

THE DISADVANTAGED AND THE DISABLED IN SHONA CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: THE *NGANO* (FOLKTALE) GENRE

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary Shona society in Zimbabwe has witnessed the mushrooming of organisations meant to protect the disabled and the vulnerable. In addition, empowering legislative measures have been put in place. In most cases, however, such efforts bear limited fruits, especially because they are not in sync with Shona practice. They are pursued as if the Shona people had never known the existence and observance of human rights and privileges. Using the Afrocentricity theory and drawing examples from the Shona *ngano* (folktale) genre, this article posits that Shona oral traditions are laden with the indigenous people's philosophy and approach to various kinds of impairments and disadvantages which can be adopted and adapted by contemporary societies.

Keywords: disadvantaged, disabled, disability, vulnerability, human rights, Shona, folktale (*ngano*)

1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Disability means a condition characterised by loss of physical functioning or difficulty in learning and social adjustment that interferes with normal growth and development (Hardman et al. 1993, 3). It generally includes impairments, limitations, and restrictions on an individual's body. It also entails an individual's inability to take part in what is considered 'normal' in everyday society. Disability may be physical, cognitive, mental, sensory, emotional, and developmental or a combination of these (Chiinze and Tambara 2000). Vulnerability entails the limitations inherent in some people, which make them targets of exploitation or abuse by the able-bodied. Persons with disabilities are vulnerable, and so are the able-bodied who are small or old, short, weak, poor, slow, non-eloquent or orphaned. In other words, vulnerability includes disabilities, small statures and low socio-economic conditions.

The adoption of the new Zimbabwean constitution in 2013 has been hailed as a milestone in the observance of human rights, especially the rights of persons with disabilities and the vulnerable (Hove 2015). It is believed to have marked the inception of equality among all people regardless of their status or physical condition. According to Winter and O'Raw (2010), traditional thinking denied children with various disabilities their rights. In other words, the thinking is that Shona society did not observe the rights of people with disabilities. However, a look at pre-colonial Shona practice, especially Shona storytelling, shows that the Shona people, without necessarily having to stress on the issue of people's rights, encouraged and established very sound relations between society and all the disadvantaged.

Disabilities and vulnerability were common in Shona society, as evidenced by terms used in their reference as well as sayings and society's attitude to them. Those with disabilities were referred to as *vakaremara* (if it was a physical condition such as a crippled leg or a hand); *mupengo* (if it was a mental challenge); *mbeveve* (if it was a speech impairment); *matsi* (if it was a hearing impairment); and *bofu* (if it was a sight impairment). Vulnerability, in addition to disability, included poor socio-economic status, being orphaned, as well as being of a small or weak stature. The young and the elderly fell in the class of the disadvantaged as well, for they were largely weak. Shona tradition treated the disadvantaged in the same way as other members of the community; all were respected and treated as human. In Shona *ngano* (folktales) these disadvantaged were referred to as *vanhu vaMwari* (God's people). Being God's people meant that they were supposed to be respected and honoured, knowing that they belonged to a supreme being who could punish in very serious ways those who trampled upon the livelihood of the disadvantaged. As such, they were special in society. The Shona also had a proverb, *Gunguwo kuseka zizi iwo muromo uchinge demo* (A crow laughs at an owl, yet its beak is like an axe) meant to alert society that everyone had their own form of disability; hence, the need to tolerate and accept everyone as they were. Another adage, *Seka urema wafa* (Only laugh at someone's disability when you have died), advised people not to laugh at,

or discriminate against others on account of their disability because the same, if not a worse disability could befall them during their life time. This made people accept and tolerate disability as a condition that could befall anyone; thus it was not a source of marginalisation. As a result of such a worldview, as will be discussed in this article, Shona society protected the rights and privileges of the disadvantaged as enunciated in Zimbabwe's constitution, which include: right to humanity and dignity, education; to marriage, home and the family; to life and freedom from forms of abuse; to health, sport and culture; and to participation in political and public life among others.

The article exploits the Afrocentricity theory to handle the issues about the disadvantaged and the disabled in Shona folktales. Propounded by Asante (1998, 2007), the theory observes that African people can and should see, study, interpret and interact with people, life and all reality from the vantage point of sane African people – rather than from the vantage point of European, Asian, or other non-African people, or from the vantage point of African people who are alienated from Africanness (Asante 1998). This entails that there are many standpoints that can be used in the analysis of phenomena. However, Africans need to look at phenomena and give them meaning from their own perspective. In this case, Shona people's perceptions about the disadvantaged and the disabled are looked at from the point of view of participants, and not outsiders to Shona culture. Thus, Afrocentricity is ideal here as it is a theory about, and for, Africans. It allows for the ethnic group's philosophy and worldview on these to be appreciated.

