ega. Aiti akatekesha munhu musoro oimbira kana kudetemberera achiti, Hohodza iwe! Ndohohodza kani! (pp. 59 - 60).

(Jekanyika would shake his waist, when he raised his knobkierie, you would see a person lying on the ground, the person has covered

himself in his blanket alone. When he hits someone's head he would sing or recite an ancestral praise poem, saying, Hammer them! I am definitely hammering.)

After the victory, chief Chipezvero singles out Jekanyika for his heroism. He declares:

'Pavarwi vose vanga vari mukurwa hapana asingazivi muenzi watanga tinaye mukati medu. Ndanzwa machinda navarwi vakawanda kwazvo vachingotaura kuti, Hohodza! Hohodza! Nemiwo mose muri pano ndinoda kuti muzive Hohodza uyu. Kwaanobva hatikuzivi, chaanoda hatichizivi, kwaanoenda hatikuzivi. Handisati ndamboona murume mumwe achiuraya vavengi vakawanda zvakadaro...Tinongoziva kuti murwi asingaenzaniswe. Dai panga pasina iye misoro yedu ingadai yati ware ware muchivanze chino. Izvozvi Rufaro uyu angadai achingunotsvaira mumba mavahosi vaMupambwawashe (p. 65).

(Among all the soldiers who were in the battle no one does not know the visitor who was among us from the start. I heard many advisors and soldiers saying, Hohodza! Hohodza! Even all of you here I want you to know about this Hohodza. We do not know where he comes from, we do not know what he wants, or we do not know where he is going. I have never before seen one man killing so many enemies. We only know that he is an incomparable warrior. Were it not for him, our heads would have been strewn all over this compound. Even now Rufaro might thus be sweeping in the hut of Mupambwawashe's senior wife.)

'Pavarwi vose vanga vari mukurwa hapana asingazivi muenzi watanga tinaye mukati medu'. (Among all the soldiers who were in the battle no one does not know the visitor who was among us from the start). The key phrase here is *Pavarwi vose vanga vari mukurwa* (among all the fighters who were in the fight), is a comparative phrase. Mugugu implies that Jekanyika, a visitor, came to be known among all other warriors who were fighting. Chipezvero isolates Jekanyika as the outstanding warrior. Chipezvero reminds other fighters about their remarks about Jekanyika in, *'Ndanzwa machinda navarwi vakawanda kwazvo vachingotaura kuti, Hohodza! Hohodza!'* Chipezvero insinuates that

he is not the only one that Jekanyika has impressed. The key phrase is *navarwi vakawanda kwazvo...* (and so many fighters). Jekanyika does not impress only chief Chipezvero but many others in the war. Such a portrayal of Jekanyika is heroic. Even the chief and his soldiers acknowledge the heroic contribution that Jekanyika has made in defending Chipezvero's chiefdom.

Chief Chipezvero crowns Jekanyika more explicitly when he says, '*Handisati ndamboona murume mumwe achiuraya vavengi vakawanda zvakadaro. Tinongoziva kuti murwi asingaenzaniswe*'. (I have never before seen one man killing so many enemies. He is an incomparable fighter.) Chipezvero has never seen a man like that Jekanyika – one man who kills so many enemies. The climax of Chipezvero's declaration of Jekanyika as a hero lies in, '*Tinongoziva kuti murwi asingaenzaniswe*'. (We only know that he is an incomparable warrior.) The idiom, '*murwi asingaenzaniswe*' (an incomparable warrior), implies Jekanyika is an outstanding fighter and that his fighting prowess is a cut above the rest. Jekanyika saves Chipezvero and his people from death. Chipezvero uses the following idiom to acknowledge this, '*Dai panga pasina iye misoro yedu ingadai yati ware ware muchivanze chino*'. (If he was not here our heads would have been strewn all over this compound.) Chief Chipezvero implies that he and his people could have been all dead. Further, concerning the sentence, '*Izvozvi Rufaro uyu angadai achingunotsvaira mumba mavahosi vaMupambwawashe*'. (Even now Rufaro might thus be sweeping in the hut of Mupambwawashe's senior wife.): chief Chipezvero, implies that his daughter Rufaro would have been taken since chief Mupambwawashe was fighting chief Chipezvero so that he takes Rufaro to be his junior wife. So, if it were not of Jekanyika's prowess, chief Chipezvero could have been defeated, killed and Rufaro his daughter taken. Thus, to Chief Chipezvero, Jekanyika is the saviour of his chiefdom.

