NARRATING GENDER AND DANGER IN SELECTED ZIMBABWE WOMEN'S WRITINGS ON HIV AND AIDS

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DECLARATION

I, Anna Chitando student number 4327-0964 declare that "Narrating Gender and Danger in Selected Zimbabwe Women's Writings on HIV and AIDS" is my own work and that all the sources I have used/quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature…………………………………………Date……………………………………..

SUMMARY

This thesis investigates how selected Zimbabwean female writers narrate HIV and AIDS. It argues that, generally, the prevailing images of women in Zimbabwean society and literature are incapacitating. Male authors have been portraying women in disempowering ways as loose, dangerous, weak and dependent on men. This unjust portrayal of women has been worsened by the prevalence of HIV and AIDS. Women have been depicted as vectors in the spread of HIV, thus perpetuating sexist ideologies. Presuming that women authors can do better in their depiction of female characters, this research investigates whether female authors differ in their representation of female characters in contexts of HIV and AIDS. The works critiqued are Virginia Phiri's *Desperate* (2002), Sharai Mukonoweshuro's *Days of Silence* (2000), Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006), Tendayi Westerhof's *Unlucky in Love* (2005) and Lutanga Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* (2006). The study further explores the extent to which Zimbabwe female authors sanction, conform, undermine, assess critically or do away with unconstructive images of women in contexts of HIV and AIDS. This study emphasized the possibility of literature to offer a platform for the liberation of women, or a counter- platform for reactionary politics. Predicated on the notion of gender and danger, the study questions whether female authors perpetuate the stereotypes of women's roles as destructive, or whether some view 'dangerous' images of women in literature as liberating. Overall, this thesis argued that contrary to the postulation of female authors being similar in their understanding and depiction of the concept of gender and danger, they are not. It is at this juncture that this study breaks new ground by utilizing the concept of agency to show how different female writers interpret and narrate gender and danger in contexts of HIV and AIDS. This study applies the notion of agency as a means of evaluating the extent to which women employ nonconformist acts in order to undercut patriarchy and other oppressive socially constructed ideologies.

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KEY TERMS

- Zimbabwe Women Writers
- Narrating
- Negative Danger
- Positive Danger
- Human Agency
- Gender
- Womanism
- Feminism,
- HIV and AIDS
- Patriarchy
- Sexuality
- Silence
- Stigma

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CHAPTER 1

NARRATING GENDER AND DANGER IN THE CONTEXT OF HIV AND AIDS IN ZIMBABWE

1.1 Purpose of the Study

This study offers a critical analysis of creative works on HIV and AIDS by Zimbabwean female writers. It examines how selected female writers in Zimbabwe construct and represent images of women and men as they face the pandemic. The research explores and explains whether or not, and in what ways Zimbabwean female writers challenge disempowering portrayals of women and grant agency to their female characters as they negotiate HIV and AIDS. The study contends that female creative artists in Zimbabwe have largely succeeded in moving away from stereotypes of women as helpless victims of patriarchy towards depicting empowered individuals who face HIV and AIDS with creativity and determination. However, the study also explores the authors' different levels of awareness of the instrumental value of narrative in re-writing images of women previously constructed through the gendered notion of 'danger'" in the context of HIV and AIDS.

1.2 Background

Women's issues have become fertile ground for scholarly reflections. In literature, Zimbabwean female writers such as Tsitsi Dangarembga (1988 and 2006) and Yvonne Vera (for example, 1994 and 1996) engage issues of the cultural construction of Zimbabwean women. It is in view of this trend that this study investigates how oppressive cultural practices, violence, unfair economic systems and other factors leave women at the bottom of society. The study also reflects on the strategies that women have adopted to ensure their survival in the face of patriarchy, HIV and AIDS and rampant capitalism. From the early 1990's, Zimbabwe has been entangled in a serious economic crisis (Muzondidya 2009) that has seen the status of women in Zimbabwe being negatively affected. For the past years, economic and political instability has posed marked challenges to the ruling regime since independence. Biological, cultural and socio-economic conditions contribute to women's greater vulnerability to HIV (Lamptey, Johnson and

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Khan 2006: 5). Against this gendered background of HIV and AIDS, young women in Zimbabwe have begun to speak out. They have published novels, short stories, poems and autobiographies that seek to address the epidemic. The selected works for this study are Phiri's *Desperate* (2002), Mukonoweshuro's *Days of Silence* (2000), Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006), Westerhof's *Unlucky in Love* (2005) and Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* (2006).

This study analyses the interplay between literature and cultural beliefs and practices in Zimbabwe with special reference to HIV and AIDS. It interrogates how writers have been influenced by culture in their approaches to the epidemic, and also seeks to question whether or not they perpetuate gender stereotypes that are informed by cultural beliefs in their writings. The thesis examines how Zimbabwean literature provides critiques of the impact of culture on gender in the wake of HIV and AIDS. The study also questions whether artists bring new insights to the discourse on HIV and AIDS and gender. It explores the influence of culture on authors and their descriptions of the HIV and AIDS pandemic as well as on the solutions that they suggest. The research analyses the underlying ideologies related to sexuality, gender and danger. Therefore, the aim of this study is to critically explore the notions of 'gender and danger' in selected novels and short stories by Zimbabwean women writing on HIV and AIDS.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The dominant images of women in Zimbabwean society and literature are debilitating. Women have been largely portrayed as dangerous, weak and dependent on men. In particular, the era of HIV and AIDS has exacerbated the negative images of women. The transmission of HIV from one person to another has led to unfair depictions of women as the sole vectors in its spread. As McFadden (1992: 173-174) accurately observes, "the media tends to play an active and often misogynist role in the construction and perpetuation of such sexist stereotypes." Fictional works are implicated in this conspiracy against women. It is important to study selected women's works to see whether they endorse, destabilise, and critique the construction of women as carriers of HIV and AIDS. Although female writers are more likely to, first, focus on HIV and AIDS out of an existential necessity, and second, are better positioned to provide empowering images of women, some have absolved the images of men as not implicated in promoting a discourse that

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describe women both as victims and vectors in the spread of HIV and AIDS. Artistic works that present incapacitating images of women in HIV and AIDS contexts are often read as depicting 'the real state of affairs in the world.' This can reinforce, in the mind of the reader, the fact that women need to be silenced and frustrated so that women who seek to develop liberating perspectives are undermined. Despite the fact that no study has demonstrated and argued that different female authors depict women and men differently, a close reading of the texts, illustrates that the construction of varied images of women and multiply meanings of 'gender and danger' in literary works within the context of HIV and AIDS can happen in spite of socialization of authors into a culture that upholds the oppression of women. Because the concepts of gender and danger are mutable over space and time, "it is up to writers and people who contest the images to redefine them in ways that they deem to be more realistic, constructive and liberating to the society in question" (Gaidzanwa 1985: 99). Challenging stereotypes that present women as loose, dangerous and prostitutes can be achieved through generating empowering narratives that deliberately substitute negative images of women in literature with descriptions of women as assertive and creative. This study interrogates how selected female authors in Zimbabwe project images of women and men in relation to HIV and AIDS.

1.4 The Assumptions of the Study

The main assumptions of the study are that:

- Women are oppressed in the Zimbabwean society, especially in the context of HIV and AIDS.
- When women write we assume that they seek to correct the image of fellow women.
- Women authorize contradictory images of womanhood.

1.5 Research Questions

If Zimbabwe male authors have in general authorized denigrating images that target women as loose and dangerous, this study poses the following research questions:

- What is the general understanding by critics, of the relationship between the concepts feminism, gender, danger and HIV in a Zimbabwean context?
- How have Zimbabwean female writers, writing in English language depicted HIV in their novels?
- What are the continuities and discontinuities in the depiction of HIV and AIDS in the creative works by Zimbabwean female writers?
- Are there alternative ways of reinterpreting gender and danger in positive ways that might lead to liberated and liberating images of women in the context of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe.
- How can we explain the contradictory representation of women in a group of selected women authors in general, and within the work of a single author in particular?

This study also questions whether artists bring new insights to the discourse on HIV and AIDS. It explores the extent to which authors grant agency to their characters. Agency is the capacity to act in ways that enable the subject/individual to change her/his circumstances for the better. It interrogates versions of masculinity in creative works on HIV and AIDS by female writers in Zimbabwe. The above questions can be examined by setting out how the study will investigate the representation of female characters in narratives that focus on HIV and AIDS.

