

Africana Womanism and Shona Children's Games

by

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Abstract

Africana Womanism has been hailed as a theory meant to give a fuller and more realistic explanation of gender relations of men and women of Africana descent. Characterised by a number of tenets, it has been presented by Hudson-Weems as one that explains male-female relations from the context and history of African culture. Before wholly embracing it as 'the theory' that succinctly explains and illuminates male-female relations of all African people, it is important to examine whether it also approximates gender relations among the Shona of Zimbabwe. This paper thus makes a juxtaposition of the tenets of the Africana Womanist literary theory and the male-female relations obtaining among the Shona in relationship to children's games with intent to ascertain the applicability of the theory to particular African situations.

Introduction

Many theories have been forwarded as useful and quite applicable to the study of African situations and literature. Some of these theories have been propounded by scholars not only outside the African soil but sometimes also outside the African worldview. Many a time, a number of these have been borrowed and used wholesale in the study of African literature to the detriment of the indigenous people's creative potential. Some of such theories with European origin like structuralism, formalism and modernism have advanced and called for works of art that have no links to the writer's background, people's history, culture, religion and also as serving no special purpose in people's lives. To them, creative writing is more influenced by narrative devices and not by people's experiences. Through these theories, literature is reduced to one's ability to use devices that strike his/her readership with awe. It is against this background that many works by African writers have either been condemned as substandard for failure to use devices as done in Western authorship, or are praised for borrowing stylistic devices from European works of art. For example, Tsodzo's *Pafunge* (1972) was praised by the Rhodesian Literature Bureau (a then censorship board for Shona Literature) for being modelled along *Oedipus Rex*, a Western piece of work. Incidentally the same novel *Pafunge* is praised by scholars of Shona literature, such as Emanuel Chiwome for its ability to vividly explore the plight of colonised blacks, something not mentioned by those who analyse the same novel from a Eurocentric perspective, such as George Kahari. Similarly, Kuimba's *Gehena Harina Moto* (1963) was praised by the same Literature Bureau editors as an illuminating piece of work which reads like Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

The praises accorded to Kuimba's novel are based on its structure, that it resembles a Western play despite the fact that prominent scholars of Shona literature such as Chiwome (1996, 2002) criticise it as a serious distortion of Shona people's past and cultural heritage. This shows that theories advanced by people who do not stay on African soil and who are outside the African worldview more often than not, leave a lot to be desired if used in the analysis of African situations and literature.

There are also theories propounded by people of African descent but who do not stay on African soil. All the same, the theories are meant to apply to African people's experiences and worldview and these include Afrocentricity by Asante (1990) and Africana Womanism by Hudson-Weems (1993, 2004). Although these scholars are of African descent there is great need to examine the applicability of their views to the study of African situations and literature on the African continent. This is important so it can be established if their ideas neatly fall into the study of African realities and way of life. In light of this, this paper makes an analysis of the applicability of Hudson-Weems' Africana Womanist Literary theory to Shona people's situation and way of life, especially Shona children's games. It seeks to establish if the theory of Africana Womanism, widely believed to correspond with African worldview can be generalised as to also apply to the Zimbabwean Shona situation.

Africana Womanism was propounded by Hudson-Weems (1993, 2004). Having realised the limitations of feminism in the study of African male-female relations, Hudson-Weems calls for a theory whose agenda is unique and separate from both White feminism and Black feminism. She argues for the need for self-definition and self-naming in a bid to reclaim the African past and rootedness in it. It is out of this that the theory of Africana Womanism is born. It is defined as:

An ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women (Hudson-Weems, 1993: 24).

Here Hudson-Weems makes a very bold statement that the theory is meant for all women of African descent, meaning it also caters for the Shona women of Zimbabwe. Hence, there is need to ascertain the validity of this claim. Thus, this paper makes an analysis of the following tenets constituting the theory of Africana Womanism: family-centred, in concert with males in struggle, flexible role players, strength, male compatible, respected and recognised, whole and authentic, spirituality, respectful of elders and mothering and nurturing (Hudson-Weems, 1993: 58-73). It examines these in relation to Shona children's games which include *matakanana* (mock house), *mahumbwe* (mock marriage), riddling and songs. The paper starts by explaining who the Shona of Zimbabwe are then gives brief summaries of the selected children's games before making an analysis of the relatedness of Hudson-Weems' observations to situations among the Shona.

