

Typification of democracy in ancient Shona society: a paremiological perspective

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Abstract

This article is an exegesis of democracy as it manifests in the Shona people's selected proverbial philosophy and collective thought. It argues that, contrary to the peddled cultural prejudices and Eurocentric condescending attitudes that portray African/Shona traditional leadership as monarchical and autocratic, this society had an analogue of democratic governance system, as an established tradition. Through proverbs, a collective and engaging dialogue with chiefs and their subjects gently reminded stakeholders of their responsibilities. The article avers that vivid insights of the Shona people's cultural norms and values exude that they had a firm, genius, significant and sustainable democracy in both theory and praxis. Furthermore, the Shona people's linguistic treasures unraveled in this analysis, typify that they have a rich oral heritage which functions as part and parcel of their history, to be exploited also by the contemporary and future generations. Shona proverbs, as this article further argues, are oral archival material worthy re-engaging for they do not only reflect the Shona people's democratic worldview but also act as a valid, reliable and rich linguistic transcript of their traditional leadership from the classical past. The intellectual pedestals adopted in this study are sankofa and nommoic creativity.

Keywords: Democracy, leadership, living heritage, nommo, paremiology, sankofa