1.6 Objectives

The study, thus, seeks to:
- explain the concepts feminism, gender, danger and HIV in a Zimbabwean context;
- analyse the selected novels in order to reveal the impact of cultural beliefs and practices on gender dynamics in literature written by women in Zimbabwe;
- examine the extent to which Zimbabwean female writers challenge gendered identities in their works on HIV and AIDS;
- compare ideological perspectives on how Zimbabwe's female authors narrate and subsequently represent female characters in works of art whose main theme is HIV and AIDS;
- evaluate the notion of human agency suggested in the works of art;

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- interrogate the 'liberating perspectives' authorized by female writers whose work focus on women's images on HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwean literature.

1.7 Conceptualizing Gender and Danger in the Context of HIV and AIDS

We need to deepen our understanding of the meanings of the concepts of gender and danger as theoretical constructs that change from time to time, and place to place, and from one novel to the other. This can be achieved by historicising concepts of gender and danger in Africa. In the era of HIV and AIDS discourses on Africa have been constructed in ways that make Africa synonymous with the heart of darkness, the adjective and the pandemic itself. Early discourses from the West on the disease were couched in science and medicine in a way that sought to link it to Africa and subsequently to the black woman (Javangwe 2011). Vambe (2003:473) building on the work of McFadden (1992), adds that the emphasis on "heterosexual relations as the dominant mode of transmission" depicted African sex life as dirty and negative. Schmidt (1992) has written that in colonial Rhodesia African women's health was associated with unbridled sexuality and disease. In Europe scientific concepts and medical terminology were created and managed to project the image of black people as the opposite of the model of civilization (Said, 1978) that Europe reserved for herself. According to Patton, in (Arnfred 2004:97), Africa was thus "represented in extremely catastrophic terms as the lost continent", and a dangerous place where every negative that humanity has experienced and can still experience is guaranteed to happen. Jungar and Oinas in (Arnfred 2004: 97) make reference to a Western "mythological understanding of HIV/AIDS as something specific to Africa" and argue that such "assumptions and questions are based on and reproduce colonial imaginations of African sexuality." The African female who embarks on writing a life narrative that has to engage issues of HIV/AIDS is, therefore, confronted with myths and pseudo-scientific theories that seek to condemn her individual self, race and geography as the embodiments of threatening forces (Javangwe 2011). This research seeks to establish whether the selected women's literary works also depict women of Zimbabwe in the same way.

Patton (1997) reveals that in the 1980s Europe authorized a range of images in which the phenomenon of what came to be described as "African AIDS" (1997: 397) was linked to blacks and Africans, to be more precisely. The Genital Ulcers Theory of the late 1980s was based on the

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wrong assumption that AIDS was an African disease and that Africans suffered more from genital ulcers which increased the transmission rate of the virus from women to men. More than just creating perceptions of HIV/AIDS as an African disease, such constructions in the ultimate instance targeted the African woman as the source and vector of the disease. As such, the representation of African women in HIV/AIDS narratives is a complex engagement and negotiation within the politics of hetero-sexual relationships as well as damning global perceptions about them in the context of the pandemic. In the colonial context of Rhodesia, Victorian and Evangelical notions of femininity and sexuality promoted the image of the African women as a whore (Schmidt 1992).

McFadden (1992:164) underscores the point that African women were constructed as loose and dangerous by observing that in intimate sexual relationships involving women and men, be they through mutual consent or abuse as in rape, "male dominance invariably places the woman in a victimized position". Gilman (1989:302) argues that "black women are targets for projection in a double capacity (as women and as black), thus, becoming sexual beings par excellence." Conflations of race and gender into the sexuality of the black woman's identity are extended to give historical constructions that associate her with filth and disease. In the first instance, the racialization of dirt and illness enabled the colonial order to designate the black woman the outermost marginal spaces (Burke cited in Harris 2008). McFadden, (1992) says that HIV and AIDS came to be identified as a black women's disease. As a result of that mode of construction in the HIV and AIDS discourse, women were seen as the principal carriers of the disease. Harris (ibid, 41) further comments on the deliberate "extension of bodily dirt to a broader state of moral dirt" that is perpetuated in colonial syllabi and later on superimposed as the basis for the construction of identities of black women with HIV/AIDS in the Zimbabwean postcolony. In this way, the sexualized female body, more so if it is African, can only be imagined in terms of corruption and disease (Javangwe 2011). Harris argues further that in post colonial Zimbabwe "current discourses around HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe are in danger of constructing HIV/AIDS sufferers as the epitome of the "moral dirt" so reviled in Murambatsvina" (2008: 49). He intrinsically captures the critical thematic concerns of the HIV/AIDS autobiographical narratives in Zimbabwe.

Therefore, it is a fact that in Zimbabwe HIV and AIDS discourse was gendered from the beginning and it was associated with danger. Biological, cultural and socio-economic conditions contribute to women's greater vulnerability to HIV (Lamptey, Johnson and Khan 2006: 5). Apart from being more vulnerable to HIV infection, women carry the greater burden of care. Against this gendered background of shouldering the burden of HIV and AIDS, young women in Zimbabwe have begun to speak out. They have published novels, short stories, poems and autobiographies that seek to address the epidemic. They have "narrated gender and danger." The range of the meanings that came to be described as easily slotting into what was considered a danger in African women within the discourse of AIDS in Africa varies from one scholar's understanding to another. Gaidzanwa suggests that in Zimbabwean male authored literature, women are either wives or mothers, and are portrayed as loose and dangerous. This descriptor of women as danger is not extended to men. She says:

> There are no cases where women get away with adultery, promiscuity and disobedience without incurring drastic punishment. This is in contrast with men who may suffer some hardship for their wrongdoing but their punishment is not as drastic as that meted out to women. Men have wives to go back to after committing adultery, brutalising their families or deserting them. These men's function is usually to highlight the indecency and evil nature of the central female characters. (Gaidzanwa 1985: 87-88).

McFadden adds that the fear by African men of African women's sexuality as "socio-sexual anxiety…is generated by the fact that there is an extremely intimate relationship between sexuality and power, a connection which is manifested in a range of circumstances and experiences" (2003: 50). Paulina Makinwa-Adebusoye and Richmond Tiemoko endorse McFadden's approach when they argue that male-authored discourses on reproductive health also suggest that women are dirty, immoral and, therefore, a danger to society:

> Important to the dissociation of sexuality and reproduction is the identity and lives of female members of society. Conflating sexuality with reproduction simply confuses womanhood with motherhood. The implication of this goes beyond the

confusion between the function or role and the person, to compromise women's identities and rights outside a reproductive age. Sexuality beyond reproduction is an important concept in research and in advancing a rights-approach to sexuality and reproduction. It explicitly recognises the importance of reproduction in human sexuality, but equally and unambiguously calls for an attention to various forms of sexual expression. Viewing sexuality beyond reproduction makes visible people suffering from discrimination and marginalization. (Makinwa-Adebusoye and Tiemoko 2007: 10-11).

In characterisations of women as loose and dangerous, images that demonise women are often used. McFadden confirms this when she says that the:

 woman continues to appear on the scene as a capricious vamp, a play-ful and beautiful slave, a she-devil imbued with cunning and capable of a thousand artifices, an explosive danger versed in all the arts of deceit and conspiracy, a seductive mistress captivating in her passion" . (Saadawi 2007:521).

These negative representations of women as danger and the subversive other are employed by men so as to depict the woman in negative terms.

However, despite attempts by patriarchy to limit the meaning potentials of what is dangerous in women by linking it to what is always negative, Chitauro and her fellow researchers (1994) argue that the notion of danger is ambiguous in the Zimbabwean society. Other than simply reducing the concept of danger to mean that women are depicted as sexually loose, and, therefore, dangerous to society. The signifier 'danger' can also reveal women who are assertive, independent, creative and who possess the capacity to subvert patriarchy. Tumusiime (2010) and Saadawi (2007) suggest that the description of women as dangerous has in fact been manipulated by women and given positive attributes and meanings. When women adopt dangerous strategies or evolve 'dangerous' modes of survival that they employ to create new spaces, to exercise their freedom, women become a danger to oppressive societies. Women who acquire higher education are feared by men because most men believe that if a woman gains higher education, in many

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cases, they can take care of themselves, and cease to become amenable as wives or they stop to be dependent on men (Tumusiime 2010). The notion of danger may also assume a positive meaning when women begin to control their lives. This is a positive innovation that benefits the woman, but threatens patriarchal authority.