2. THE HUMANITY AND DIGNITY OF THE DISADVANTAGED

Pre-colonial Shona society viewed disadvantaged people as human and called for them to be treated with respect and dignity. In fact, Shona philosophy advised against the marginalisation and ill-treatment of such people. Those who ill-treated the unfortunate ones usually drew societal criticism and shaming. In Shona folktales, the disadvantaged comprised the small built, the slow, the orphaned, the scabies-infested, the very young and the very old, as well as those with visual, mental or physical impairments. In 'Rungano rwaTuro nedzimwe mhuka' (The tale of Hare and other animals) (Fortune 1973), Tortoise and Hare are the animals that are small in stature. When all the animals come together to dig a well but fail, it is Tortoise who manages to bring out the water. All the big, fierce and muscular animals, like Hyena, Buffalo and Lion, take turns to guard the well and deny Hare (who had refused to participate in digging the well) access to the water but are tricked. When Tortoise offers to try, most of the animals roar with cynical laughter, for how could he succeed when the big and imposing ones had failed? Surprisingly, Tortoise hatches a brilliant idea (to smear himself with glue) and catches Hare, compelling Elephant, the king, to declare:

Vanhu vangu mose muri kuonaka kuti kamba ndiye mukuru. Kamba ndiye akachera zvakaburitsa mvura. Nhasi ndiyezve akubatirai Tsuro. Pane anoramba here ungaru hwaKamba? (Fortune 1973, 31)

My people, you now see that Tortoise is great. He is the one who brought up water from the well. Today he is the one who managed to catch Hare. Who denies that Tortoise is very intelligent?

Elephant emphasises that it is uncalled for to despise the small and slow, for they could be capable of doing what the big and quick fail to do. Tortoise is depicted not only as wiser than Hare, but as the wisest of all (Nandwa and Bukenya 1983). Similarly, in the same tale, despite being of a small body size, Hare manages to cheat all the heavily built animals, like Hyena, Buffalo and Lion. The tale emphasises that people should not judge others by size, but by ability; for a small size does not always mean inability. As a result, the child audience learnt that they too were respected despite their body sizes and that they had to respect everyone else who was like them and treat them with dignity.

In 'Kamutari' (The weakling) (Fortune 1982), the eponymous character is of very poor upbringing and wears cast-off clothes but is so powerful that he can control the fall of rain. In 'Chinyamapezi' (The scabies-riddled man) (Fortune 1982, 1983b), the eponymous character is riddled by scabies, but he manages to lure a very beautiful girl across a mountain and ultimately marry her when all the good-looking and well-to-do young men have failed. In 'Rungano rwemukadzi aiva chirikadzi' (The tale of a widow) (Fortune 1973) and 'Nherera mbiri' (Two orphans) (Fortune 1973), a widow and orphans are ignored and marginalised by all in society and wander into unknown territories where they are treated with dignity. They prosper and bring happiness to those areas. In 'Bofu naShumba' (The blind man and Lion) (Fortune 1983b), it is a blind man who kills the lion which had tormented and killed all the men in a distant neighbourhood and is rewarded with a polygynous marriage. In 'Mambo wechidiki' (The young king) (Fortune 1983b), a very frail, old man rescues the young king who had been coiled around by a huge and venomous snake when all the king's young and energetic colleagues had failed.

The above tales show that people with disabilities and the disadvantaged were sometimes particularly at risk of exposure to torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. Orphans, widows, the elderly and those with various impairments were vulnerable to exploitation, violence and abuse. However, many violations of these kinds against people with disabilities would not go unnoticed even in places which were isolated and hidden from public scrutiny. In 'Mukadzi aiva chirikadzi' (A woman who was a widow) (Fortune 1973), the king's first four wives who refused to accommodate the widow are later divorced as the widow's daughters get married to the king. In 'Rungano rwemukomana nherera' (The tale of an orphaned boy) (Fortune 1973), a step mother and her son who ill-treated an orphaned boy are later exposed and chided. The tales show that traditional society

exposed and shamed perpetrators of abuse. It protected and ensured the safety of the disadvantaged and persons with disabilities. The Shona view of humanity derives from the belief that 'humanity is a creation of God' (Gykye 1996, 24). As a result, everyone had the right to health, food and freedom from torture and other forms of abuse. In other words, any actions that threatened the right to life of even those with disabilities were confronted and thwarted.