The Shona of Zimbabwe

The Shona are one of the language groups in Southern Africa. Although the bulk of them are found in Zimbabwe, especially in the Northern, Eastern and Central parts of the country, some are also found in the Manica Province of Mozambique and in modern day Botswana. The fact that the speakers of this language are found across many national boundaries shows the divisive nature and intentions of colonialism, which strove to distance people who were related and who saw and regarded each other as one. The word Shona was used by Clement Doke (1931: 3) to refer to groups of people who spoke a language that had been sub-divided into distinct units by the coloniser. The language had then been disbanded into units, which were identified as Zezuru (spoken in the Northern and central parts of the country), Korekore (spoken in the North-western parts of the country), Manyika (in the Eastern parts of the country), Ndau in the South-eastern parts of the country) and Karanga (in the central parts of the country). Doke's choice of the name was argued to be neutral then.

However, before colonialism, no one used the term Shona to refer to themselves. The people who shared the common language did not feel themselves to be Shona (Ranger, 1985: 4). Chimhundu (1992: 89) asserts that when asked about their identity, the people would not say we are Shona, but simply answered 'Tiri vanhu' (We are people). Upon further questioning, they would instead use names of chiefs as their labels, 'Ndiri wekwaShe Ngana' (I am of Chief so and so). They also used totems to refer to, and identify themselves. Chimhundu (1992: 94) adds that the name 'Shona' started to appear in writing only in the early grammars and dictionaries that were written in English as 'Mashona', 'Shuna' and 'Swina'.

The origin of the name Shona is explained by several theories. One is that it is believed to have originated from the Ndebele word 'Ukutshona' which means to vanish. It is believed that the Ndebele would occasionally raid the Shona people for cattle, grain and wives. The Shona would hide in caves or even run to faraway places and remain there for long, and it was believed they had vanished, *ukutshona* (Mutswairo, 1996: 34-5). The other thought is that the word came from 'Svina' or 'amaswina'. Again the thought is that having raided the Shona, the Ndebele would eat the good meat and gave intestines to the captured Shona. They would eat the intestines after removing the dung, *kusvina*. Henceforth they were called 'amaswina', those who remove dung from intestines of animals. Theal (1907: 226) asserts that:

The word Mashona is a contemptuous nickname given them by their enemies and adopted by us (Whites) unwittingly, but it is now in general use by Europeans.

The enemies being referred to here are the Ndebele. However, the truth of the matter is that Ndebele raids among the Shona are exaggerated by many historians, and this was in line with colonial interests for occupation (Chimhundu, 1992:92). Also, it is not possible to trace the word 'Shona' to any of the chiefs, headman or individual, hence the name is of foreign origin and not indigenous (Mutswairo, 1996: 32). Nevertheless, the Shona constitute the largest population in Zimbabwe, followed by the Ndebele and then other minority groups.

People who speak Shona can understand most of the words and concepts used across the wide geographical spectrum. As Chimhundu observes, the Shona have never doubted that they belong to one common culture sharing a common language (1992: 89). Thus what this paper refers to as Shona children's games are actually games played by Shona children across the many geographical parts where the language is spoken and they are done in basically the same ways, with very minor differences.

Shona Children's Games

Shona children had many games for educative and entertainment purposes. The games strove to develop the whole being of a *muShona* child, physical, moral, spiritual and intellectual (Matsika, 2012). Any child who participated in these games usually emerged out thoroughly cultured, having adopted the tastes, values and worldview of the Shona. In other words the games cultivated the values of *unhu* (an ethic/humanist philosophy focused on people's allegiances and relationships with one-another, hence, human interconnectivity) and *ubuntu* (a twin ethic of *unhu* concerning human-ness and in sharing that connects all humanity) among the children as they refreshed themselves. Among the games were *matakanana* (mock house), *mahumbwe* (mock marriage), riddling, songs, *tsoro* (draft), *chamuhwandemuhwande* (hide and seek). Some of these games were accompanied by song and, or dance whilst others were not. This paper focuses on the first four games, showing how they relate to the tenets of Africana Womanism.