The 'danger' that female authors can bring to the act of writing and reading of literature can also be understood as women's power to "… tell terrible things in song and poetry… and survive with impunity" (Chitauro *et al* 1994: 118). This line of understanding the notion of women's roles as embodying creative danger is amplified by the Egyptian writer, El Saadawi (2007) who suggests that when men describe women's writings and images of women in those writings as dangerous, this can have positive meanings because it underscores the link between danger to "dissidence and creativity" (Saadawi 2007:172-177). Dissidence and creativity can then suggest a real possibility of a community of women whose writings transgress and bring into being images of women that can no longer be fixed or stereotyped negatively. In other words reversing negative images of women in literature creates a new culture and empowered images of women deliberately created and depicted as a counterpoint to destructive tendencies in male and female writings. Moyana (2006) elaborates on this point when she makes reference to the educated, economically empowered, sensitive, selfless and accommodating Mrs. Gwaze in Mungoshi's short story, "Did you have to go that far?" (1997). In Mrs. Gwaze, one witnesses a new breed of women redefining themselves to counteract negative predispositions. Moyana's exploration of Mungoshi's stories is insightful in so far as it reveals images of passive as well as assertive women in literature. This characterization of women is significant because as Kristeva (1985) notes, women's marginality can help them enhance their ability to subvert oppressive susyems even by those women that men think are passive and, therefore, underdogs of society. This moral economy of resistance that women possess is often glossed over in analysis that search for women's agency in open rebellious acts only.

1.8 Agency: A Synopsis

The term agency describes women's resilience. When it appears reasonable for women to give up, they gather the courage to create a new identity in order to survive. It is such inspired action that allows women to move out of subjectivity. This innovative aspect is crucial to an

understanding of the ways in which women and men negotiate changes within gender relations. Female agency in this context would, therefore, mean a rejection of female powerlessness. Motsemme (2007) complicates one's commonplace understanding of agency as only implying positive recreation of the self. She proposes the term 'flawed agency' to suggest that victims of a particular socio-cultural order can also perpetuate it by either taking part in it or not questioning its assumptions. Motsemme's definition of *ukuphanta* clarifies the concept of flawed agency:

> *Ukuphanda* or *ukuphanta* is a philosophy of survival which can be summarized as a way of 'getting by', 'making ends meet'. Although the term means doing anything that will bring in money, in the townships it is mainly used to describe 'illegal'/non-conventional ways to make ends meet. (Motsemme 2007:80).

Flawed agency, thus, basically means employing unconventional ways in order to achieve the intended result. The end justifies the means. This concept clearly comes out in Phiri's *Highway Queen* (2010) where Mrs. Mumba engages in sex work in order to provide for her family. This perspective of agency is significant to this study that explores the images of women by female writers who possess different levels of conceptualizing female identities in a context of HIV and AIDS. Women who participate actively in reconstructing their communities, and influence other women to celebrate their sexuality use their personal agency to contribute to social agency. McFadden (1992) also links women's danger that is positive to women's capacity to subvert patriarchy particularly when women show that they have feelings and desires that cannot easily be controlled within the marriage institution. This unsettles patriarchy as it is an ideology that thrives on men's control of women in all spheres of life, especially the sexual one. Women's sexual desire and pleasure presents the ultimate challenge to patriarchy, hence, the tendency to label women as dangerous. Since women can understand the ascribed term 'danger', in creative ways, the women do use it to challenge the male authored status quo. These women are resented by patriarchy and negatively labeled as a danger because the same women can redirect their energies to positive-bearing acts that empower women. According to Connell, female bodies have their own form of agency and as such we must understand gender and danger within a context "…where bodies are seen as sharing in social agency, in generating and shaping courses of social conduct". (Connell 1994: 13).

Women's lives in Zimbabwe have been worsened by the HIV and AIDS epidemic.[1] As will be illustrated in this study, women are undeservedly affected by the epidemic. They are more vulnerable to HIV infection and they carry the load of care-giving. In their creative works, Zimbabwean women authors have interrogated the dynamics of the relationship between HIV, gender and danger. These women also critiqued cultural practices that increase their vulnerability to HIV. In their creative and resolute voices, they have looked forward to a better world where women are no longer victims in the face of HIV. This study analyses Zimbabwean women writers' contribution to discourses on HIV and how women have embraced the concept of positive and negative danger in order to recreate their roles and introduce new gender ethos in restrictive social, economic and political contexts.

1.9 Study Justification, Significance and Scope

A study of the images of women and men in artistic products on HIV and AIDS is highly relevant to academics, policy makers and society at large. The study critiques encumbering images of women in contexts of HIV and AIDS. This awareness should encourage other scholars to do further investigations into the relationships between literature and gender in the face of the pandemic. HIV and AIDS programmers, technocrats, policy makers, gender activists and members of society are sensitised to avoid stereotypes that deny women agency. Aspiring and future authors and critics can be sensitised to provide more liberating images of women and men, particularly as they seek to stem the tide of the pandemic.

This study examines the impact of cultural ideologies on gender constructions in selected Zimbabwean literary works on HIV and AIDS. In so doing, the study covers a number of themes that have not benefited from sustained scholarly scrutiny, such as criticism of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwean literature. Gaidzanwa (1985) has argued that male authors have tended to portray women in negative terms. This research will therefore critique the depiction of both women and men in the texts under study. Moi (1985) and Gikandi (1992) share the same view, suggesting that when women themselves write they are taking their space back. Spivak (1995) however, complicates all this when she starts to question whether women can speak. In the light of this, it

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[1] UNAIDS currently encourages authors to make a distinction between HIV and AIDS and refrain from using "HIV/AIDS" since these are two separate health conditions. In addition, reference should principally be to HIV, unless one is specifically referring to AIDS.

is important to investigate how female writers depict female and male characters in the framework of HIV and AIDS. Furthermore, articles and chapters on the issue of gender, danger and HIV and AIDS in literature are fragmented, scattered and difficult to access. There has not been a study that explores the relationship between art, gender and danger in analysing perspectives on HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. This research hopes to contribute by filling in this gap.

While male creative authors such as Matanganyidze (1998), Mabasa (1999) and Magwa (2000) have written creative works on HIV and AIDS in the local language, Shona, their works conform to the stereotype of women as carriers of disease. They fail to re-imagine the role of women in society (Dube 2004). However, not much has been written by male authors in English on the same theme. Perhaps as a response to the problematic portrayal of women in works by male authors, female authors have found it necessary to describe women's experiences of the pandemic. It is, therefore, not accidental that we have considerable creative works by women on HIV and AIDS emerging from 2000. Women are socially more affected negatively by HIV and AIDS, hence, the need to express their experiences in creative works.

This study breaks new ground by analysing the gendered discourse that characterises the HIV and AIDS epidemic in Zimbabwean literature. It isolates and interrogates narratives on the epidemic by female writers who have been overlooked in the criticism of Zimbabwean literature. It questions the assumption that women are 'disease carriers' and also probes the cultural factors that underpin such a reading of the epidemic. The study also utilises the theoretical statements by prominent African female writers such as Ama Ata Aidoo (2007) who believe that women's creative works are deliberately understudied in the academic institutions that are male dominated.

The study will focus on the women writings to interrogate the claims made by female critics such as Stratton (2007) who have argued that African literary criticism is an exclusionary practice. It will also interrogate the assumption that everything written by a woman will necessarily project images of women in a positive light. The research shall utilise these perspectives in the process of questioning the content of what is negative and positive in images of women authored by

female writers. The assumptive argument of the study is that literature uses images and metaphors that have the capacity to carry meanings beyond those intended by the authors.