These narratives and many others emphasise Shona philosophy which stresses the need to respect every human being regardless of their condition. Such philosophy is also conveyed through the proverb, '*Munhu munhu haafananidzwi nembwa*' (A human being is human; they cannot be treated like a dog). A dog is usually ill-treated. It is scolded in derogatory ways, used to hunt game but made to feed on bones as the hunter feeds on good meat. Despite harsh weather conditions that may prevail, a dog stays outside and is denied entry into the house. Thus, it is denied decent shelter. It is beaten up for any wrong doing, leading to another saying, '*Muripo wakambwa uri pamuviri*' (A dog can only pay back by being beaten up). In extreme cases of poverty, a dog is usually denied food, again expressed through another adage, '*Hakuna chembwa tenzi vararira mutakura*' (There is no food for the dog when its owner has round-nuts for supper). Whereas in Shona tradition a dog could be treated in these insensitive ways, a human being, regardless of their stature, status or sex could not. A human being was accorded humane treatment and enjoyed many rights, such as right to equal treatment, education, food and shelter, life, marriage and individual expression.

3. THE DISABLED, DISADVANTAGED AND TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

In pre-colonial Shona society, education was imparted through a number of ways, which included songs, folktales, riddles and games. People with disabilities and even the disadvantaged were not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability but enjoyed full participation and the benefits of such an education on an equal platform with those without disabilities. Folktales were told by a *sarungano*, who was usually an old grandmother, to a child audience from the whole neighbourhood. Thus, the disadvantaged (old and weak) were the teachers of the young (who were also the vulnerable). All children, regardless of their size, stature or physical condition, came together and freely participated in the renditions. Storytelling was usually preceded by the game of riddling, a game in which children of both sexes and all conditions, participated. In the tales, such as 'The rivalry of boys over a girl' (Hodza 1987) and 'The scabies-riddled man' (Hodza 1987), all the children were exposed to the values of life, and to the need to accommodate and tolerate other people's conditions. Not only did the vulnerable take part in the storytelling activities, but they, like the advantaged and able-bodied, were also talked

about in the society's literatures, showing that they too were considered an important and undeniable section of society.

Even in song-cum-games, like 'Sarura wako' (Choose your partner), 'Zipote zipote' (Going round and round), and 'Mahumbwe' (Mock marriage), and others, like 'Tsoro' (Draught), children freely and happily participated. In other games, like 'Chamukamhina' (Hopping on one leg) and 'Handionioni' (I am blind), the children put themselves in the shoes of those with physical handicaps and thus learnt to empathise with them. Those with disabilities felt accommodated and needed. Everyone was entitled to an equal opportunity to participate in inclusive education settings along with all the other people in the community in which they lived. Thus, society provided the disadvantaged and people with disabilities the opportunity and support they needed to access quality, lifelong education that would maximise the full development of their mental and physical abilities. The attitudes of the traditional teachers, families and peers about the ability of the disadvantaged and persons with disabilities to learn and actively participate in schooling were very positive.

4. MARRIAGE, HOME AND THE FAMILY

p'Bitek (1986) observes that husbandlessness, wifelessness and childlessness were not virtues in pre-colonial Africa. Every man or woman who reached adulthood was expected to marry and bear children (Gykye 1996). Marriage was thus a requirement of the society, an obligation every man and woman had to fulfil (Gykye 1996). The disabled and the disadvantaged too enjoyed the right to marry, establish a family and have a home just like any other. Discrimination against persons with disabilities in all matters relating to marriage, family, parenthood and relationships had no place in Shona tradition. In fact, pre-colonial Shona society encouraged all disadvantaged persons, including those with disabilities, who were of marriageable age to marry and to establish a family on the basis of their free consent. Cases below vindicate this.

The orphan in 'Kamutatari' (Fortune 1982), the scabies-riddled man in 'Chinyamapezi' (Fortune 1982, 1983b), and the small built hare in 'Baboon and Hare' (Hodza 1987) all end up marrying and establishing families. This is despite their upbringing, physical condition and stature. That even the poor or not-so-well-to-do establish families was in sync with Shona worldview where there were marriage customs like *kutema ugariri* (mortgaging one's labour for a wife) which made it possible for even the poor to marry (Mkanganwi 2000; Mutubuki 2007; Shiri 2011). Such people could work for their in-laws for an agreed period of time and that work was equated to the amount of bride-wealth they should have paid. The guardianship, wardship or trusteeship of children from their marriages was never an issue of debate.