- **Matakanana** (mock house)

This is a game normally played by young girls of between age three and five years. They may play it as a group or individually. A girl at this age imagines herself having her own house, a kitchen to be specific. She marks the beacons that constitute her kitchen and sweeps the place clean. Even if the kitchen is not a physical structure, the young girl has an entrance which she uses every time she enters or exits. Anyone who 'visits' her must also use the same entrance and not jump across. She gathers her kitchen utensils that normally comprise small tins, broken gourds or even broken clay pots which save as her cooking and storage utensils. In some cases she moulds these utensils from clay. She also has small twigs that she save as her firewood and cooking sticks. In some of her calabashes there is soil, which saves as mealie meal. She also gathers tree leaves that are also used as relish. As a 'mother', she prepares food, using soil and tree leaves as mealie meal and relish respectively. She is so engrossed and enthusiastic about her role that she needs not be disturbed. Once she feels the food is ready, she invites people, elderly and even passers-by to come and have food which is already ready. Ordinarily, Shona people agree and get accommodated at her house where they pretend to eat the prepared food, after which they say words of gratitude and go away. The young girl feels elated and happy.

And apart from preparing food, the young girl also has her baby, normally a doll or a cob strapped on her back. At some point, the 'baby' is taken off her back, bathed, clothed and even 'breast-fed' and also lulled to sleep. To this young girl, the doll or cob is a real baby and not a toy or inanimate object. It is not seen as a lifeless object, but is seen, considered, treated and looked after as a real child. If someone throws away this doll or cob, the young girl cries at the pain of seeing her baby ill-treated. This game presents the young girl visualising herself as a mother, doing all the duties she sees her mother doing.

- **Mahumbwe** (mock marriage)

This is a game that is played after the *matakanana* stage. It is played by both boys and girls, normally from the age of six to thirteen. The children engage in mock marriage. Elderly boys and girls assume the roles of husbands and wives, grandfathers and grandmothers, aunts and even chiefs. Younger boys and girls assume the roles of children. In this game, the children try as much as possible to replicate the families (nuclear and extended) and relations as in real life. Those who perform the roles of husband and wife need not be related. They do all the duties done by husband and wife except having sex (Gelfand, 1979: 23). The mother and father undertake different but complementary roles for the well-being of the family, and not for selfish gains. In this game, the 'families' also experience squabbles as in real life. It is interesting to note that these squabbles do not lead to family break-up. Rather, the 'couples' that experience these challenges seek the advice and guidance of their elders so that thorny issues are resolved and the family fabric remain intact. They strive to reconcile and re-establish sound relations. After the game, young girls are normally taken for examination by the aunts, to see if none of them had been defiled (Chidyausiku, 1984). Normally, no one is found defiled and this is followed by feasting and happiness in the families. Occasionally a girl would be discovered to have been defiled. The boy responsible would be punished, severely. Chidyausiku (1984) reports a case of a young boy who had his male organ chopped off for disrespecting the body of a girl because he defiled her.

- **Riddling**

The game of riddling is normally played by children of both sexes, usually at night as they entertain themselves waiting for supper. It is played by either two people or, if they are more than two, and normally they organize themselves into two groups, regardless of sex. The first group poses a challenge to which the other group must give a response. If the group responding gets it right, the first group will keep on posing challenges until the other group is baffled. Once they fail to give a correct response, then it becomes their turn to also pose a challenge. The game goes on until the children agree to end, whereupon they identify a group that would have emerged victorious and clap hands for them.

- **Songs**

Songs like *Zipote zipote* (going round and round) and *Sarura wako* (choose your partner), capture the expectation that society has, and the platform they accord citizens to choose marriage partners. These songs are sung by children in their tender ages. They form a circle and the children take turns to go round the circle, each singing and picking a partner of their choice. A female child picks a partner of the opposite sex and likewise when it is the male child going round, he also picks a female as a partner. They take turns to lead and go round the circle until each child has been given a chance to go round mentioning the qualities of their ideal lover. At the end, a child that would not have been picked as a partner by anyone is laughed at.

