

## **COUNTERING COLONIAL NARRATIVES THROUGH THE SECONDARY SCHOOL HISTORY CURRICULUM: A CASE OF THE ZIMBABWEAN POST-COLONIAL SCHOOL HISTORY EDUCATION FROM 1980 TO 2022**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper advances the argument that the post-colonial secondary school history curriculum in Zimbabwe plays a role in countering colonial narratives about African history which were full of exclusion as well as biased interpretations of African experiences. The emergence of a reconstructionist wave culminated in the re-visiting of historiography of African affairs, the past of Africa and the experiences of its people and thus catechized the authenticity of colonial historiography. Reconstructionist accounts which were informed by an Afrocentric approach challenged the prejudiced portrayal of Africans in colonial historiography and became the cornerstone for the revision of the historical content and information to be studied in the post-colonial Zimbabwean secondary school history curriculum. This qualitative study is informed by the post-colonial theoretical framework which interrogates the impact of colonialism on the colonized as well as the responses and efforts by the colonized to achieve decolonisation. Document analysis of the syllabuses and textbooks used to implement the post-independence history curriculum in Zimbabwe were examined to gather data. The study observed that the post-independence secondary school history curriculum in Zimbabwe is instrumental in countering colonial narratives as evidenced by syllabus topics/ content and historical information in textbooks which explores African civilisation, ethnic relations and cultural practices from an impartial point of view.

**Keywords:** Colonial historiography. Secondary school history curriculum. Zimbabwe.

## **COMBATE ÀS NARRATIVAS COLONIAIS ATRAVÉS DO CURRÍCULO DE HISTÓRIA DA ESCOLA SECUNDÁRIA: UM CASO DE EDUCAÇÃO DE HISTÓRIA ESCOLAR PÓS-COLONIAL DO ZIMBÁBUE DE 1980 A 2022**

### **RESUMO**

Este artigo avança o argumento de que o currículo de história do ensino secundário pós-colonial no Zimbabué desempenha um papel no combate às narrativas coloniais sobre a história africana, que estavam cheias de exclusão, bem como de interpretações tendenciosas das experiências africanas. A emergência de uma onda reconstrucionista culminou na revisitação da historiografia dos assuntos africanos, do passado de África e das experiências do seu povo, catequizando assim a autenticidade da historiografia colonial. Os relatos reconstrucionistas que foram informados por uma abordagem afrocêntrica desafiaram a representação preconceituosa dos africanos na historiografia colonial e tornaram-se a pedra angular para a revisão do conteúdo histórico e da informação a ser estudada no currículo de história da escola secundária pós-colonial do Zimbabué. Este estudo qualitativo é informado pelo quadro teórico pós-colonial que interroga o impacto do colonialismo sobre os colonizados, bem como as respostas e esforços dos colonizados para alcançar a descolonização. A análise documental dos programas e manuais utilizados para implementar o currículo de história pós-independência no Zimbabué foi examinada para recolher dados. O

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estudo observou que o currículo de história do ensino secundário pós-independência no Zimbabué é fundamental para combater as narrativas coloniais, como evidenciado pelos tópicos/conteúdos do programa e informações históricas em livros escolares que exploram a civilização africana, as relações étnicas e as práticas culturais de um ponto de vista imparcial.

**Palavras-chave:** Historiografia colonial. Currículo de história do Ensino Médio. Zimbábue.

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## Introduction

Zimbabwe is a country in Southern Africa which lies between the Zambezi and Limpopo rivers. Zimbabwe fell prey to the forces of colonialism and was colonized by the British in 1890 and it was named Rhodesia after Cecil John Rhodes, the British imperialist who spearheaded the occupation of Zimbabwe by Britain. The country attained its independence in 1980 after a protracted armed struggle against the British settler government and changed its name to Zimbabwe. Historiography in colonial Zimbabwe had a political, economic and social agenda to achieve which was congruent with the advent and spread of European imperialism across Africa. Therefore, it was awash with Eurocentric perspectives which glorified white civilisations and marred with prejudice and exclusion on the past of Africans. “The mobilization of historical mythology played a prominent part in relation to the endeavour of white colonizers to appropriate and legitimize power” (KAARSHOLM, 1992, p.156). Africans were portrayed as an incapable race and literally with no history to pay attention to (DAVIS, 1973). Social, political and economic structures which have been the core of the existence of African societies were deliberately ignored. The whites “imposed Eurocentric versions that marginalized and denigrated the indigenous people” (MAVHUNGA, 2006, p. 451). The biased colonial narratives were tailor-made to justify the advent of colonialism in Africa and in Zimbabwe in particular as an era of enlightenment for the primitive continent (DAVIS, 1973).