The research brings an awareness of neglected women's voices on HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwean literature. Whereas sociology, psychology, history and other disciplines emphasise statistics, literature uses images and metaphors that suggest multiple identities and lived experiences. It creates empathy and sympathy. The study highlights the role of literature in debating HIV and AIDS, stigma, discrimination, as well as promoting prevention, care and support. In addition, it introduces a systematic application of the theories of feminism and gender to the study of literature on HIV and AIDS can provide a holistic interpretation of roles that women and men play in a context dominated by contesting versions of masculinity .

During the early phase of the epidemic (mid-1980s), silence and secrecy surrounded the epidemic. However, since the turn of 21st century, creative writers and critics have sought to respond to HIV and AIDS. There is now an appreciable body of literary works focusing on the epidemic. These include Zimbabwean women writers who narrate their experiences of the pain and suffering caused by HIV and AIDS. While they utilise the English language to articulate their experiences, other authors (male and female) use indigenous languages to capture their feelings in relation to the epidemic. This study will make references to these works of art written in indigenous languages to support and refute representations of women in women's writings on HIV and AIDS. In the light of this, it is important to investigate how women writers using the English language depict male and female characters in the context of HIV and AIDS. Furthermore, articles and chapters on the issue of gender, danger and HIV and AIDS in literature are fragmented, scattered and difficult to access.

1.10 Theoretical Framework

1.10.1 Womanism

This study is located within the African womanist research theoretical perspectives. The study posits that Zimbabwean literary works on HIV and AIDS are not gender-neutral/blind. It assumes that Zimbabwean literature on HIV and AIDS has clear and subtle biases against women. The study is informed by African womanist concerns over the experiences of ordinary women. Womanism as a theory was introduced in literary studies by Alice Walker (1983). It is dedicated to the survival and completeness of a whole people, male or female. According to Walker, a womanist is a woman who "appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility, and women's strength… [and is] committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health" (Walker 1983:xi).

A womanist, therefore, has a holistic approach to the struggles of the community. Womanism derives from womanists' concern with the reification that result from the misrepresentation of women and the male-female relationships in creative works of art. Hudson-Weems (2004) has also expounded on the theory of Africana womanism. She also emphasizes the complementary roles of women and men. Women and men need each other for meaningful existence. She explains how Africana womanism came into being:

> Africana womanism emerged from the acknowledgement of a long-standing authentic agenda for that group of women of African descent who needed only to be properly named and officially defined according to their own unique historical and cultural matrix, one that would reflect the co-existence of men and women in a concerted struggle for the survival of their entire family/community. (Hudson-Weems 2004:1).

Walker's womanism and Hudson-Weems' Africana womanism both seek to promote the reciprocity of women and men. Armah (1979) captures this vision concisely when he maintains that it is not a question of which sex rules, but that the way is reciprocity. Principally, womanism differs from other forms of feminism that promote gender discrimination. As a

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philosophy, womanism celebrates black roots and insists on complementarity between women and men, if racial and social prejudices are to be adequately addressed. Nevertheless, there is a subtle difference between Walker's womanism and Hudson-Weems' African womanism. Although Walker appreciates the need for women and men of colour to work together within their communities, she is first and foremost concerned with the experiences of the women of colour. This is different from Hudson-Weems who emphasises the interrelationship of women and men within their communities.

The theory of womanism is critical to this research as it facilitates an awareness of the status and contribution of black women to society. More critically, it recognizes the need to engage men in the (re)construction of society. However, as a theory, womanism has its own weaknesses. Despite the fact that it seeks to give a voice to black women, womanism fails to adequately take into account the heterogeneity of women of African descent, with their different historical backgrounds and social realities. This has given rise to African feminism.

Enriched by other different perspectives, the womanist agenda seeks to retrieve the multiple meanings of gender within socially defined relations between women and men (Gaidzanwa 1985). The research is, therefore, grounded in womanist theory, with a firm commitment to the liberation of women and men in contexts of HIV and AIDS. It is inspired by the realisation that literature is a key resource in unpacking gender values and norms that are influenced by cultural beliefs. The study approaches culture as a social institution that can be transformed. The theoretical approaches followed in this research are therefore, different. For example, McFadden's (1992) understanding of social construction of sex and sexuality in the context of HIV and AIDS is usefully deployed in this study. She distinguishes sex from sexuality and gender, thereby showing how these are informed by material power relations as well as expressed in differentiated symbolic representations. This version of womanism is in contrast to the confrontational and polarized forms of feminism discussed in the next section.

1.10.2 Feminism and Gender in the Context of HIV

Although womanism is the main theory that informs this study, I also utilise other feminist approaches such as Western and African feminism. As a literary theory, feminism is concerned

with the criticism of texts from a historical consciousness of gender imbalances between dominant patriarchal systems and subservient females. By questioning society's conception of gender, sexuality and perceived inequalities between women and men, the idea is to draw attention to the significant role feminist criticism has played in the study of literary texts, in a bid to reveal and recover the often understated experiences of women as the inferior other or subaltern in different social settings. Conceptions and perceptions of stereotypical representations can be accounted for by the philosophical thrust of feminist interpretation.

Feminist criticism as a theoretical framework takes different approaches. For example, Western white feminism thrives on gender polarization and fragmentation, while Africana womanism is embracing in approach. It emphasises power-sharing, complementarity, accommodation, compromise, negotiation and inclusiveness (Hudson-Weems 2004). Africana womanism refuses and rebels against the dominant trend in the traditional feminism which constructs barriers between masculinity and femininity. Nnaemeka suggests that African feminism is an ideology that promotes harmony between women and men. She rejects any gender or sex separation as she writes:

> Diverse perceptions of the nature of power account for the different locations and articulations of power in gender analysis. While a zero-sum matrix and a winner-take-all reasoning govern the articulation of power in Western feminist discourse, African feminism sees power as negotiable and negotiated; it assesses power not in absolute but in relative terms – in terms of power-sharing and power ebb and flow. While Western feminist discourse emphasizes the power grabbing that reinforces individualism, African feminist discourse foregrounds the power-sharing that underscores community and human living as they are inscribed in many African proverbs. (Nnaemeka 2005: 33-34).

Filomina Chioma Steady (1987) articulates African feminism. Her views also point to the interdependence between women and men:

> For women, the male is not 'the other' but part of the human same. Each gender constitutes the critical half that makes the human whole. Neither sex is totally complete

in itself to constitute a unit by itself. Each has and needs a complement, despite the possession of unique features of its own. Sexual differences and similarities, as well as sex roles, enhance sexual autonomy and cooperation between women and men, rather than promote polarization and fragmentation. Within the metaphysical realm, both male and female principles encompass life and jointly maintain cosmological balance. (1987:8).

Steady makes important observations pertaining to the qualities of African feminism. However, Steady seems to overlook the fact that inequalities characterize patriarchal societies. Again, the issue of different social classes should be considered in order to try to establish whether grassroots and elite women share the same feminist views. This study makes use of insights from different forms of feminism in its analysis of the representation of women and men in the selected literary works that narrate gender and danger.

1.10.3 Radical Feminism

Kate Millet (1969) argues that the most profound divisions are based on gender and that all societies are patriarchal, with men using ideology to oppress women. For radical feminists, the family is a miniature representation of patriarchy noticeable in larger social institutions. According to radical feminists, male authors reproduce stereotypes in their social interaction with women.   In this regard patriarchy, is therefore, viewed as a particular form of male dominance instituted upon a dominant role of a father as the head of a family.

Radical feminism, as a movement of the educated white middle class women of the 1960's, has been criticised for prioritising the middle class against the poor uneducated women of colour. This has resulted in its being one-sided in view of its use in interpreting male supremacy and women's oppression. However, in spite of the polarization, radical feminism has made it its major concern to investigate who the oppressors of women are. Mary Daly (1978) argues that men throughout history have sought to oppress women. An understanding of women and men as products of their cultures and societies, therefore, shows that both women and men are flexible beings who can yield to positive social transformation.

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Radical feminism also maintains that women's inferiority can be rectified through legislation. This theory essentially sets out to reform society's way of thinking that prejudices women and girls. Shulamith Firestone (1970) castigates men as the enemy and marriage as an institution that dis-empowers women. Its strength, which is useful for this study, is that it recognizes that regardless of class origin all women are oppressed or are potential targets of oppression of men. However, while radical feminism seeks to liberate women, it is limited in that it fails to notice the fact that women are not a homogenous group. Therefore, to talk of women as only oppressed by patriarchy is to ignore the workings of other ideologies that have seen women being marginalized. There is also a glossing over of the fact that powerful women can and do oppress weak women. Further radical feminism underestimates the fact that powerful women can also oppress working class men, just as powerful men can oppress poor women and men.These shortcomings of radical feminism lead to a brief discussion of Marxist or socialist feminism.