Jekanyika's heroism culminates in receiving a reward. Chief Chipezvero honours Jekanyika by giving Jekanyika his daughter Rufaro to him as a wife. He announces:

.... *ndavakupa Rufaro kunaJekanyika kuti ave mudzimai wake. Varume vakange vaona kurwa kwaJekanyika, Hohodza, vakafarira zvakanga zvaitwa namambo wavo. Rufaro mwanangu, handisi kukumanikidza kuti ude mukomana uyu, asi unofanira kuziva kuti ndinoda kuita rukudzo* (p. 65).

(I am giving Rufaro to Jekanyika to be his wife. The men who had

seen Jekanyika, Hohodza fighting were happy with what their chief had done. Rufaro, my daughter, I am not forcing you to love this boy, but you should know that I want to express honour.)

The gist of the announcement is '*ndavakupa* (I am giving) Rufaro *kuna Jekanyika* (Rufaro to Jekanyika) *kuti ave mudzimai wake*'. He concludes that, '*ndavakupa Rufaro kunaJekanyika kuti ave mudzimai wake*'. (I am giving Rufaro to Jekanyika to be his wife.) '*ndavakupa*' is from '*kupa*' which means to give. *Mudzimai wake* means his wife. The sentence, '*Rufaro mwanangu, handisi kukumanikidza kuti ude mukomana uyu, asi unofanira kuziva kuti ndinoda kuita rukudzo*' reflects Chief Chipezvero's main concern; honoring Jekanyika. The key words are '*handisi kukumanikidza kuti ude mukomana uyu*' (I am not forcing you to love this boy) and '*ndinoda kuita rukudzo*' (I want to express honour.) This is in fact a defamiliarisation, or even deconstruction, or refraction of the traditional romance genre, where the girl serves as the prize to be won by the hero. This speaks to a more gender-sensitive author. Old World novel authors ground their works in traditional Shona culture narrative. All the men at the gathering see Chipezvero's gesture as appropriate. They are happy. '*Varume vakange vaona kurwa kwaJekanyika, Hohodza, vakafarira zvakanga zvaitwa namambo wavo*'. (The men who had seen Jekanyika, Hohodza fighting were happy with what their chief had done to him.)

The excerpts, regarding Jekanyika's heroism, I have analysed above, provide 'a wide range of role models for male pupils compared to female pupils' (Saleem & Zubair 2013:70). The authors depict males in glorified, active, and dominating roles. Men are the dominant figures and much space is given to male characters. Activities of males are shown as heroic and prestigious. 'Males are the role models and their characters are ideally depicted; they are shown to have good, extraordinary skills and qualities, whereas females are shown as ordinary members of society'. (Jabeen & Ilyas 2012:78-89). Therefore, in these Old World novels selected for this study, female pupils may have limited heroic activities to identify with, while male pupils are offered wide range of heroic activities. Thus, female and male pupils may be learning differently, depending on the way males and females are projected in the instructional materials and in this case in the novels. Having explored gender depiction in relation to male characters the following section explores gender depiction of female characters. First, I consider Chiguvare's *Kutonhodzwa KwaChauruka*.

Female Characters in Chiguvare's *Kutonhodzwa KwaChauruka*

Sexism is even more evident with regards to contrasting evidence regarding the achievements of women in the novels. In two of the novels the authors have women involved in heroic activities; yet they are not projected as protagonists. For example, Chimwecho, an old woman in Chiguvare's *Kutonhodzwa KwaChauruka*, leads Chief Chauruka's army and plundering expeditions. This is aptly captured in the author's remark, '*VanaMutonhodza vakashamiswa kuona kachembere kakange kachinekaira kari pamberi kakabata mudonzvo nenyere yegona kachikaida kushaura rumbo. Ndiko kaive musimbotti wehondo yaChauruka*' (p. 25). (Mutonhodza's army were shocked to see a tiny old woman confidently walking in front holding a walking stick and a sacred trumpet leading the song at the top of her voice. She was a pillar of Chauruka's war.) The key phrase regarding the role Chimwecho is '*Ndiko kaive musimbotti wehondo yaChauruka*'. The '*musimbotti*' means center pole/ pillar. As a center pole/ pillar Chimwecho leads the army. '*kachembere kakange kachinekaira kari pamberi*'. (The tiny old woman was confidently walking in front.) Pamberi (in front), refers to a leading position.