Ndlovu (2009) argues that the history curriculum is usually manipulated and monitored by politicians so that it follows the ideology of those in power. Likewise, the school history curriculum during the colonial period was influenced to advance the Eurocentric ideology amongst learners. The history curriculum that was implemented in colonies of the British crown was primarily intended to spread the culture of the colonizers and suppression of the colonized (LONDON, 2000). The history curriculum implemented nurtured learners to idolize the British crown (MOYANA, 1989). Moyo (2020, p.306) laments that this type of history curriculum “resulted in the alienation of the learners as history was presented as disembodied reality with no connections to their lived realities”. Barnes (2007, p. 29) intones that in Zimbabwe, the history of Africa in textbooks was “discussed as the history of European settlement in the region, focusing on western culture, and politics.”

Colonial historiography on Zimbabwean history did not escape scrutiny from critical historians. Davis (1973, p. 380) argues that post world war two saw an emergence of a strong wave of nationalism in Africa “aimed at overthrowing rather than reforming the colonial situation” and thus questioned colonial narratives. Historical scholarship began to “resist paternalistic and patriarchal foreign practices that dismiss local thought, culture and practice as uninformed, barbarian and irrational.” (Dussel, 2000, p. 472) Revisionist perspectives emerged as historians “started to become aware of Africa and the earlier assumption that Africa possessed no history of its own began to be seen as silly (DAVIS, 1973, p. 380). Kaarsholm (1992:156) argues that:

On the basis of archaeological research, missionary materials and investigations of oral traditions, attempts were made to reconstruct the development of pre-colonial modes of production and forms of government and to trace the continuity in the anti-colonial resistance from the revolts of the 1980s to modern political movements and parties.

With regards to Zimbabwean history, the reconstructionist approach emerged “as a response to colonial historiography that seemed determined to deny Africans any meaningful past (Mlambo, 2009, p. 64). Consequently, post-independence history in Zimbabwe among other key objectives was to “perform the noble task of demythologization by countering (ADEOYE, 1992, p. 2) the “dangerous lies Europeans has systematized and institutionalized about the African past” (UYA, 1984, p. 1). Revisionist accounts on the history of Africans in Zimbabwe were a base to stir resistance against biased Euro centric narratives. This initiated a paradigm shift in the secondary school history curriculum as it “performed a vital social function of intellectual decolonisation” (ADEOYE, 1992, p. 2). Davis (1973, p. 4) further notes that African universities invested time and resources to “to shift the focal point of African history from the study of European activities to the development of the African society itself”. This was crucial to explore the history of Africa from an objective point of view in order to portray and produce its lived realities.

## **1 FEATURES OF COLONIAL NARRATIVES ON AFRICAN HISTORY IN ZIMBABWE**

Colonial historiography in Zimbabwe was rooted on the ‘pre-historic’ fallacy to refer to the period prior to the arrival of Europeans as ‘*history-less*’. These sentimentalities were popularized by Eurocentric historians such as Trevor Roper who labeled Africa as a dark continent and declared that, “perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at the present, there is none. There is only the history of Europeans in Africa” (TREVOR-ROPER, 1965, p. 9). Such utterances portrayed Africans as devoid of any meaningful past (MLAMBO, 2013). Kaarsholm (1992, p. 156) argues that the pre-history theme “was put forward without any greater variation in academic treatise on history, in school textbooks and in Rhodesian nationalist propaganda until the fall of the Ian Smith government in 1980”. All the socio-economic and political structures developed by Africans were thus deliberately rendered insignificant. Garlake (1982, p. 1) argues that the Rhodesian government invested a lot in thwarting any efforts “promoting black cultural pride and political consciousness through any indication that Zimbabwean history however remote had a proud record of achievement”. These narratives found its way to the history curriculum to be consumed by learners which was ideal to cultivate the ‘masters and servants’ relationship which was implemented amongst the whites and Africans. “Often when colonial administrators spoke of Rhodesians, they did not, as a rule, include Africans as fully fledged members of that group, regarding them merely as wards under the whites’ paternalist care, often patronizingly referred to as our Africans” (MLAMBO 2013, p. 58).

To cement the assertion that “everything of value in Africa originated outside the continent” (DAVIS 1973, p. 385), the colonialists denied the indigenous Zimbabwean people ownership of some of their milestone achievements. For example, Great Zimbabwe which thrived between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century and is situated on the southern part of the Zimbabwean plateau as a testimony of a civilisation which displayed sophistication in masonry (NDORO, 1997). The three significant stone features at Great Zimbabwe are the Hill complex, Great Enclosure and Valley ruins which housed various artifacts that illustrated the socio-economic and political life of its inhabitants (NDORO, 1997). Great Zimbabwe “became a vehicle of propaganda” serving the purpose of

promoting white supremacy and inferiority of Africans. Colonial historiography credited the construction of Great Zimbabwe which was an exhibition of art and architectural prowess to non-Africans. The Great Zimbabwe ruins were viewed as “vestiges of an earlier, extinct, mighty white civilisation in the heart of darkest Africa (KAARSHOLM, 1992, p. 157). Therefore, the colonial government openly endorsed discourses that concluded that Great Zimbabwe was built by Phoenicians, Chinese and Egyptians (NDORO, 1997). This blatantly detached Africans from the marvelous stone structures as acknowledging Africans as the builders of Great Zimbabwe threatened the validity of the claims that the African continent was home to a stagnant and primitive race that urgently needed to be enlightened by the civilized white race through colonization.