1.10.4 Marxist Feminism

Marxism generally regards class struggle as the source of inequality. Class becomes the key to understanding social phenomena. Marxist feminism's main undertaking was to reveal the intricate relations between gender and the economy as signified by Juliet Mitchell (1966). As long as the concept of class is made reference to, capitalism and the ownership of the means of production turn out to be the primary concerns to be dealt with. Oppression of women benefits a capitalist system. If the system was to award women's domestic labour, that would impact negatively on the capitalists' profits. In this case, the immediate oppressor becomes the bourgeois capitalist policies and practices. This theory is useful to this study because it locates power struggle within labour processes which in many ways determine the influence that women or men can have on each other. However, Marxist feminism ignores the fact that the oppression of women is deeper than the question of gender. Powerful or elite women can oppress poor women. In addition, the capacity of elite women to help poor women to realize their own material and spiritual goals is undermined each time we reduce oppression to the axis of class struggle only.

1.10.5 Liberal Feminism

Another theory whose insights are used in this study is liberal feminism that investigates the intrinsic inequalities between women and men in society. Liberal feminism is predominantly concerned with personal independence and assurance of a person's dignity. Liberal feminists view self-actualisation as their objective. They insist on equal opportunities in spite of sexual differences. Liberal feminists emphasise the need to work with legislation so as to address all injustices that have caused women's oppression. To this end, liberal feminism is revisionist in nature. The resolution to injustice would therefore be transformation which would ensure a fair treatment of women within the system (Waylen 1996).

On issues of the family, liberal feminists value the interrelatedness of everything in the natural world. They therefore maintain that men should play an important role as the head in the family. Ironically, while they seek to promote social transformation to make women's lives better, they regard women's inferior roles as normal and valuable in protecting family stability.

Despite its varied approaches, as discussed above, feminism seeks to uncover, through critical practices, the underlying ideologies that influence the depiction of women and men in literature, and other discourses that are utilized to define spaces and roles within society and institutional structures. Since feminism is premised on ideological structures that treat women from a position of exclusion (Stratton 2007), and domesticity, feminism questions and critiques male authority in order to democratize spaces accorded to both women and men, with the hope of promoting development of full potentialities in both sexes.

Feminist criticism was adopted by feminists such as Kate Millett (Jefferson *et al*. 1982: 204) in order to evaluate the foundations of the prevalent "exclusion" and "oppression" of women in both the public and domestic spheres. The task of feminist critics and theorists is what Toril Moi (1985) construes as the exposition of the way in which male dominance over females is viewed as both cultural ideology and the fundamental concept of power. It is significant to point out that these various forms of Western feminism inform this research. They assist in locating women's status within the family, economy, politics and other institutions. Such ideas broaden the perspectives adopted in the study. In my formulation of womanism I, therefore, advance an

argument in which theoretical insights derived from western inspired theories of feminism as well as African forms of feminism should all be used in the analysis of the concepts of gender and danger in the context of HIV and AIDS. In this, I am in basic agreement with Linda Strong-Leek when she writes:

> Thus, whether one calls if womanism, African feminism, or Africana womanism, these ideological frames identify the complex positions of women of colour. They posit themselves within a womanism that is not only woman-centerd, but also centred in a world of ancient traditions, cultures, and a multiplicity of ethos vastly dissimilar from their western counterparts. (Linda Strong-Leek 2000:202).

1.11 Methods Used for this Study

The choice of a suitable research methodology is an important stage in the data gathering process in any research. The first stage in the process of selecting appropriate research methodology is to consider the philosophical point of view within which the study is located. According to Gibbon and Sanderson (2002), an understanding of the theoretical perspective of one's study is crucial because it determines the progression of the research. In qualitative research, the researcher is the key data gathering instrument, who spends substantial time in the research setting, exploring the subject under study. Data are in the form of words. This allows one to carry out an inductive analysis of data so as to extract information from different sources before one analyses and makes conclusions. Concepts are often in the form of themes or motifs. Data presentation is more descriptive and narrative in style.

Cognisant of the above, this study employs the qualitative research method. This method allows the researcher to unravel the complexities of social realities in the broader context of socio-economic, cultural and political structures. This study mainly utilizes literary analysis of selected Zimbabwe writings on HIV and AIDS. Literary analysis or textual interpretation is necessary to employ because it engages the creative texts (Bakhtin 1981) in order to reveal how they have depicted gender, danger, women and HIV and AIDS. The underlying conviction is that writing is not a neutral undertaking. Texts 'speak' and seek to both present and alter reality. The study also

makes extensive use of secondary sources related to theories of gender and danger in the context of HIV and AIDS.

Qualitative research is an extensive approach to the study of a social phenomenon. Its different types are naturalistic, interpretive and increasingly critical. They draw on multiple methods of inquiry (Marshall and Rossman 2006:2). Qualitative research recognizes that meaning emerges through interaction and is not standardized from person to person as in quantitative research. This aspect allows the researcher to study issues in detail, without predetermined categorized analysis (Merriam 1998:8). Findings are 'created' and meaning is constructed. The researcher studies things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln 1994).

I employed the qualitative method to analyse creative works on HIV by Zimbabwean women writers, paying specific attention to the socio-cultural and economic contexts within which cultural production has taken place. Mason contends that these methods are "highly exciting" as they are concerned with the aspects of life "that matter and in ways that matter" (Mason 2002: 1). These methods allowed me to appreciate the depth and richness of the data. They also dovetailed with the eclectic versions of the womanist approach that I have adopted, enabling me to produce "cross-contextual generalities" (Mason 2002: 1) regarding the portrayal of women (and also men) in literary works by women.

While the study analyses each creative work in its own right within the different chapters, it has an underlying evaluative comparative thrust. I seek to describe and evaluate the achievements of specific authors in their portrayal of women and men as gendered beings who respond to the context of HIV and AIDS. However, I proceed to compare the extent to which the various writers succeeded in according agency to women and men. Even as I compare the relative successes of specific authors, I paint an overall picture of how women writers in Zimbabwe have engaged the pandemic. In order to attend to the requirement of representation, I have selected the works of five writers. Furthermore, I analyse different genres, including an anthology of short stories, novels and semi autobiographies. The idea is to build a composite picture of the portrayal of women (and also men) in artistic products on HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. The study will

make use of secondary sources to explain the notions of gender and danger as depicted in the female-authored Zimbabwean works on art that focus on HIV and AIDS.

1.12 Organisation of the Study

The organization of the chapters for this study follows a rational progression informed by the level of complexity displayed by each writer in giving different options for women as they negotiate their survival in contexts of HIV and AIDS. Chapter one is the introduction. It defines the area of study and spells out the justification of the research. Chapter one also outlines the statement of the problem and supplies the theoretical framework. In addition, the chapter shows placement of novels in the different chapters.

Chapter two provides an extended literature review. It gives an overview of literature that is significant to one's comprehension of the portrayal of women as inferior members of the Zimbabwean society. The chapter explores the development of Zimbabwean literature and its literary theory and criticism. It further problematizes the concepts of 'gender', 'danger' and HIV and AIDS. Major themes in the Zimbabwean literary canon are also addressed as a way of providing a backdrop to this study. The chapter also evaluates the position of women in Zimbabwean literature. Lastly, the chapter pays attention to the criticism of literature on women's writings on HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. The review of the literature facilitates an appreciation of the growth of Zimbabwean literature but also highlights some gaps in the study of creative works in Zimbabwe.

Chapter three focuses on Phiri's *Desperate*. This particular author approaches the question of gender and danger in the context of HIV and AIDS from a conventional perspective, that is, one that depicts women as the cause of HIV. The chapter argues that Phiri unravels some of the important factors that promote women's vulnerability to HIV and exacerbate women's poverty which include cultural, economic and political factors.