Africana Womanism: Applicability to Shona Children's Games

- **Family Centred**

The family is at the core of Shona society. Establishment of a family through a heterosexual marriage is every Shona child's ultimate goal in life. Hence, what p'Bitek (1986: 15) says of the Acholi of Uganda equally applies to the Shona, that husbandless-ness and wifelessness are not virtues. The importance of a family in societal survival is drummed into the children at a very tender age. Songs like *Zipote zipote* and *Sarura Wako*, capture the expectation that society has, and the platform it accords its citizens to choose a marriage partner. A female child picks a partner of the opposite sex and likewise when it is the male child going round, as he picks a female as a partner. The song is complemented by the game of *mahumbwe* where children take motherhood and fatherhood roles, minus sex. *Mahumbwe* is thus a gear up, as children would have gone beyond mere choosing of partners, to establishment of families. Elderly boys assume the positions and responsibilities of fathers whilst elderly girls take those of mothers. Small children take the roles of children. What is important to note is that although the families may have challenges, they strive not to break up as young couples strive to keep the family fabric intact by seeking counsel from their elders. Thus the game teaches the children to be "family-centred, and not self-centred" (Hudson-Weems, 1993).

In the *mahumbwe* game, small children assume the roles of children for the young couples. The existence of small children has a strong socio-cultural significance. Shona children are brought up to cherish not only marriage but also child-bearing and rearing. They take pride in motherhood. Whereas feminists abhor the family, child-bearing and rearing claiming these denude the woman of her dignity, humanity and integrity, Africana women take pride in these duties and many more. The love for children and the family by African women is exuded by the Shona girl child through the game of *matakanana* where small girls between three and six years assume the roles of mothers, 'cooking' food in scrappy containers using soil as mealie meal and tree leaves as relish. Also, they will be having babies (usually dolls or cobs) which they give food, clothe and even bath. These roles show that the Shona girl child is keen to undertake roles associated with being a mother. She is family centred and looks forward to a time when she would have a family and look after not only her own children, but humanity in general.

- **Male Compatible**

Africana Womanism contends that unlike Western women who have irreconcilable grudges with their male counterparts and who do not want anything to do with men, Africana women on the other hand are male compatible. They can live, work and sit side by side with their male counterparts. They enjoy the company of their male counterparts. The women desire positive male companionship, a relationship in which each individual is mutually supportive, and thus an important part of a positive Africana family (Hudson-Weems, 1993: 66). The songs *Zipote zipote* and *Sarura wako* do not make sense and cannot be complete without male and female participating, joyfully together. In Shona society, marriage is greatly valued and the society only accepts and tolerates marriages between members of the opposite sex. Thus being gay or lesbian has no place in the people's way of life. The game gives the youngsters a platform to air the qualities of their future partner, who has to be a member of the opposite sex. Thus the game cultivates into the young the belief and conviction that they cannot do without members of the other sex. It is important to note that those who do not relate well with members of the opposite sex are normally not picked as future partners during the game. Those who finish the game without being picked up are laughed at, as mentioned above. Usually they would have been left unpicked owing to their undesired attributes or attitudes towards members of the other sex. Such lampooning forces the culprits to revert to societal ways of relating to members of the opposite sex.

Whilst the game *Zipote zipote* teaches the youngsters to admire and cherish compatibility between sexes, that *mahumbwe* augments and requires that the young boys and girls relate well as 'fathers', 'mothers', 'grandfathers', 'grandmothers', 'aunts' and children. To the youngsters, it becomes clear that male and female relationships are not only comforting, but are the key to perpetuating the human race (Hudson-Weems, 1993: 67). The father and mother work together for the well-being of the family. Each does their roles which are different from the other and so they cherish that they must each contribute to the other's welfare. The role allocation in Shona culture makes the youngsters appreciate that no one can do or manage all things alone, but that they require the help and contribution of others which helps them relate well with members of the opposite sex, knowing the valuable contribution they bring to life. This fits well into Hudson-Weems' observation that in the Africana community, neither women nor men can afford to conclude that the other gender was irredeemable and therefore, undesirable (1993: 67). Hudson-Weems warns that should the other gender be sidelined, it would be societal suicide. Thus the Africana womanist realises that, while she loves and respects herself and is, in general, at peace with herself, she ultimately desires a special somebody to fill a void in her life, one who makes her complete (ibid).