In addition, people with disabilities or disadvantages had equal rights with respect to family life. They were not to be segregated, concealed, abandoned or

neglected. That is why the elderly and frail (grandmothers and grandfathers) took part in public societal spheres, such as being narrators of folktales or trying cases in real life and in folktales. In other words, they were society's public and private teachers. That is also why in the tale, 'Bofu naShumba' (The blind man and Lion) (Fortune 1983b), the blind man walks out in the company of his brother until he comes across a neighbourhood where a lion has eaten up all the men. This blind man walks in the open and in the company of the able-bodied. He is not segregated from public life. Thus, the visually impaired were accommodated as any other member of society. Those who had an indifferent attitude to the vulnerable, like the king's first four wives in 'Mukadzi aiva chirikadzi' (A woman who was a widow) (Fortune 1973), were exposed and humiliated, and even divorced. In cases where the immediate family was unable to care for a child with disabilities, just like with the able-bodied, efforts came from the extended family and in extreme cases, from the chief who provided alternative care. Here, Shona philosophy was that it took a whole village to raise a child (Hudson-Weems 1993). Thus, in Shona tradition, a child had several fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers, from the extended family and these took good care of them in all situations (Rukuni 2007). Hence, the needs of all children were taken care of by society as a whole. All humanity thus enjoyed establishing a family and being in the company of a family.

5. THE DISADVANTAGED AND THE RIGHT TO LIFE

In the Shona way of life, every human being had the inherent right to life and society took all necessary measures to ensure that life was enjoyed on an equal basis, by all persons, including those with disabilities. People's attitude was that life with a disability was still 'worth living'. Infanticide and neglect of newborn infants or the elderly with disabilities had no place among the people, where the belief in *ngozi*, the avenging spirit, held supreme. That Shona folktales are laden with characters (young and old) with disabilities shows that these people had the same right to live and even grow to adulthood and old age as anyone else. In the tale 'Rungano rwenherera mbiri' (A tale about two orphans) (Fortune 1973), when the orphans wander in the neighbourhood, they are saved by an old lady from being killed and eaten by a rogue man who ate human meat. In 'Vakomana vaishanduka shumba' (Boys who changed into lions) (Fortune 1982), the young boy and his sisters are saved from being preyed upon by lions. In 'Mambo wechidiki' (The young king) (Fortune 1983b), a frail, old man is hidden by his son and saved from the merciless killing of the elderly. Again, those who ill-treated or abused those with disabilities or the disadvantaged were exposed and shamed as happens to an irresponsible mother and the king's first four wives in 'Zvirehwi nengwena' (Zvirehwi and the crocodile) (Fortune 1982) and 'Pimbirimano' (One born through the limb) (Fortune 1973). The same applies to the young men who had mercilessly killed their elderly in 'The young king' (Fortune

1983b). They later confront baffling situations which they cannot address and all rue why they had killed their old and experienced fathers. Thus, Shona philosophy was in sync with the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which says: 'Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life' (<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/IstandardsIV2.aspx>).

In fact, in general Shona worldview, the right to life was unquestionable. The death of a warrior during an act of war could still violate the right to life. As such, pre-colonial Shona people tried all peaceful avenues of settling an issue before going to war. Even during war, they took time fighting a war of words, in a bid to scare the enemy into peaceful submission in order to avoid the shedding of blood altogether. Physical combat was rare, and only became the ultimate resort if all other peaceful avenues had been exhausted. Killing usually brought with it, the avenging spirit which bore disastrous consequences. Thus, life had to be preserved at all costs, and all thought was given towards making and saving life and such was a survival imperative (Gelfand 1973).

6. ACCESS TO SOCIAL SERVICES: HEALTH, SPORT AND CULTURE

According to the UN Convention, 'Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport are all essential components of being a part of one's community' (<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/ConventionRightsPersonsWithDisabilities.aspx#10>). Part of having fun and games included sharing stories (Rukuni 2007). Traditional Shona society had its own ways of and forms of entertainment and these included games and songs as well as narration of folktales. In such society, the disadvantaged had equal platforms to enjoy the forms of entertainment and develop and utilise their creative, artistic and intellectual potential, not only for their own benefit, but also for the enrichment of society. They participated on an equal basis with others in recreational, leisure and sporting activities of the time.