Furthermore, colonialists also orchestrated the virgin land theory to justify the occupation of the Zimbabwean territory by the British settlers. This theory is based on the assumption that the Europeans settled in unoccupied land upon arrival in Zimbabwe. Kaarsholm (1992, p. 156) argues that “it was central to the self-understanding and propaganda of white settlers that what they had appropriated was an empty virginal tract of land which was only sparsely populated”. Robert Tredgold, one of the prominent government officials of the Rhodesian government in Matabeleland once claimed that the Pioneers (First group of Europeans to occupy Zimbabwe) were “advancing through empty spaces” (TREDGOLD, 1956). This standpoint turned a blind eye to the imperialist motives of the Pioneers which disrupted the socio-economic life of Africans. The Pioneers upon arrival in Zimbabwe were given 3000 acres of land as reward for their commitment to the imperialist cause (MLAMBO, 2010). Palmer (2010) highlights that the existence of unoccupied land never implied that Africans did not have meaningful plans to utilize the land and some areas lay bare because of the practice of shifting cultivation. Moreover, some settlers labeled Africans they found in Zimbabwe as “rootless immigrants without rightful claims to the land” (KAARSHOLM (1992, p. 160). This line of thinking profoundly justified the dispossession of African productive land and natural resources as an innocent move by the white settlers which also downplayed its brutal impact on the lives of Africans.

Colonial narratives also stigmatized the culture of the Africans as it was perceived as backward and could hardly influence any significant form of progression. Kaarsholm (1992) highlights that the white people in Rhodesia believed that Africans were people who lacked any social systems and culture. This speaks to the cultural blindness-oriented attitude of the white people which informed their cultural standpoint. The culture of the Europeans was portrayed as the epitome of civilisation while African culture was viewed with immense suspicion. Kaarsholm (1992, p. 163) argues that “by defining the Africans as traditional, the whites created an image of themselves as modern and development- oriented”. Thus the Africans were to be transformed from a backward culture which surprisingly had shaped their way of life since time in memorial. This paved the way for indifference on the indigenous knowledge systems in colonial historiography as well as in the school history curriculum. According to Mavhunga (2006, p. 442), the whites had an agenda “to facilitate the conversion of Africans from their pagan beliefs to that of colonialists and to subjugate, control and exploit Africans”. As such the Europeans had to impose their culture on Africans and convert them to “produce an African who looked down upon his own cultural beliefs and everything else that was African including indigenous languages and religion (Mavhunga, 2006, p. 442). For example, the failure of the 1896-7 uprising by the Ndebele and Shona people against the whites was taken as a testimony of the ineptness of African religion. Coleman et al (1983, p. 140) notes that:

The Africans were naturally disillusioned at the failure of the rebellion which they thought had been undertaken at the bidding of the ancestral spirits. Some began to doubt the power

of the spirits they had formerly worshiped and began to turn to Christianity. There began, too, a weakening of tribal beliefs and customs: during the next fifty years, some Africans began to adopt some of the European customs.

In reality, the 1896-7 uprising by Africans demonstrated their discontent towards the British administration with its repressive social, political and economic policies which plunged Africans' life in social and economic disaster. The colonialists deliberately brushed aside the genuine concerns of Africans and declared that the "origins of the revolt are not frustrations and protests of the African population against the expropriation of land and forced labour but a superstitious fanaticism brought about by witch doctors and talents of the warlike Ndebele in exciting the Shona into taking up arms" (British South Africa Company, 1989, p. 55). This statement further presents the Shona people as docile and incapable such that they had to be incited by the Ndebele to feel the need to resist settler oppressive governance.