- **Whole and Authentic**

The Africana womanist also seeks wholeness (completeness) and authenticity (cultural connection) in her life (Hudson-Weems, 1993: 69). To be complete, the Africana woman wants her home, her family and her career, without neglecting one for the other (ibid). The desire for a home manifests itself when the young girls and boys participate in the songs *Zipote zipote* and *Sarura wako* where they openly express their future wish to choose a partner that is hard working, organised, responsible and smart. This is why the Shona girl playing *matakanana* pleases herself in cooking and having a baby strapped on her back. She loves and anticipates having a family and is prepared to work hard fending for the family. And she takes this a step further in the *mahumbwe* game, where she ‘establishes’ her own home with her chosen man and she assumes and takes up responsibilities of a mother. She cleans the homestead, prepares food, looks after the family and gathers wild spinach from the forest as the man does other duties. Here, she demonstrates her desire for a husband and a family, and thus marriage makes her feel she is a whole and authentic African woman. In her pursuit of wholeness, the Africana womanist also demonstrates her desire for a positive male companionship, for without her male counterpart, her life is not complete in a real sense (Hudson-Weems, 1993: 69). She needs male companionship in the same way and sense the man needs hers. Both the man and woman know that they are essential to the survival of the human race. Also, she delights in responsibilities that make her a real or authentic African woman. p’Bitek (1986: 30) echoes this concern for family, saying that among Africans marriage means having and rearing children. And perhaps, this is why the Shona girl child embarks on responsibilities that include ‘rearing’ children, carrying children on their backs, cooking, cleaning the home, gathering wild spinach, pounding and grinding grain. Thus she strives to live up to the important goals in her culture that makes her whole and authentic, that is, a true or real African woman.

- **Flexible Role Players**

Feminists usually fight to have space. They strive to enter and venture into domains, responsibilities and positions normally believed to be under the domain of men. As such, their enemy number one is the man, whom they believe shuts doors to women’s emancipation. Men are condemned and in most cases shown as the chief causes of women’s problems and their disadvantaged positions in life. To the Africana womanist, the woman does not, and is not keen to fight to be accorded her own space. She does not compete with her male counterpart for positions, responsibilities and privileges. Rather she and her male counterpart are flexible role players. In other words, although African society has neat role allocation, these roles or responsibilities are not cast in stone. The players change roles depending on the situation. Thus the Africana woman does not fight her male counterpart to be accorded a platform to demonstrate her potential; she knows that chance will come without her having to fight for it. Shona children’s songs amply this phenomenon, and all the songs, which include *Zipote zipote* and *Sarura wako* are played in turns. At one point a boy is leading, going round the group, mentioning the qualities of the girl of his choice before ultimately picking one. After that, the girl takes centre stage and leads the pack, describing the boy of her choice before picking him.

The game teaches the children that roles are not fixed, yet flexible wherein women are accorded the platform to do activities that men do. The same is also true in the game of riddling, played by children of both sexes, mixed together. They organize themselves into groups which normally comprise members of each sex. Both male and female children are given the chance to pose challenges and even give responses. Hence, there is no discrimination at all in the game, and boys and girls are taught to understand and value the fact that they need to accord each other equal platforms to freely undertake their duties in life.

Such flexibility in role playing is a foundation that responsibilities in adulthood are modelled. Fatherhood responsibilities among the Shona are not limited to male members only, but are also undertaken by females. Among the Shona, an aunt may take on the responsibilities of a father, hence, she is a female father. And also among the Shona, every woman is an aunt to someone, and so every woman is a female father. This position gives her the authority/position and respect accorded to a male father. And among the Shona, all male members of a family are also considered as, and undertake motherhood roles especially to children borne of their sisters. Thus Furusa says (2006: 3):

Western biological determinism textually restructured fluid and dynamic Ndebele and Shona cultural representations into rigid gender categories based on the colonised 'female' body. In Shona, all the people on my mother's side including males are responsible for 'mothering' me. This means that my mother's sisters, brothers and all the male and female children of her brothers are my 'mothers'. Similarly, all my father's brothers and sisters are responsible for 'fathering' me.