Chiguvare seems to trivialise women's leadership attributes in the army. Chiguvare attributes all the positives this tiny old woman displays to magic and hence, '*nenyere yegona kachikaida kushaura rumbo*'. (and a sacred trumpet leading the song at the top of her voice). In Shona culture gona and nyere are tools associate with destructive magical powers. Thus Chiguvare portrays this tiny old woman as a magician and a sacred trumpet leading the song at the top of her voice. Through such portrayal, Chiguvare justifies the centrality of her position in army and her confidence and energetic walking and singing as nothing to do with skill but magic. However, Chiguvare confirms that, '*Ndiko kaive musimbotti wehondo yaChauruka*'. (She was a pillar of Chauruka's war). The fact that Chiguvare attributes this tiny old woman's heroic activities to magic, costs her a heroic recognition as she is instead treated as a witch.

Her achievements, as a pillar of Chauruka's army, are tied to her magical prowess related to *nyere yegona* (sacred trumpet). The achievement is therefore not attributed to her personal attributes or traits in contrast to the male heroes I considered above, whose heroic activities are tied to their personal attributes. The following excerpt testifies to this:

Hapana chandinoda kuti muite asi kana muchinge masvika kuna iye Chauruka, murume ane mwoyo unenge wechikadzi anorwa namakona, muroyi muudzei kuti zvanzi naDzumbunu hokoyo’ (p. 14). (There is nothing that I want you to do but when you meet Chauruka, a man who has a feminine heart, who fights with magic, a witch, tell him that Dzumbunu says beware.) The key phrase that demean women’s prowess in the army is ‘... *murume ane mwoyo unenge wechikadzi anorwa namakona*’. (...a man who has a feminine heart, who fights with magic.) This insinuates that women who are successful army leaders, resort to magic.

Chiguvare, through such portrayal, implies that use of magic is feminine. Chiguvare seems to communicate two major gender messages. Firstly, he communicates that women cannot be heroic unless they use magic. Secondly, he communicates that even when they employ magic their successes are short term.

In light of these excerpts, achieving heroic activities through magic is stereotypically a strategy that women employ. This confirms what Zulu (2012:58) describes as the ‘construction of debased images of women in order to contrast with men and build up images of superiority of men’. This may promote the perpetuation of gender stereotyping if female pupils through *Kutonhodzwa KwaChauruka* are led to believe that they can only succeed in heroic activities when aided by supernatural powers. Also, that when girl pupils surpass boys, pupils simply think it is ascribed to magic. The way Chiguvare portrays the ability of males and females to lead the army may communicate a binary and oppositional gender conception. It is important to note that in traditional Shona culture, in some cases when girls excel it is magic. This is an issue that teachers can use and make the subject for an educational gender- sensitive discourse in class. The next novel I explore regarding the gender depiction of female characters, is Chakaipa’s *Pfumo Reropa*.

Female Characters in Chakaipa’s *Pfumo Reropa*

Chakaipa, in his *Pfumo Reropa*, seems to demean women’s role in a war situation despite women’s engagement in a heroic activity. For example, a group of women kill chief Ndyire. First it is important to note that the women are determined to participate in the war. The women defy an instruction to go back home. The phrase, ‘*asi vakaramba vakati vanoda kufa navarume vavo*’

(but they refused and said they wanted to die with their husbands), implies this. The key word is *vakaramba*. This word is from *ramba* which means refuse. The instruction that the women defy is ‘... *vakataurira vakadzi kuti vachidzokera kumusha*’ (pp. 102-103). (... they told all the women to go back home.) The key word in this phrase, *vachidzokera* (to go back), is from the word *dzokera*. *Dzokera* means go back. This suggests that women are neither fit nor can meaningfully contribute to victory in the war. The instruction further implies that men think they can defeat the army on their own without the help of women. However, as I have already indicated above, the women refuse (*vakaramba*) to go back home.

Eventually the women make a heroic contribution. Chakaipa describes this contribution vividly. He writes,

Vakadzi kungovati bamama, vakafunga kuti vaakuya kuzovauraya, vakagoti navo nemete. Murume akashaya zvokuita. Vakamutema-tema musoro wese zvokuti pakauya varume, vakawana changamire chava chando (pp. 103 - 104).