Moreover, the nature of ethnic relations amongst Zimbabwean indigenous communities was also subjected to distortions and misinterpretations by colonial narratives. The exaggerations were more pronounced on the Ndebele-Shona relations during the pre-colonial era. The Shona people had been the inhabitants of the Zimbabwean plateau as back as the early Iron Age period while the Ndebele arrived in Zimbabwe around 1837 from Nguniland where they left as a result of the political upheaval of the Mfecane period (BEACH, 1975). Muzondidya and Ndlovu- Gatsheni (2007, p. 277) argue that ethnic "relationship was always dynamic and changing and the complex and fluid relations were characterized by both conflict and cooperation and both incorporation and fragmentation". Upon arrival, the Ndebele defeated some of the Rozvi chiefdoms who are part of the Shona ethnic group and established themselves as the paramount rulers in the south west part of Zimbabwe (RANGER, 1985). This had both a positive and negative impact on the relations of the Ndebele and Shona. Therefore, the Ndebele relations with the Shona during the early phase of their settlement in Zimbabwe were shaped by various complex factors such as the quest for security, survival and assertion of political authority over the Shona people. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008, p. 38), "Mzilikazi employed such strategies as raiding, conquests, assimilation and incorporation of individuals, groups and communities". Thus the Ndebele raided the Shona people for both economic and political reasons and there is no doubt that some Shona chiefdoms defied domination by the Ndebele. Beach (1974, p. 651) argues that the "the bulk of Ndebele raiding before 1873 was a response to both the political and military threat of the Rozvi dynasty and to the economic needs of the state." Nonetheless, not only did the Ndebele raid the Shona but the Shona chiefs such as Chizema, Tohwechipi and Mutinhima also embarked on raiding expeditions against the Ndebele (BEACH, 1974). However colonial historiography inflated the extent and impact of Ndebele raids on the Shona people. Furthermore, the colonialist defined the Ndebele-Shona relations on the parameters of one sided Ndebele raids upon the weak Shona which did not objectively reflect the prevailing reality. Also, raiding was portrayed as the mainstay of the Ndebele economy so as to present the Ndebele as an avid warmonger nation that survived on sheer plunder on the fragile Shona chiefdoms. The missionaries who visited the Zimbabwean territory also championed this rhetoric. According to Chennells (1982, p. 83), Robert Moffatt, one of the British missionaries declared that:

The former inhabitants of these luxuriant hills and fertile plain land had, from peace and plenty become effeminate, while Matabele under the barbarous reign of the monster Chaka, from whose iron grasp they had made their escape, like an overwhelming torrent, rushed northward to the north, marking their course with blood and carnage.

This overwhelmingly pathetic depiction of the Shona at the mercy of the Ndebele raiders was just but a political ploy to legitimize the exigent necessity to occupy Mashonaland by the white settlers as a philanthropic gesture to redeem the Shona people from brutal Ndebele constant raids. It is also essential to note that these claims paid no attention to other economic, social and political ties which bound the Ndebele and Shona societies. Gusha (2022) reports that economically, these two groups traded with each other and diplomatic relations also prevailed through payment of tribute by Shona chiefs. The Ndebele also adopted some religious practices of the Shona and paid tribute to the Ngwali religious cult which was also venerated by the Shona (GUSHA, 2022). On trade, (BEACH, 1974) reveals that the Ndebele people heavily relied on the Njanja Shona group for the provision of iron tools. Thomas (1963) also highlights that Mzilikazi once requested Tohwechipi who was Chirisamhuru's son to return from exile in the eastern Highlands where he had fled to. This indicates that both peaceful coexistence and conflict characterized the Ndebele-Shona relations. Ndlovu- Gatsheni (2008) argues that the Ndebele employed diplomatic strategies to gain acceptance from different chiefdoms they ruled. Exclusion of the diplomatic side of the Ndebele-Shona relations was a strategic method meant to enforce a divide and rule strategy and stifle the possibility of any constructive cooperation between the Ndebele and Shona against the colonial administration.

Furthermore, colonial historiography misinterpreted the Ndebele social structure as synonymous to a caste system denoting exploitation of the weak by the powerful rulers. The Ndebele state was divided into three social groups which are the Zansi who accounted for 15% of the population, the Enhla who made 25% and the Hole who were the majority accounting up to 60% (CHANIAWA, 1976). The Eurocentric accounts assumed that this social structure was a systematic model of exploitation of the weak groups by the elite Zansi group (NDLOVU-GATSHENI, 2008). In a caste set-up, "people belong to certain hierarchical structures that are fixed and one cannot cross to the other structures within the system (GUSHA, 2022, p. 60). Chennells (2007, p. 75) argues that the diverse origins of the people who made up the Ndebele nation were used against them" by the colonialists. According to Cobbing (1976), the social structure did not in any way resemble a caste system but it reflected where different groups in the Ndebele state originated from whereby Zansi meant, (those who came from the south), the Enhla referring to those who originated from the north) and the Holi for those whom the Ndebele found in present day Zimbabwe). While it is true that significant positions were mainly occupied by people from the Zansi group in the Ndebele state (CHENELLS, 2007), labeling the social structure as a deliberate system for exploitation is rather toxic. Gusha (2022) also reveals that social relationships in the Ndebele state were not primarily bound by the regulations of a caste system.

## **2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is informed by the post- colonial theory which is a "multi-stranded theory concerned with advancement of liberatory and resistance politics that support decolonisation and engages subaltern experience, which involves the perspectives of dominated, marginalized, oppressed and subordinated people" Westhuizen (2013, p. 690-691). The theory also critically examines the relationship between the colonizer and their colonies which was characterized by dominance of the colonies (HAMMER, 2004). The advent of colonialism in continents such as Africa and Asia had a far reaching impact on the economic, social and political lives of the colonized people who were subjected to foreign systems of administration. Hence post-colonial theory examines the impact of the interaction of two divergent cultures where one culture is regarded highly while the other is relegated to inferiority (ILIEVA; ODIEMO-MUNARA, 2007).