In chapter four, the study explores the theme of HIV, gender and stigma. It utilizes Mukonoweshuro's *Days of Silence* to highlight the ambivalence surrounding the theme of gender and danger. The chapter shows that the author is still influenced by obscurantist cultural

definitions in which women are portrayed playing out subordinate roles in society. It is argued that part of the complexity of Mushonoweshuro is her ability to complicate the depiction of her characters by showing some of them attempting to challenge patriarchal discourses that undermine women's quest for freedom. However, I argue in this chapter that on balance, Mukonoweshuro's women characters are not at all radical enough to understand the dynamics within which women are named as vectors in the spread of HIV and AIDS. This contradictory articulation of female agency in the face of HIV and AIDS partly describes the reality of womanist discourse.

Chapter five, focuses on Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*, and demonstrated that indeed women possess numerous cultural capital derived from their impoverished lives that they use to subvert cultural symbols that link their being to danger. In fact, the chapter argued that women characters also appropriated certain aspects of the language associating them with danger and in the process inflected new meanings in this symbolism so that for them to be described as dangerous marked appreciable degrees of individual freedom with which they used to attack the economic and political ideas that promoted negative women's images. The author also adds another layer of differentiated representations of female characters and in the process illustrated how women from different social classes and educational backgrounds achieved more when they come together to challenge patriarchy. It was argued that the author's progressive stance relating to women's liberation and willingness to challenge stifling political systems justified my description of her work as a womanist in ideological orientation.

Chapter six shifts the emphasis and focuses on a variety of female characters who have been depicted as having embraced, unequivocally, the idea of danger as the condition of possibility that can liberate them from negative stereotypes such as 'disease carriers' and dependent on men. In this chapter women are depicted more as assertive and focused on self help and at the same time refusing to take up demeaning roles in society. Instead, women undermine patriarchal values by contesting masculine values. Women also appropriated and manipulated to their advantage men's nationalist and liberation discourse and inscribed their thoughts in alternative ways that demonstrated that women can re-organize themselves and survive on their own positive and progressive terms in life situations that threatened to consign them perpetually to

positions of being men' subalterns. Basing its critical analysis on Westerhof's *Unlucky in Love*, the chapter celebrated women's independence and willingness to critique male dominance. Utilising her experiences as a woman living with HIV, Westerhof reveals how the act of writing imparts voice and positive agency to women who stand up to fight and reclaim individual and collective freedoms in the face of negative stereotypes.

In chapter seven I demonstrated that Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, further subverted men by showing and depicting women who openly embrace the creativity embedded in the notion of danger used by highly educated women question oppression and negotiate destructive social values created by patriarchal system. The chapter revealed an expanded notion of female at play in sophisticated women who articulate their interests in hostile circumstances of HIV and AIDS. I then argue that Shaba's brilliant narrative reverses notions of gender and danger, and, in the process, instills positive consciousness in women' lives. The heightened awareness in Shaba's female characters not only enables them to defy exploitation of ordinary women by men, but also breaks tradition with earlier Zimbabwe male fiction that stereotyped women as a danger. The novel is open-ended. It is inaugurated in new womanist tradition roles. The notion of danger is appreciated for its capacity to allow women to transgress on patriarchal dictates. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* authorizes new identities that women feel they own and control, irrespective of how contradictory some of them are. Shaba's creativity and powerful expression, more than the other novels in this study, clarifies the fact that creative danger and dissidence is needed in order to transform images of women from acquiring negative connotations.

Chapter eight concludes the study by highlighting the different ways in which female authors from Zimbabwe writing on gender, and danger in the era of HIV and AIDS all authorized characters whose boldness is manifested in experimenting with different types of human agency. The chapter also offers recommendations for future studies. These recommendations are based on the findings of the study.

1.13 Definition of Terms

Before we start analyzing the texts, we need to clarify the meanings of the following key terms used in this study:

Africana Womanism: A theory by African American women that promotes complementality between women and men.

Agency: Being able to act in one's own right, or being able to take or initiate action, the power to initiate action at any given level associated with prejudice and autonomy.

AIDS: Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome.

Danger: The state of being vulnerable to injury, loss, harm, destruction or evil. It is also a person or thing that may cause pain or injury.

Female: Being a woman or girl.

Feminism: The belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men; the struggle to achieve this aim.

Flawed agency: Use of unacceptable ways to achieve one's ultimate goal.

Gender: The biological fact of being male or female.

HIV: Human Immune Virus.

Male: Being a man or boy.

Man: An adult male human being.

Matriarchy: A society or system that gives power and authority to women rather than men.

Masculinity: The quality of characteristics that are typical of men.

Patriarchy: A society, system or country that is ruled or controlled by men.

Secrecy: The fact of making sure that nothing is known about something.

Sexuality: The feelings and activities connected with a person's sexual desires.

Shame: The feeling of sadness, embarrassment and guilt that you have when you know that something you have done is wrong or stupid.

Silence: A situation when nobody is speaking.

Stigma: Feelings of disapproval that people about particular illnesses or ways of behaving.

Vulnerable: Weak and easily hurt physically or emotionally, exposed, open to abuse.

Woman: An adult female human being.

1.14 Conclusion

This introductory chapter has stated the statement of the problem, which basically is about how authors differ in their depiction of gender and danger, as well as narrate HIV and AIDS. Chapter one also outlined the background to the study. It discussed the concepts of gender and danger in

the context of HIV and AIDS. It expressed the assumptions of the study, namely that female authors are better placed to depict empowering images of women. The chapter outlined the research questions that guide the study, as well as stating its objectives. The justification, significance and scope of the study were articulated, mainly arguing that there has not been a book or comprehensive research that explores the relationship between gender and danger in the context of HIV in Zimbabwe in a single study. This study endeavours to contribute by filling in this gap. Theories informing the study were also discussed. Gaps were noted in some of the theories and it is anticipated that this study has bridge the gaps. The research methods to be utilized in this study were described. There was also a brief discussion on the organization of the study. Key terms to be used in the study were defined. The next chapter is an extended review of the literature that amplified the explanation of the notions of gender and danger in the context of criticism of Zimbabwean literature in general and analysis of the discourse on HIV and AIDS in particular.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: RETHINKING GENDER AND DANGER IN THE CONTEXT OF HIV AND AIDS

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is a review of the literature that is relevant to an understanding of the social construction of women as subordinate members of Zimbabwean society. In this chapter, I first outline and critique the growth of Zimbabwean literature and its criticism. For one to appreciate the focus on gender and danger in the context of HIV and AIDS and literature that this study adopts, there is need to review the dominant material that has been published on these themes. This section provides the background to the study by addressing the prominent themes that emerge from the available scholarly reflections on the major themes that inform this study. In the first instance, I provide an overview of the criticism of Zimbabwean literature. I then proceed to examine the status of women in Zimbabwean literature. Finally, I focus on women's writings on HIV and AIDS. The following section concentrates on books that have been published on Zimbabwean literature.

2.2 Review of Material on Zimbabwean Literature

2.2.1 Zimbabwean Literature in English

Zimbabwe has a well-developed literary canon, especially for male writers. Alongside Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa, Zimbabwe has produced notable literary giants. These include the late Dambudzo Marechera, the late Yvonne Vera, Charles Mungoshi, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Chenjerai Hove, Shimmer Chinodya and others. A number of Zimbabwean writers have won international publishing awards. It is, therefore, fair to conclude that Zimbabwean literature is an important component of African literature. Assessing Zimbabwean women writers' response to HIV and AIDS is likely to be a valid entry point into understanding how women writers have handled the theme of HIV and AIDS. Accordingly, this study has implications beyond Zimbabwean literature.

2.2.2 The Context

In line with the country's notable literary output, criticism of Zimbabwean literature is fairly developed, although non-indigenous interpreters have tended to dominate. A number of works have outlined the historical development of the black novel. Prominent literary critic George Kahari makes the significant observation that:

> Black Zimbabwean writing is remarkably diverse. It is a literature that has adopted and adapted as well as assimilated creative energy from disparate sources and models: oral tradition, Western classics, romances, detective stories and thrillers". (Kahari 1990:2).