(When the women saw him, they thought he was coming to kill them, they confronted him. The man could not do anything. They chopped his whole head off so that that when the men came they found him already dead.)

Chakaipa shows that women can contribute meaningfully in the war in spite of the fact that men underestimate them. In the idiom, ‘*Murume akashaya zvokuita*’. (The man could not do anything.), *murume* (man) refers to chief Ndyire who comes out from hiding in a grannery to meet his death at the hands of women who are part of Haripotse’s army. Chakaipa implies that chief Ndyire is overwhelmed by these women when he says *akashaya zvokuita* (he could not do anything). This indicates that chief Ndyire could not defend himself from the fighting women. ‘*Vakamutema-tema musoro wese zvokuti pakauya varume, vakawana changamire chava chando*’. (They chopped his whole head off so that when the men came they found him already dead.) Since the women killed an evil persona, it means the women acted courageously. Their names are therefore worth mentioning.

Despite this heroic achievement the author does not identify the women by their names. I agree with Mkuchu (2004:134) who argues that,

The absence of names signifies the low status associated with the female gender. A name is an important identity which signifies a person's existence, position in society and power relations between females and males in the family and the community at large. This omission of names of female characters can have negative effects for the formation of positive identities in female learners.

Generally, in the two excerpts above, women's heroic activities are made invisible. The women are spoken about. They are not speaking subjects. This excludes women and keeps them out of the main plot. It renders them invisible. There is therefore a gender-privileging of male heroic achievements (Zulu 2012:58). In traditional Shona culture women are expected to sit back while men face danger. Despite the lack of status of women engaged in heroic activities as protagonists and the lack of identification by names, this glimpse of heroines in action, nevertheless provides female pupils with characters of their gender. It therefore gives girl pupils an opportunity to be more engaged and remember the activities of the women characters. In this case, the Old World novels, at least partially provides positive representations of women concerning gender roles. This gives more evidence for Cook's (2013) findings that there are things that defy traditional gender stereotyping regarding males and females. Thus, Freitheim (2014:131) argues 'that previous studies relied on the contrast between masculinity and femininity'; yet the reality in Old World novels regarding the engagement of characters in heroic activities is much more complex than the oversimplified understanding of men as strong and dominant and women as the weak and manipulated. The above scenario in *Pfumo Reropa*, though the heroic activities by women are unappreciated, affirms the Africana womanist theory that is characterised by flexible role players (Hudson-Weems, 2000). Again, this is in tandem with Oyewumi (2010: 32) who says, 'Men and women's relationships are neither binary, oppositional nor hierarchical, but rather complimentary'. In light of these observations a gender sensitive discourse in the class can revolve around female courage. In a way this confirms Barton and Sakwa's (2012) observation that textbooks are also tools for challenging existing stereotypes, in this case stereotypes coming from the Shona cultural background that the authors of the novels assume. The silence about the presence of women in novels, could be because of power-relations in traditional Shona society and community. Old

World Shona novels assume traditional culture and practices. Teachers can use the under-representations, and silences about women, as an educational, or teaching moment, where this can be used for the enlightening of the pupils about their gender relations, and the blind spots that exist in Shona society and community. This is consistent with Barton and Sakwa's (2012: 175) observation that teachers have a huge responsibility for providing a more versatile view on gender representation than is provided in the textbooks. In the next section I explore whether this plays out in Mugugu's *Jekanyika*.

Female Characters in Mugugu's *Jekanyika*

Mugugu's Madzudzo in *Jekanyika* says to chief Chaitezvi: '*Madii kuti titumire vakadzi vanogona kuchapa magwa kumhiri kwaZambezi kwasahwira wedu muRozvi uya kuti atume mauto anozotibatsirazvimwe tingamboedza kubvisa Godzi*' (p. 65). (What do you say to the idea of sending women who are able to row boats across the Zambezi to our ally the Rozvi Chief to ask for reinforcement soldiers to assist us ... somehow we can try to drive away Godzi.) Mugugu, through Madzudzo, though could not identify these women by names acknowledges that they have the skill of sailing across the Zambezi. The phrase '*Madii kuti titumire vakadzi vanogona kuchapa magwa*' (What do you say to the idea of sending women who are able to row boats), indicates that chief Chaitezvi is gender flexible as his people acquire skills regardless of gender. Mugugu's Madzudzo, one of chief Chaitezvi's army commanders has faith in the skill of rowing boats the women have acquired. Similarly, in, '*kumhiri kwaZambezi kwasahwira wedu muRozvi uya kuti atume mauto anozotibatsira....*'. (across the Zambezi to our ally the Rozvi for him to send reinforcement soldiers to assist us...), further shows women's skills to cross Zambezi a very big river.