Post-colonial theory also stands as a challenge to colonial discourses and narratives which are marred with an impartial depiction of the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized (MACEDO, 1999).

Therefore, it takes a decolonisation stance both in the academic and non-academic field in order to give space and significance to the voices of the colonized to be heard. According to Kennedy (1996, p. 347), on the basis of orientalism, the post-colonial theory advances that “the dismantlement of Western modes of domination requires the deconstruction of Western structure of knowledge.” The post-colonial theory raises “fundamental questions about the epistemological structures of power and the cultural foundations of resistance, about the porous relationship between metropolitan and colonial societies, about the construction of group identities in the context of state formation, even about the nature and uses of historical evidence itself (KENNEDY, 1996, p. 356). On this regard, the post-colonial theory is suitable for this study because it provides a platform to critically reflect on how the post-independence Zimbabwean secondary school history curriculum “challenges the superiority of the dominant Western perspective and seeks to reposition and empower the marginalized and subordinated” (SMITH, 2007, p. 12) Africans using reconstructionist narratives on the African social, economic and political realities.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

Methodology is “an articulated theoretically informed approach to the production of data” (ELLEN, 1984, p. 9) for a particular study. This study employed a qualitative approach which is a “form of systematic enquiry into meaning (SHANK, 2002, p. 5) which deals with non-numerical data which is interpreted to enhance the understanding of social experiences through exploring the target population (PUNCH, 2013). The study examined the post-colonial secondary school history curriculum in Zimbabwe so as to provide insights on how it responds to colonial historiography which distorted and excluded some concepts of African history. Document analysis was applied to gather data which is a “systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents where data is examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge” (BOWEN, 2007, p. 27).

Therefore, the documents which were reviewed include the post-colonial history syllabuses which are official documents that contain what students should learn in order to meet the aims and objectives of the curriculum being implemented (TOKATLI; KESLI, 2009). The African history textbooks for different levels (Form 1-4) were also examined because they are one of the main resources in history teaching hence they are produced in line with the concepts contained in the syllabus and entire curriculum (AMAD, et. al., 2013). Data was analyzed through the thematic approach which is a “method for systematically identifying, organizing and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set” (BRAUN; CLARKE, 2012, p. 2). The following research questions were used to solicit for data:

- a) How does the post-colonial Zimbabwean secondary school history curriculum respond to colonial narratives/ historiography
- b) To what extent is the Zimbabwean post-colonial secondary school history curriculum informed by re-constructionist perspectives on African History?

### **4 OVERVIEW OF THE POST-COLONIAL ZIMBABWEAN SECONDARY SCHOOL HISTORY CURRICULUM**

At independence, the government of Zimbabwe was obliged to reform the secondary school history curriculum so that it is relevant to the context of Africans and speaks to the aspirations of the government. The history syllabus 2160 which was inherited from the colonial era was labeled as a “feeble attempt at countering colonial historiography (SIBANDA 2013, p. 13) “that was steeped in knowledge regurgitation and dissolution of an African identity” (Sibanda and Blignaut, 2020, p. 4). It was also condemned for its “equal emphasis on European and Central African history (BARNES, 2007, p. 639.). Consequently, the mission to reform the history curriculum with regards to content, methodology and assessment practices began in 1984 and the new History Syllabus 2166 was unveiled in 1990 (CHITATE, 2005) which replaced Syllabus 2160. Syllabus 2166 had a Marxist-Leninist orientation which was the ideological approach of the government and was designed to “capture the soul, consciousness and identity of the African people” Chitate (2005, p.2). The syllabus was based on nationalist historiography (BARNES, 2007) which was aimed at validating that “Africa had produced organized polities, monarchies, and cities just like Europe” (ZELEZA, 1997, p. 1). In other words, it was meant to counter the prejudiced colonial narratives by celebrating the past of the Africans (NDLOVU-GATSHENI, 2011). Chitate (2005) notes that this school curriculum accommodated the new history philosophy which regards history as a form of knowledge hence it sought to equip learners with historical skills of analysis of evidence and historical perspectives in order to arrive at sound conclusions. However, Moyo (2014, p. 6) notices that nationalist historiography “eulogized Africa’s past without subjecting it to critique.” As a result, it was prone to imposing grand narratives.