Authors such as Charles Mungoshi and Dambudzo Marechera had already risen to prominence before the attainment of political independence in 1980. However, independence gave birth to greater literary output. Zimbabwe waged a protracted liberation struggle in the 1970s, resulting in the black nationalists accessing power. This saw a new wave of optimism. This optimism was expressed in different spheres, including the performing arts. In music, many groups celebrated the dawn of a new era. There was euphoria and anticipation that Zimbabwe would become a prosperous nation.

2.2.3 Earlier Reviews of Zimbabwean Literature

It is instructive to note that some critics tie literary production in the country to the quest for identity (Kahari 1990) and liberation (Zimunya 1982). For Kahari, most authors in pre-independent Zimbabwe were driven by the desire to unhinge colonialism and recover authentic African identity. They sought to undo the damage of colonialism and express their Africanness. On the other hand, Zimunya understands authors as reflecting on the years of drought and hunger. These are images of alienation that evoke notions of being orphaned spiritually and materially. Colonialism denuded Africans and robbed them of their lands. Publications by Kahari and Zimunya on the state of Zimbabwean literature came soon after independence. They were presented to a largely euphoric audience that was filled with the hope for a new nation. Both Kahari and Zimunya are cultural nationalists, although this label probably suits Kahari better. As cultural nationalists, they placed emphasis on the extent to which authors sought to capture "the Zimbabwean ethos." Writing against the backdrop of the colonial assault on African

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identity, the two critics are keen to assess the extent to which authors critique colonialism's theft of the African soul.

Earlier reviews of Zimbabwean literature in English demonstrate that the corpus was fairly manageable by the time the nation attained independence. There were many more novels published in Shona and Ndebele than in English when Kahari and Zimunya published their reviews. Kahari's work clarifies the contribution of Stanlake Samkange, Solomon Mutswairo, Ndabaningi Sithole and Charles Mungoshi. On the other hand, Zimunya throws light on the publications of Samkange, Geoffrey Ndhlala, Mungoshi, Wilson Katiyo and Marechera. They provided a basis for the criticism of Zimbabwean literature. Therefore, there is a gap in terms of criticism of literature that deals with narrating gender and danger in the context of HIV and AIDS, particularly that which is written by female writers of Zimbabwe.

In addition, as this chapter will argue by focusing on women's writing on HIV and AIDS, it is apparent that while earlier reviews of Zimbabwean literature dealt with the theme of gender, there was a tendency to distort gender relations in favour of men. Again, gender was not a dominant theme in the criticism of Zimbabwean literature in the immediate postcolonial period. Themes such as the liberation struggle and the reconstruction of African identity were more dominant. This study updates these reviews of Zimbabwean literature by focusing on women's writings on HIV and AIDS. It recognizes the insights of the earlier writers and builds on them even when I shall do so by way of interrogating how male authors portrayed female characters. This chapter focuses on how authors make use of the concepts of gender and danger in their works in order to emerge with a multiplicity of meanings that these notions can be associated with in Zimbabwean literature.

2.2.4 Ongoing Engagement with Zimbabwean Literature

During the middle of the first decade of political independence, Gaidzanwa (1985), a sociologist, published *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature*. This work decisively put gender on the agenda of women's writing in the country. Her main focus was to expose the biases against women in literary works in English, Shona and Ndebele. Gaidzanwa's work is important to this study as it lays bare the stereotypes that women are subjected to in fictional works. Gaidzanwa's

contribution is particularly in her critique of the negative images of women in Zimbabwean literature authorized by male writers.

In the early 1990s, a German literary critic, Flora Veit-Wild (1992) published *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature*. The book adopts a sociological slant to bring out the context within which authors operate. Veit-Wild's interest in Zimbabwean literature has continued and expanded beyond her initial preoccupation with Marechera. She has emerged as a significant voice in the interpretation and criticism of Zimbabwean literature. However, Viet-Wild has overlooked women writers' struggle against HIV. This study seeks to fill in this gap. Vambe (2005: 92-94) also charges that Veit-Wild is overly dependent on sociological theory and fails to appreciate the literary aspects of the works she analyses.

Rino Zhuwarara, a Zimbabwean academic, published *Introduction to Zimbabwean Literature in English* (2001). This is a highly informative study that gives the background to Zimbabwean literature. It engages with the work of Mungoshi, Stanley Nyamfukudza, Marechera, Hove, Dangarembga and Vera. In commending his volume, Zhuwarara says:

> The writer would be quite satisfied if the critical survey enables general readers of Zimbabwean fiction, especially those who study it at secondary school, college and university levels to interpret the works on the basis of a sound grasp of the texts themselves; these texts have captured the breadth and depth of the Zimbabwean experience and expressed the historical, cultural, social and psychological dimensions of life in the context of a society that is rapidly changing (2001:25).

Part of the "rapidly changing" aspect of the Zimbabwean society that Zhuwarara alludes to is the devastating impact of HIV and AIDS. Unfortunately, Zhuwarara's review does not address this theme for two main reasons. First, the authors that he covers do not focus on the theme except Nyamfukudza, (Zhuwarara 2001: 171-174). Second, the full effects of HIV and AIDS had not begun to be felt at the time that Zhuwarara published his volume. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge his detailed analysis of the leading names in Zimbabwean literature.

Belonging to a later generation of critics, Maurice T. Vambe (2004) has drawn attention to the role of orature in the development and expression of Zimbabwean literature. His *African Oral Story-telling Tradition and the Zimbabwean Novel in English* (2004) is a valuable addition to literary criticism in the country. Whereas Zhuwarara focused predominantly on later works (except Mungoshi and Marechera), Vambe retraces his steps to include earlier works by Mutswairo and Ndhlala. At the heart of his thesis is the conviction that the status of African orality has not received due recognition in the analysis of contemporary literature. Vambe is adamant that the African tradition of oral storytelling is embedded in the modern novel, hence "rejecting the binary divisions implied by such terms as 'high' culture and 'low' culture.

Vambe's intervention is important as it reminds consumers of Zimbabwean literature that there is an oral guide behind it. This is important for this project, as women writers responding to HIV and AIDS employ African traditions of oral storytelling to narrate their experiences of the epidemic. However, Vambe's study does not stress how storytelling accords space to women to be subversive. The fluidity of orality enables women to bring in their own concerns to the fore when narrating stories.

The publications reviewed in the foregoing section were published before the Zimbabwean crisis blew out of proportion from around 2005. The scholars who reviewed Zimbabwean literature were operating in an environment of relative stability and prosperity, although the situation had begun to deteriorate from the late 1990s. As the Zimbabwean crisis worsened, critics began to pay more attention to the political dimension in published literary works. Ranka Primorac's *The Place of Tears: The Novel and Politics in Modern Zimbabwe* (2006) focuses on the impact of the political situation on literary production in the country. She maintains that authors have been daring to name the factors that threaten prosperity. This dimension is important for the analysis of women's publications on HIV and AIDS. There is need to explore whether authors are willing to challenge the nationalist government to invest in responding to the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

2.2.5 Edited Works on Zimbabwean Literature

Up to the turn of the century, critical works on Zimbabwean literature tended to be published by single authors. From 2002, a trend has emerged where edited volumes dedicated to specific themes are published. Robert Muponde and Ranka Primorac edited the volume, *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture* (2005). This is a key publication that demonstrates sensitiveness to the social, economic and political crisis that engulfed the country. Various contributors examine different themes in Zimbabwean literature, including violence, theory, children's literature, ethnicity and the social construction of Zimbabwe. The volume is useful to this study as it foregrounds the contestation around citizenship. This will assist in reviewing women writers' portrayal of women living with HIV.

The trend of edited volumes also relates to works on specific authors. Prior to her death in 2005, Yvonne Vera had emerged as one of the country's foremost literary voices. Robert Muponde and Mandivavarira Maodzwa-Taruvinga edited the volume, *Sign and Taboo: Perspectives on the Poetic Fiction of Yvonne Vera* (2003). Contributors to this volume explored various aspects of Vera's literary works. This volume is useful to the current project as Vera wrote passionately about women's experiences. In particular, Carolyn Martin Shaw's essay (2003) illustrates how Vera broaches the topic of women's sexuality. This is an important theme as it highlights the "danger" associated with women's sexuality. This study makes use of her ideas when examining the attitudes of women writers on HIV and AIDS.