It was observed earlier that these people were participants in many song-cum-games as well as in the art of storytelling. With folktales, they did not just passively listen to the stories, but actively participated with others, in the chorus or other paralinguistic features of the tales such as clapping hands, beating drums, whistling and ululating. They too were accorded the chance to tell their own stories and in cases where they had problems, or were at loss for words or for the right detail, they were spurred on and directed by the responsible audience (Finnegan 1967, 1970; Okpewho 1992). In other words, stories could be told by anyone of whatever age or status (Finnegan 1967), vindicating p'Bitek's (1986) assertion that in Africa, the question who is an artist does not make sense, for everyone is an artist. Hence, they were equal participants and spectators in cultural life.

Quite a number of animal characters were also exploited to sensitise society about the need to accommodate and tolerate the various forms of disabilities in society. Narrators in these stories talked about and dramatised all the characters in society, including the physically impaired, imitating them but presenting them in a manner which persuaded the audience to tolerate all personalities. Animal characters were made to lisp by the change of alveolar consonants into inter-dental and the use of palatal glides. For example, when Tortoise ate, his speech was slow and measured, 'Kanugudu medu' instead of 'Kanunguru medzu' and Hyena would say, 'Ndoda kutauda nemi dakanaka' instead of 'Ndoda kutura nemi zvakanaka'. The dancing of an elderly lady's limping step would be mimicked 'Dzvigidi chikumbochi' in 'Ambuya nemuzukuru' (A grandmother and a cousin) (Fortune 1983a). The same applies to the able-bodied, who were foolish or had other vices. These too were mimicked and their vices lampooned making them revisit their behaviour and approach to life. The storytellers made society look at itself, laugh at itself, love itself and appreciate itself. Social and communication barriers were removed between the able-bodied and the disabled allowing them to participate as one. Participation in these games directly impacted on the right to health as well.

7. PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE

In traditional Shona society, the disabled and the disadvantaged could effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others. Their participation in decision-making generally was encouraged. They had platforms for freedom of expression and opinion. No one, regardless of age, was prevented from fully participating in the deliberations of the councils or public assemblies (Gykye 1996, 153). In fact, a successful *dare* (court) was one to which all the affected parties were invited, and convened to deliberate on matters affecting them (Rukuni 2007). In 'Tsuru nedzimwe mhuka' (Hare and other animals) (Fortune 1973), the small, the slow and despised ones (like Hare and Tortoise) and the big and mighty (like Elephant, Lion and Buffalo) are all invited and they convene to deliberate on their welfare, in particular the digging of a well. After agreeing on a way forward, all, regardless of their physical stature, take turns in the digging until Tortoise brings up the water. Again, they all discuss how to catch Hare who had refused to participate in the digging, and when everyone is given a chance to try, it is the slow and small but intelligent Tortoise who comes up with an idea that brings the desired results. The leader, (Elephant in this tale), is just a figurehead, the actual consultative and decision-making process lies with the council of elders (Rukuni 2009, 103), who in the folktale were all the animals. Here, the small and disadvantaged participate in both the political (decision-making) and social life of their community (i.e. the digging of a well). In this and other cases, 'the right to free expression of opinion was honoured' (Gykye 1996, 153). Commenting on the Shona political process wherein

everyone had a platform and was listened to, Gelfand (1968, 39) testifies, 'I have no fault to find with the chief's *dare* (court) ...' In tales like 'Chinyamapezi' (The scabies-riddled man) (Fortune 1982, 1983b), 'Kamutatari' (The weakling) (Fortune 1982) and 'Turo naGudo' (Hare and Baboon) (Fortune 1983b), the despised and disadvantaged end up getting married, thus participating in the social life of the community. In 'Bofu naShumba' (The blind man and Lion) (Fortune 1983b), it is the blind man who kills the lion that had tormented and killed all the men in the neighbourhood. He becomes the saviour and ends up getting married to all the women who had been left behind. In many other tales, the orphans, the widows and other disadvantaged people end up having lots and lots of wealth from their exploits, leading very good and admirable lifestyles. In tales where the disadvantaged and those with disabilities are animals, a closer look shows that these were actually human beings in animal masks (Finnegan 1967; Nandwa and Bukenya 1983). Thus, the animal characters vindicate that given platforms people with disabilities and disadvantages perform deeds greater than even the able bodied.