Syllabus 2166 was replaced in 2000 with syllabus 2167 and Barnes (2007, p. 634) claims that the development of this syllabus was a “hurried affair” to respond to the disconcerting social, economic and political circumstances in the country. The socio-economic and political impact of the unsuccessful Economic Structural Adjustment Programme prompted the adoption of Syllabus 2167 which was based on patriotic historiography. Moyo argues (2014, p. 7) that Syllabus 2167 by and large was meant to serve the government from “growing unpopularity that was concomitant to adoption of western inspired economic adjustment programmes and also by the western sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe following land invasion of post 2000”. Therefore, the school history curriculum was manipulated by the ruling party and “re-interpreted as a means to re-justify a legitimacy that was under threat (MOYO, 2014, p. 8). In the process, the liberation struggle was portrayed as “the total significant history of Zimbabwe” (RANGER, 2009, p. 67) at the expense of “other socio-political dynamics that have been central to the nation state” (MOYO, 2016, p. 6). Consequently, history was made a compulsory subject to make sure that all learners are socialized through the patriotic discourse. As a result of this standpoint, Syllabus 2167 fell short in cultivating critical historical competencies as it largely embraced traditional pedagogical practices in history teaching and learning. This was ideal to protect patriotic narratives from critical questioning.

In 2017, Zimbabwe adopted a competence-based history curriculum which is currently being implemented. This syllabus speaks to a departure from a content-laden curriculum to a skills oriented one in a bid to equip learners with relevant skills, knowledge and attitudes compatible with the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well as discipline specific competencies. The History Syllabus 4044 also commits to serve national interests by developing a “historical overview of Zimbabwe and raises an awareness of the need to preserve and conserve our heritage” (History Syllabus 4044, Form 1-4, 2015-2022). Syllabus 4044 is also informed by the recommendations of the Nziramasanga Commission of Enquiry which was tasked to investigate the relevance and utilitarian purpose of the Zimbabwean education system through nationwide consultations. The Nziramasanga Commission advocated for a “holistic education aimed at the development of the whole person: physical, mental, spiritual and social” (NZIRAMASANGA, 1999, p. 61). In line



with this objective, the competence-based curriculum emphasizes that together with knowledge, there should be inculcation of a wide range of values of Ubuntu, human rights and democracy, gender sensitivity, patriotism which should facilitate behavior change amongst learners (History Syllabus, Form 1-4, 2015-2022). It also provides for a blended approach in assessment of learners through assessment for learning, assessment as learning and assessment of learning which is both content and skills oriented (Curriculum Framework, 2015-2022).

## 5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

There is immense evidence from the post-colonial secondary school history curriculum that demonstrates that one of its primary focus is at countering the distorted colonial narratives about the history of Africans. The secondary school history curriculum syllabuses and the textbooks seek to “eschew the crude racism of the Rhodesian era” (BARNES, 2007, p. 635). Various history textbooks used as sources of teaching and learning material were written to chronicle African history from an Afro-centric perspective. The Ministry of Education celebrated the publishing of one of the first African Heritage Secondary school history textbook series by stating that “for the first time our secondary school pupils can now read and study a history textbook written about our forefathers, form our own view at last is work that celebrates the African past as we always knew it” (Ministry of Education, 1982). The observed trends which counter colonial historiography in the secondary school history syllabus and textbooks are discussed below:

### 5.1 AFRICANS AS A CIVILIZING SOCIETY

The school history curriculum portrays Africans as a society that possesses various forms of civilisations which happened over time during the pre-colonial period. It traces the existence and developments of African societies as back as the Stone Age period up to the Iron Age era before the advent of colonialism. Developments which are part of these historical epochs are clearly accommodated in the secondary school history curriculum. For example Syllabuses 2166, 2167 and 4044 all contain topics about the way of life of the Stone Age San people and the Iron Age Bantu communities with regards to their economic, social and political organization. Also, in textbooks such as Dynamics of History Book 1 (1997) and History Form 1 (2019), the derogatory labeling of the San people as the ‘Bushmen’ (KAARSHOLM, 1992) is removed. In colonial writings, “discourse of Bushmen as helpless, undervalued victims, silent societies with no literature and no history was common” (KOZIEL, 2018, p. 108). Rather, Syllabus 4044 pays attention to the indigenous knowledge systems of the San people which shaped their survival. One the first history textbooks for the post-colonial history curriculum Syllabus 2160, African Heritage Book 1 (1982, p. 38) challenges the view that “the San were totally ignorant of economic issues” by highlighting that the San “had detailed knowledge of their land and existing natural resources, had industry and technology which suited their needs and most importantly painted on rocks which has provided information about their lifestyle and beliefs” (1982, p. 38-39). The rock paintings by the San people have been widely used by historians to explain how the San people lived socially and economically. The Advanced Level History Syllabus 6606 (2015-2022) requires that learners in studying the development of pre-colonial societies should examine the indigenous knowledge systems of the San as well as their influence on present societies. This creates an opportunity for learners to explore and evaluate the place and value of the contributions of the San people as part of the forefathers of pre-colonial African civilisation owing to their capabilities and inventions which allowed them to survive in harmony with the environment.