This is why Amadiume (1987) talks of male daughters and female husbands. The implication is that daughters were not only limited to feminine duties, but also undertook duties done by men, hence they became 'male'. Similarly, men were not only limited to so-called masculine duties, but would also delve into areas usually under the domain of women, thus becoming 'female'. There was no bracketing of roles into restricted domains of feminine and masculine in the same way positions/roles like being spirit mediums, traditional diviners were not sex specific. Any member of the society could perform them without any hesitation or shortcoming, thus, Shona roles, like other roles shared between African men and women are flexible and can be undertaken by a member of any sex, depending on the situation and the time.

- **In Concert with Men in Struggle**

In general, African women via Hudson-Weems (1993, 2004) do not perceive African men as their enemies, and thus they reason that their problems are not entirely caused by men, but that their men are also in many ways victims of the same system that has marginalised and oppressed them. Thus they do not fight their men, but rather fight alongside and together with their men to uplift life for Black people.

And like the roles that Shona children assume in their games that are not antagonistic, but complimentary of each other, so is the idea in Africana male and female relationships. And as mentioned above, in the game of *mahumbwe* (mock marriage), the young couple undertakes roles that complement each other for the well-being of the family wherein the father traditionally builds the houses, looks after the cattle and goes out to hunt. Similarly, when the young girl undertakes the responsibilities of a mother, such as cooking, cleaning, fetching vegetables and wild fruits, it is all for the well-being of the family. Thus they work independently but mindful and considerate of the other as they channel their energies and talents for what is good for the family. And again, when they have a domestic dispute, they do not fight each other, nor do they fight for individual rights and privileges, but rather, they both visit an aunt or a grandpa or a grandma (the elders) to have the issue resolved as they do not strive to win a case, but to instead to have the matter amicably resolved for the good of everyone absent of a need to fulfil an egocentric tendency leading to greater conflict.

- **Strength**

In regard to strength, that is, the ability to withstand applied stress or pressure without failure, Shona children's games and songs require such vigor/firmness. For example, the song *zipote zipote* (going round and round) mentioned above requires one to run around the circle in rhythmic dances mentioning the qualities of a partner of one's choice as the leader mentions that they are looking for someone who would wash plates for them, and who would leave them sparklingly clean. That one should wash plates well is just symbolic of the desire to have a partner who when they do duties, they would do them diligently and expertly. Having a partner who does their roles very well is quite important, especially in a society which treasures role allocation. And since no one can do everything or manage all things by themselves, there is a great need to have the other partner do very well at some duties the other person cannot do so that everyone's well-being is guaranteed. Thus idleness has no place in Shona society, and it is one reason why the society has praise poems and praise names which are recited for those who would have worked hard and excelled in their duties.

Also in Shona society, *Matakanana* (mock house) cements the fact that an Africana woman has to be physically strong, because often as the young girl goes about her household chores like cooking, she will also have a 'baby' on her back. And again, when the young mothers harvest crops, carry firewood on their head for long distances, pound and grind grain, beat floors and drag nets fishing in rivers, physical strength is needed. Hence, when they reach marriage stage, Shona men are taught and told to look for girls who are hard working. Aschwanden (1982: 47) says a young man looking for a woman to marry is advised to make sure his beloved has thorny hands; soft hands are a warning that the girl is lazy. And among the Shona, the saying, '*Musha mukadzi*' which means a home is so because of a woman is an axiom most respect, along with '*Chakafukidza dzimba matenga*' which means what covers a house is a roof, but there are many challenges within a house confront couples in marriages, and that many of these challenges are not exposed to other people. Thus, those challenges require psychological strength and courage, similar to the ethic of Africana Womanism.