Thus, in Shona life, disability was not approached from a charity perspective. Persons with disabilities were not considered to be passive objects of kind acts or donations. Rather, they were considered to be empowered individuals with rights to participate in political and social life and in their individual development. The Shona have a saying, '*Chirema ndechine mazano, chinotamba chakazembera mudhuri*' (One with a disability makes a plan, he dances whilst leaning against a wall). The proverb expresses that one with a disability knows how to go about his daily activities. Society expects him to 'dance' and he knows he has to 'dance' like others, but has to devise ways of doing so without affecting his being or health. This way, people living with disabilities had great control over their lives. They were self-reliant and not dependent on society's social welfare. Their disability was not treated as a medical condition, which had to be fixed; for what would happen if the condition could not be fixed? It would mean they would be marginalised and treated as less human.

Shona tradition thus accommodated individual differences. This accommodation enhanced the individual's participation in activities of life. Inequality is thus not due to the impairment, but in society's inability to eliminate barriers challenging persons with disabilities. This way, being disadvantaged and having a disability ceases to be an individual's problem, but the outcome of society's wrong perception. Pre-colonial Shona society moulded 'policies', practices, attitudes, environmental accessibility and political organisations, that allowed for the full participation of the disadvantaged and those with disabilities. Thus, Shona philosophy was not based on pity for those with disabilities, but rather on acknowledging their dignity and freedom. It sought and promulgated ways to respect, support and celebrate human diversity by creating the conditions that allowed for meaningful participation by a wide range of persons, including persons with disadvantages or disabilities. Instead

of focusing on people with disabilities as passive objects of charitable acts, Shona society sought to assist people to help themselves so that they could participate in society, in education, at the workplace, in political and cultural life, and accessing justice. Hence, pre-colonial Shona life was hinged on fundamental human rights and freedoms, the recognition of the inherent dignity and worth of each human being, recognition of equality of all human beings, gender equality and more importantly, the recognition of the rights of persons with disadvantages or disabilities (Mandipa 2013).

The folktales largely show that indigenous people enjoyed society's protection and those who felt wronged or mistreated usually turned to their society's justice system. The disadvantaged and those with disabilities often got fair and equal treatment before courts (family or communal), tribunals, and other bodies that made up the justice system of the time. In real life, there were several levels of appeal for any person who would have been wronged (Gombe 1998). If a case did not receive a favourable hearing at the lower courts, the complainant took it up to the chief, who would surely try it in the most just manner. Hence the adage, '*Ishe idurunhuru*' (A chief is a rubbish pit). Being so, it means the chief was accessible even by the commoners, including the disadvantaged and those with disabilities. Thus, there were no barriers to limit the ability of people with disabilities to use the justice system, or their contributions to the administration of justice.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The observance of human rights is not a new phenomenon among the Shona. Pre-colonial Shona society cultivated the respect for humanity and the need for every being to enjoy many rights as enshrined in today's constitution. However, unlike in the past, today's rights are enunciated as rules. These appeal less to contemporary society because the rules are not embedded in the people's practices. Pre-colonial society reformulated such rights into literature which appealed to the people's emotions and whole being, thus maximising their being adapted and adopted in life. There is therefore need for contemporary society to appeal to the creative arts in expressing human rights so as to loosen the rigid social structures that separate the vulnerable from the life of modern day society. In addition, such rights should be taught as part and parcel of child socialisation, as was the case with past Shona society.

9. CONCLUSION

Efforts and legislative measures put in place to protect the disadvantaged and those with disabilities are all done as if there have never been ways of approaching people with such status in African tradition. The article underscores that African oral traditions

are laden with the indigenous people's philosophy and approach to various kinds of impairments and disadvantages. Focusing on the Shona ethnic group and drawing examples from the *ngano* (folktale) genre, it was observed that the disadvantaged and vulnerable were accorded similar platforms in all societal matters. They enjoyed humanity and dignity, education; marriage, home and the family; life and freedom from forms of abuse; health, sport and culture; participation in political and public life; all without discrimination. In all instances, disability was not approached from a charity perspective. Persons with disadvantages and disabilities were considered to be empowered individuals with rights to participate in political and social life and in their individual development. More so, such rights were taught as part of the ethnic group's socialisation process; hence, this produced a citizenry that was appreciative of everyone's rights. It is these venerable and proven lessons that today's society may adopt and adapt to suit contemporary situations.

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