The post-colonial history curriculum further provides for the teaching of state formation amongst the Bantu people in pre-colonial Zimbabwe during the Iron Age period. For example, reference is made to the Great Zimbabwe, Mutapa, Rozvi and the Ndebele states which are Iron Age states which thrived in the Zimbabwean plateau. When studying these states, learners are supposed to examine their origins, social, economic, political as well as how they declined (Syllabus 2166, 2167 and Syllabus 4044). History textbooks such as Focus on History Book 3 (2018), People Making History Book 1 (1985) provides information that explains how factors such as religion, availability of natural resources and capable leadership were influential in the rise of the Mutapa, Great Zimbabwe and Rozvi states. Moreover, the controversy on who were the builders of Great Zimbabwe is also cleared in various post-colonial history textbooks. People Making History Book 1 (1985), History for Zimbabwe Book 1 (1986) as well as History Form 3 (2020) attribute the establishment and construction of the magnificent Great Zimbabwe structures to the Shona people of the Gumanye culture who are believed to have settled in the plateau around the eleventh century when the Mapungubwe Kingdom was at the verge of its decline. Pikirayi (2013) also argues that the rulers of Great Zimbabwe were able to mobilize labour for the construction through the wealth they acquired from livestock production, crop cultivation and long distance trade. People Making History Book 1 (1985) further highlights that the indigenous Shona people were responsible for the construction of the Great Zimbabwe by illustrating the spread of masonry culture to other places in the Zimbabwean region such as Chipadze, Nhunguza and Mtelegwa which were also Shona inhabited areas. Beach (1974, p. 646) concludes that the “Shona were the descendants of the creators of the most impressive Iron Age material culture in Southern Africa, the Zimbabwe-Khami culture.

How the Iron Age communities survived and earned a living is explained in various history textbooks. Dynamics of History Book 3 (2008) outlines a variety of economic activities which were the backbone of the Iron Age societies such as crop cultivation, mining, hunting, livestock production, gathering, craftwork and trade. The same textbook further describes the social organization of these states with a strong emphasis that the Iron Age communities valued community and family relations and also had various cultural practices which were shaped by their beliefs. Colonial historiography robbed the learners of these concepts in their study of history. Studying the social organization of African societies is vital for learners to understand how their forefathers interpreted the world around them. Furthermore, learners are exposed to information on the political organization of the pre-colonial states with an emphasis on the hierarchical government structure which consists of the king at the apex of power, council of advisors, the army, judiciary systems and rules and laws. For example, Focus on History Form 3 (2018), gives a ranked structure of the Rozvi state whereby the king (*Changamire*) was the head of the state, assisted in ruling by advisors known as “*dare*”, and also relying on the services of the provincial chiefs known as *sadunhu* and village heads called *samana*. All these government officials had clearly stated roles which were important for the smooth governance of the state and to ensure stability and security of the entire kingdom. This is a huge contradiction of colonial historiography which regarded Africans as disorganized people without any systematic form of leadership structure.

## 5.2 DEMYSTIFYING THE NATURE OF THE NDEBELE-SHONA RELATIONS

Ndebele-Shona relations were also part of the topic to be studied in History Syllabus 2167 as a sub-topic on the Ndebele State’s relations with its neighbors. The objective to be accomplished with regards to this concept is to “comment on the relationship between the state and its people as well as its neighbors” (History Syllabus 2167). The myth of raiding as the backbone of the Ndebele

economy which has been popularized by Eurocentric accounts is dismissed in the textbook, History Form 3 (2020) by highlighting a variety of economic activities which were the basis of the Ndebele economy such as trade, crop cultivation and livestock production, blacksmithing and hunting among others. This is supported by Cobbing (1976) who argues that every homestead in the Ndebele state had a piece of land for farming and chiefs also participated in crop cultivation while soldiers took leave to participate in farming during the rainy season. The issue of raiding is also presented in two fold that is both the Ndebele and Shona raiding each other which is also attested to by Beach (1974) who reports several raids upon the Ndebele by Shona chiefs such Tohwechipi. Step Ahead Book 3 (2008, p. 65-66.) mentions that:

The Ndebele regiments attacked the Shona in order to capture cattle but it was far less widely and often less frequent than has supposed. The claim that Ndebele cruel regiments forced Shona to rebuild their villages among inaccessible caves and boulders is not entirely accurate. The majority of the Shona people remained on their land and most old communities remained intact. The Ndebele regiments never set foot in the distant states in Mutekedza, Hwata, NemaKonde and Shangwe.

Furthermore, Focus on History Book 3 (2018) further reveals that the Ndebele and Shona people were engaged in other economic relations such as tributary relations, trading relations and cattle alliances as well as religious ties. This displays that the Shona were not always on the run because of Ndebele raids and that these groups were not sworn enemies rather both peaceful coexistence and hostility shaped their relations. This is supported by Beach (1974, p. 638) who asserts that the “Ndebele did not believe in total war and the Shona in total peace.”