- **Respected and Recognised**

In the game of *matakanana*, after being served with 'food' that is, mixed soil and tree leaves someone is expected to thank the young girl by clapping their hands. The clapping is done as a form of respect for the valuable duty of preparing food that nourishes life. So women are respected for contributing to the welfare of the family and society through preparing food. They are the mothers of society and are accorded due respect. In the game *mahumbwe*, the woman in the imaginary families is respected as if they are real mothers. The 'husband' does not hold an executive role, he always discusses issues with his 'wife' and always acts on mutual agreement and not on personal desires. Whatever the husband does, he thinks through it and is very sensitive as to how it would affect his wife. When they have property in their imaginary home, the husband does not dispose of it without telling his wife and without seeking her consent. Gelfand (1968: 42) notes that the African husband is not a free agent in the disposal or acquisition of property; the wife must be consulted and her consent obtained. And if he has wronged her, he must ask for forgiveness, and if needed, he prepared to have their domestic misunderstanding resolved by aunts and grandmothers, further showing his respect for women, clarifying to all that his wife and other women need to be respected and recognised.

Also, at the end of the *mahumbwe* game, the girl children are taken by aunts to the river for inspection. This is not an exercise meant to infringe on the rights of the girl child as feminists would want to make people believe, rather, for the Shona, and perhaps in other African societies who practice it, it is a sure way of safeguarding the girl child from sexual abuse by men. It is meant to establish if a girl has been violated and if not, the practice is usually followed by jubilation and feasting. The practice is meant to ensure that girl children are respected, especially their bodies. Thus the female body is very sacred and there are even taboos that chide men against casting eyes on bodies of naked women. For example, there is a saying: '*Ukadongororera mukadzi akashama unoita shohwera*' which means if you look at a naked woman you will develop a boil on your eye. The saying thus makes it clear that even an aspect of peeping has no room among the Shona, let alone sleeping with a woman who is not one's wife. The idea is to inhibit men from looking at bodies of naked women as this may result in unpermitted sexual liaisons.

The respect accorded to African women is further illustrated through the game of riddling. In this game, girls are accorded the same platform to participate as boys. Also, girls are also counted and considered full members as they represent their respective groups. They also give challenges, and relied upon in providing correct answers to riddles. In some cases the girls outwit their male counterparts in presenting difficult riddles or providing accurate answers to those riddles unknown to their male counterparts. This is possible because the girls also go out into the forests and rivers to gather firewood, wild spinach and fish. In this way, they have a wide awareness of the environment which is usually the subject of riddling sessions. As masters of the environment, girls are respected/intelligent educators, and thus recognised by their respective groups. This reality contrasts feminist claims that women are not heard or listened to, and that they do not participate in literature, and are simply talked about by men. In opposition to that perception, Shona girls participate in literary production, alongside their male counterparts.

Also the riddles themselves present women as recognised and respected members of the community. For example:

Amai vangu vanobika zvinonaka (My mother who cooks delicious food)

Amai vangu kubika havabviri (My mother is a great cook)

Amai handei munozvarira mberi (Mother, let's go, you will give birth along the way)

Amai ngwee kuchena, mwana ngwee kuchena (Mother is very smart and so is the child)

Imba yamai vangu isina musuwo (My mother's house which has no entrance).

In the above examples, there is preponderant reference to *amai*, mother and there are many riddles that make reference to the female principle (*vasikana vekwedu*), grandmothers (*mbuya vekwedu* or *kachembere kekwedu*), and also aunts (*vatete vekwedu*) [Makaudze and Gudhlanga, 2012: 165]. The preponderant reference to women as mothers, girls, grandmothers or aunts shows that women are as much talked about as men, and thus are equally recognised and their presence and being respected. This suggest that feminist claims that in general women are not recognised, and that they are at the periphery of society is not completely true. Also, the phrase 'mai vangu' (my mother), 'mai vekwedu' (a mother who belongs to our family), 'kasikana kekwedu' (a girl who belongs to our family), 'kachembere kekwedu' (an old lady who belongs to our family) are not in no way discriminatory, but associative to show society's desire to be identified with women, in the same way it desires to be associated with men (Makaudze and Gudhlanga, 2012: 165). Such close association makes it difficult if not impossible for men to ill-treat women in Shona society.