Still in the same part of the excerpt, Mugugu through Madzudzo reveals another skill of negotiation as these women are tasked to ask for soldiers to assist in the war against Godzi from chief Rozvi. This implies that women are portrayed as envoys. So in this scenario, Mugugu portrays women in multiple ways. *Firstly*, women and men are complementary and partners in defending their sovereign rights. Thus, all people regardless of gender are assets that should partner one another, in ensuring national security. *Secondly*, the underestimation of women's potentials prejudices the communities about the manipulation of the available human resources. Men sometimes

overburden themselves unnecessarily when there are women who can do other tasks. Though Mugugu appears to mock the feminine gender by make them the last and hopeless option, he in fact mocks the male gender for underestimating a substantial contribution of women-as-human resource. It takes only a selected few intelligent and sensitive men, in this case the army commander, Madzudzo, to realise women's potential and tap into such potentialities. Thus, Mugugu seems to portray female as equal to males and that gender equity has nothing to do with physiology and anatomy. *Thirdly*, gender is seen as 'anybody' and has nothing necessarily to do with physiology and anatomy. Mugugu opens the possibility of girl pupils in taking up boat rowing. Mugugu is communicating to the Ordinary Level pupils the gender message that men and women are complimentary, which is in harmony with the Afrocentric paradigm of Africana womanist theory.

Despite the lack of status of women engaged in heroic activities as protagonists and the lack of identification by names, this glimpse of heroines provides female pupils with characters of the same sex as them. It therefore gives them an opportunity to be more engaged and remember the activities of the women characters. In this case, the novel, at least provides characters which female learners identify with on a positive note concerning gender roles. This gives more evidence for Cook's (2013) findings that there are things that defy traditional gender stereotyping regarding males and females. Thus Freitheim (2014:131) argues that 'previous studies relied on the contrast between masculinity and femininity'; yet the reality in Old World novels sampled in this study regarding engagement of characters in heroic activities is much more complex than the oversimplified understanding of men as strong and dominant and women as the weak and manipulated.

Conclusion

In this article I set out explore the gender depiction of characters in the four purposively sampled Zimbabwean ChiShona Ordinary Level 2010 - 2015 prescribed literary texts. These are Mavengere's *Akanyangira Yaona*, Chakaipa's *Pfumo Reropa*, Mugugu's *Jekanyika* and Chiguvare's *Kuton-hodzwa Kwa-Chauruka*. I explored the gender depiction of characters in order to determine gender scripts the novels potentially expose the Ordinary Level boys and girls to, as well as the possible educational implications of the gender scripts that

the novels expose pupils to. The depiction of characters in protagonist, heroic and villainous activities in the Old World novels: Chiguvare's *Kutonhodzwa kwaChauruka*, Chakaipa's *Pfumo Reropa*, Mavengere's *Akanyangira Yaona* and Mugugu's *Jekanyika* is to a large extent sexist.

Since the authors of the novels attach protagonist/ heroic /villainous activities to male characters this may deprive female pupils of models and the attendant traits that people associate with protagonists and heroes/ heroines, such as determination, bravery and perseverance in women. The portrayal seems to take masculinity as primary since most of texts are named after male characters. These male characters, who bear the titles of the texts, become the protagonists and heroes. In cases where female characters engage in heroic activities, they are neither accorded protagonist nor heroine status. Where female characters engage in heroic activities it is attributed to magic. The gender story that the authors seem to indirectly communicate is that while masculinity is primary femininity is secondary. The Old World novels I have explored may provide female pupils with limited heroic characteristics and activities to identify with, while male pupils are offered a wide range of positive heroic activities as role models. In cases where characters are represented in a gender-biased manner, I have suggested these as areas that teachers may engage in gender sensitive discourse in a classroom setting so that teachers' mediation of the textbooks does not perpetuate gender insensitivity. Further exploration may be required regarding gender representation in ChiShona prescribed texts written by female authors.

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Beatrice Taringa
PhD Graduate
University of Zimbabwe
taringabeatrice@gmail.com