### 5.3 A PEOPLE WITH A SENSE OF SELF-DETERMINATION

The history curriculum also goes a long way to reveal that Africans in both pre-colonial and colonial Zimbabwe were a people with a sense of self determination which speaks to a consciousness to independence and self-rule. Unlike, colonial narratives which depicted Africans as people who were naturally destined to a position of subjects, the history curriculum brings out that they had a sense of independence through the topics of the Anglo-Ndebele war, the 1896-7 Ndebele/ Shona uprising, forms of resistance against colonial administration as well as the liberation struggle which ended in 1979 and culminated in the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980. It is also stated in History Form 2 (2020) that during the Anglo-Ndebele war of 1893, though unsuccessful the Ndebele fought in order to defend their kingdom against the invading settler forces. This shows that the Ndebele were committed to maintaining their independence. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008) argues in his book ‘The Ndebele nation, Hegemony, Memory Historiography’ that “the Ndebele cherished their cultural and political independence to the extent of responding violently to equally violent imperialist forces which were intolerant of their sovereignty and cultural autonomy” Furthermore, on the causes of the 1896-7 Ndebele-Shona uprisings, People Making History Book 4 (2001, p. 99) highlights that the war was mainly triggered by forced labour, taxation, alienation of land and stripping of powers of traditional leaders as well as banning of trade with the Portuguese among other causes. These mentioned separate events show that Africans detested the economic, political domination and occupation of their land by the Europeans which is contrary to the colonial historiography discourse which maintains that the 1896-7 uprising was a result of misguided advice from religious leaders. Furthermore, the history curriculum portrays the move to an armed struggle in colonial Zimbabwe as a significant quest for independence and self-rule by the Africans. Step Ahead History Book 3 (2001, p. 195) highlights that the armed

struggle in Southern Rhodesia was a result of the failure of reformist initiatives, continued repressive policies and banning of political parties by the Rhodesian government. This gives more room for learners to appreciate that the Africans were not just a passive society meant to be ruled by the whites but they also reacted to the economic, social and political conditions in their interaction with the whites as it affected their independence. Mlambo (2013) intones that the root causes of the armed struggle in Rhodesia are linked to the neglect of African grievances and persistent repressive policies of the white government.

#### 5.4 AFRICANS WITH A SOUND CULTURE

The post-colonial history curriculum acknowledges that African societies had an established form of culture which informed their lifestyles. The cultures of different societies are indicated in the social, economic and political organization of the Stone Age and Iron Age societies. People Making History Book 2 (1987, p. 93), describes cultural imperialism which was prevalent during the colonial era whereby “missionaries and school teachers taught that many traditional customs were evil. European culture was presented as superior to African culture in every way”. Cultural complexity of African societies involves language, resource use and management, social interactions, rituals as well as spirituality issues (KOZIEL, 2018) which is largely accommodated in history textbooks. History Form 1 (2020) explains that division of labor, marriage systems, inheritance system, religious system and various ceremonies were some of the popular elements of the African culture in the Great Zimbabwe, Mutapa, Rozvi and Ndebele states. African religion is also portrayed as a significant factor that acted as a pillar in uniting people and solving problems at family and community level. For example, Focus on History Book 3 (2018, p. 20) mentions that in the Mutapa state, “religious leaders united the state through religious ceremonies like rain calling and also intervened in succession disputes and religious ceremonies were used to show loyalty to the king”.

### 6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study examined how the secondary school history curriculum in post-independent Zimbabwe resisted colonial narratives. Colonial historiography deliberately denied Africans of any meaningful history as it was driven by the Eurocentric notion that Africa was a backward continent hence its people failed to initiate any civilisations prior to the coming of the whites. Resultantly, colonial narratives portrayed Africans without a significant past and any social, political and economic systems to influence their way of life.

This paper notes that the school history curriculum during the colonial period and post-independence era has been instrumental in advancing the main objectives and aspirations of the influential society in terms of ideology and culture. The school history curriculum has been used as an avenue to promote the historiography which the government and the dominant society affiliates to at a particular point of time. Efforts to counter colonial narratives are observed in the post-independent history syllabuses and textbooks through creation of room for the study of African civilisations, cultural practices, detecting and dismissing of biases on ethnic relations. The school history curriculum is designed to juxtapose learners to a past that they can relate to and interpret meaningfully as well as the history of some parts of the world. Though the post-colonial secondary school history curriculum is credited in this paper for promoting the realities of African experiences, it is also observed that at some point post-colonial historiography tended to promote and protect grand narratives on Zimbabwean history. Such a curriculum and pedagogical stance to

secondary school history curriculum can deny learners an important opportunity to explore various complex factors which shaped the relations and way of life of Africans in general.

Therefore, such tendencies should be guarded against if the secondary school history curriculum in Zimbabwe is to continue to be employed as an effective vehicle to resist biased interpretations of African history and promote objective accounts which reflect reality on the history of Africans. It is also essential that curriculum and pedagogical practices in secondary school history education in Zimbabwe be underpinned by multiperspectivity and critical analysis on ethnicity issues, forms of resistance against colonial rule, gender relations and some socio-economic political issues.

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