- **Respectful of Elders**

The true African womanist respects and appreciates elders, and insisting that her young do likewise (Hudson-Weems, 1993: 70), and indeed, another continuum of African culture. The young protect their elders and seek their advice, as the wisdom of elders is indisputable (*ibid*). It is the elders who keep the family fabric intact and who undertake most religious responsibilities thus guaranteeing families a good living, and they in turn command the greatest respect in society. This is why in the game of *mahumbwe* (mock marriage), the children strive to have complete families, which include the grandfathers, grandmothers, aunts and chiefs. The aunts, grandfathers and grandmothers usually assist in resolving most of the young couples' domestic misunderstandings. The couples seek the advice and guidance of these elders each time they confront a situation which they may be unable to resolve on their own. The chiefs also help quell similar issues should the family elders no succeed.

And as Mkanganwi rightly observes, among the Shona one can be intelligent but they cannot be wiser than their elders (1998: 13). The saying ‘What a young person cannot see whilst standing, an elder can see whilst seated’ is true in the African context, and particularly in Shona culture. Respect for the elders also respected important because they usually conduct rituals and other religious activities, as they know how to communicate with the departed, what and how to say something if a person has grievances or wishes to relate to their ancestors. Hence, the Shona approach religious issues with reverence and awe, and as Mbiti (1975: 30) observes, African people are generally notoriously religious as religion percolates and influences every aspect of their lives, be it social, economic or political. Thus it is the elders who know the departed in their order of seniority and how communication should be done in order not to anger any one of the ancestors; knowledge and wisdom which the young do not have and hence there is a need for them to be in the shelter and comfort of their elders. And correspondingly, when an elder dies among the Shona, it is akin to a first class library being burnt down in a fire.

- **Careful Partner Selection Essential**

In the song/game ‘zipote zipote’ (going round and round), one does not pick their relative as a partner, and should it happen, they are laughed (they are expected to pick a partner with a different totem, praise name and household (and the same applies when they embark on mock families via *mahumbwe* because some of these relationships may develop into serious affairs culminating in marriage, and Shona spirituality has no room for husband and wife who were close or blood relatives (sexual liaisons between related people were considered taboo, and a crime regarded as *makunkuna* (incest), and the people feared the wrath of the spiritual world if such a crime was committed, as the culprits were usually punished by death. So the song and the *mahumbwe* game teach youngsters that when they choose a marriage partner, they do it carefully, because only a distant or non-relative is culturally acceptable.

- **Mothering and Nurturing**

Hudson-Weems observes that in the Africana womanist ethic there is a commitment to the art of mothering and nurturing, her children, and in general, humankind (Hudson-Weems, 1993: 72). This means that a woman sees herself as a mother to her own children and to all of humanity, and the motherhood role is consolidated in the *mahumbwe* game where the young boys and girls embark on mock families which highlights the Shona way of life where relations border from the nuclear to the extended family and where meal time feeding is normally done at a *dare*, inside village court where food is brought and eaten by all who are, regardless of their parenthood. Thus, hospitality among the Shona and generally throughout Africa is a cultural attribute, for passers-by and even strangers. In this regard, the Shona have the adage, ‘*Mweni haapedzi dura*’ (a visitor does not empty a granary), which challenge people to exercise hospitality to visitors and strangers without thinking about them eating too much of the reserve, because there is no need to deny them food. And as such, Gelfand (1968: 38) observes that there is no need for charity in African society, because it is built into the ethos of the people.

Conclusion

Many theories have been advanced in the study of situations and literature. Some are propounded by people alien in both the location and worldview to the African person. As such a number of have exuded weaknesses when applied to the study African realities. Some of these theories are propounded by Africana people who do not live on African soil. These include Afrocentricity and Africana Womanism. It is therefore important to put these to rigorous examination to determine the extent to which their ideas apply to realities on African soil. It is against this background that the theory of Africana Womanism has been analysed in relation to what is important among the Shona of Zimbabwe. Most of the tenets of the theory have been seen to neatly apply to ideals in Shona children's games. In their games, it has been seen that Shona girls are taught and exude such qualities as family centred, male compatible, in concert with males in their struggle in whole authentic, strong, and respected relationships that are recognised, respectful of elders, spiritual, and nurturing, all integral in the theory of Africana Womanism. To this end, the theory of Africana Womanism posed by Hudson-Weems is highly applicable to the study of Shona people and situations, and African people and situations in general.

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