Mungoshi's stature as a leading author in the country is uncontestable. Cognisant of this reality, Vambe and Memory Chirere edited the volume, *Charles Mungoshi: A Critical Reader* (2006). Authors clarify various aspects of Mungoshi's work. Of particular interest to this study are chapters that focus on the portrayal of women in Mungoshi's writings. These include chapters by Magosvongwe (2006) and Moyana (2006). These reflections will be valuable when assessing women writers' response to HIV and AIDS. Mungoshi's work is also crucial for this study as he has courageously tackled the taboo topic of homosexuality. Societal reactions to homosexuality are closely linked to its reaction to women's sexuality. The trend to regard heterosexuality as normal and standard is attached to the control of women's sexuality.

Zimbabwean Transitions: Essays on Zimbabwean Literature in English, Ndebele and Shona, edited by Mbongeni Z. Malaba and Geoffrey V. Davis (2007) is another valuable collection of essays. It analyses the portrayal of women by specific authors. In addition, the emerging theme of masculinity in Zimbabwean literature is covered. This study appreciates the essays and interrogates the extent to which scholars have been able to tackle the taboo subjects of HIV and human sexuality in their works.

2.2.6 The Emerging Focus on Men

The trend in African literature has been to focus mainly on the portrayal of women in literary works and women's contribution to literature. In these studies, men only provide the background within which these assessments are undertaken. Not many critics have sought to examine the portrayal of men in these works. There has been an assumption that men are not gendered beings themselves. There is now an emerging trend to focus on men. Masculinities studies are gaining ground in Southern Africa. Campbell (2003) has analysed Zimbabwe's postcolonial challenges in terms of "an exhausted patriarchy." He charges that the patriarchal nature of Zimbabwe's leadership meant that it was not prepared for renewal and replacement. He also suggests that employing feminist strategies would assist in "reclaiming Zimbabwe." Campbell's work helps to critique the militaristic outlook of Zimbabwe's political leadership. Masculinity dominates the country's politics. However, Campbell does not pay sufficient attention to how patriarchy co-opts women to serve its cause, and its potential to reinvent itself. Some women have been actively involved in the government of Zimbabwe. While Campbell's work does not focus on literature, it helps when one tries to assess the government's response to HIV and AIDS.

In "Coming Unstuck: Masculine Identities in Postcolonial Zimbabwean Fiction," Alden examines the portrayal of male characters in selected short stories by Mungoshi, Nyamfukudza and Chinodya. According to her, central to the stories is the crisis of masculinity. Whereas in the past men were presumed to be in control, the declining economic situation has rendered men economically powerless. Alden asserts that:

> These stories show men losing control, becoming violent, and often directing their anger against women or becoming hopelessly paralyzed, even self-destructive. By contrast,

women often gain greater control and demonstrate ability to be comfortable in – even to take pleasure in and feel liberated by – modernity. Unsurprisingly, in these stories men are threatened by and even come to dread women's power. Finally, just a few stories confront two markers (in the minds of the characters) of this troubling condition of modernity, AIDS and homosexuality. (Alden 2007: 128).

Alden's (2007) analysis of masculinities in Zimbabwean literature helps to sharpen the gender perspective. Exclusive focus on women characters runs the risk of taking men out of the picture. Her work reminds readers that men too are gendered beings. Her approach serves as a reminder to this study to pay attention to the portrayal of men in women's works on HIV and AIDS. This will help to provide a more balanced approach. This will be appropriated, alongside Mungoshi's creative blending of sex and gender in some of his works. These approaches serve to remind us of the discussion at the beginning of this chapter, namely, that gender is not handed down from heaven. Gender is not equal to women. It is the social roles that men arrogate to themselves and to women. Depending on the values that these roles espouse, social roles can be dangerous in a negative sense that implies self destruction, or dangerous in a way that celebrates the capacity of human beings to destroy evil systems of oppressions in order to grow new ones that are democratic. As such in this study, the notions of gender and danger are a product of socialisation and can be reconstructed. In this study I ask whether women's writing on HIV and AIDS have succeeded in offering a vision of a new society based on gender justice.

Manning the Nation: Father Figure in Zimbabwean Literature and Society, edited by Kizito Muchemwa and Robert Muponde (2007), is one of the most comprehensive analysis available on literature and masculinities. Contributors to the volume have examined the portrayal of male characters in Zimbabwean literature. As with Alden's work, *Manning the Nation* is very relevant to the current study. It seeks to complete the meaning of gender by examining the characterisation of male characters in Zimbabwean literature and society. As this study analyses women writers' response to HIV and AIDS, the criticism found in *Manning the Nation* will help to inform its conclusions. Insights into masculinity will also be drawn from *Masculinities in African Literary and Cultural Texts* (Mugambi and Allan 2010).

The overview of material on Zimbabwean literature undertaken above is strategic for this study. It has facilitated the awareness that criticism of literary works in Zimbabwe is not in its infancy. There is already a tradition of analyzing fictional works in the country and beyond. The review also confirms the tendency to focus on the major authors at the expense of emerging writers who may be focusing on relevant themes such as HIV and AIDS. In addition, it has emerged that there has been little attention paid to genres such as autobiography. This study pursues this genre in relation to women authors who narrate their encounters with HIV. Of particular interest is the extent to which most of the critics have not focused on the related themes of gender and danger. I seek to investigate how Zimbabwean women authors have appropriated these concepts to create their characters and move their narratives forward. Although the material that has been published so far is quite useful, it does not address the subject of women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS, their agency and commitment to liberation. This study fills in the scholarly gaps by adopting such a direct focus on gender and HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe women's literature. In the section below, I examine the concepts that lie at the heart of my thesis, namely, gender and danger within the Zimbabwean literary canon.

2. 3 Gender and Danger in Zimbabwean Society

This study examines the concepts of gender and danger and how various theorists have brought out these ideas. These concepts offer the theoretical grounding for this study. In this section I focus on the concept of gender in Zimbabwean society. This is necessary because the women writers whose work I examine in this study are rooted within Zimbabwean society. In order to value the contribution of Zimbabwean women writers to discourses on HIV, there is need to examine gender relations in the society they seek to describe. There are two competing schools of thought regarding gender in Africa. On the one hand are cultural nationalists who argue that it is no longer possible to retrieve authentic images of gender dynamics in society due to the impact of colonialism on indigenous societies. In particular, the Nigerian feminist scholar Ifi Amadiume (1987) has argued that the colonial period distorted gender relations, at least in her Nigerian context. Amadiume has argued that the Western concept of gender is not readily applicable in Africa. Elaborating on indigenous Nigerian communities, she maintains that they did not have the rigid concepts of gender. These were introduced as a result of colonialism. For example, rulers in society could be either male or female, but these were changed to "kings" with the

coming of colonialism. The Igbo term for husband, *di*, does not show whether one is male or female. Consequently, both a man and a woman can be a husband (Amadiume 1987: 128). Women may act as husbands for other wives and daughters may step into positions of sons. It is, therefore, not surprising that her book has the title, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* (Amadiume 1987).

On the other hand, radical feminists such as Gaidzanwa and McFadden argue that it is no longer pleasant to appeal to the distant past where women and men might have related as equals. They point to harsh realities of the present where women struggle to be seen and heard. They argue that in the contemporary world, African women endure a lot of abuse. Appealing to the era of gender equality that was not only a precolonial mythology and then overtaken by colonialism, will not liberate these women. In this study, I aim to bring the two schools of thought on gender in Africa to a common understanding. I look into whether it is not possible to utilise traditional concepts that availed space to women as well as ideas by radical feminists to minimise women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS.

It is within the context of contestation regarding gender relations in Zimbabwean society that this study seeks to understand women writers' portrayal of the dynamics in the interaction between the two sexes. Taking cognisance of the fact that gender does not mean "women's issues," the study pays attention to men as gendered beings themselves. There has been a trend to overlook the reality that men too have a gender (Morrell 2001). If one is not born a woman but becomes one (as suggested by Simone de Beauvior above), one is also not born a man but becomes one. Through the process of socialisation, a man gets an identity. The danger with this is that most men end up taking identities that endanger the lives of women and themselves. Most men have been socialised to exercise power and control over women. In many cases, this has translated to sexual and gender-based violence. Men also endanger themselves through taking risks and refusing to show emotions. In his review of Zimbabwean masculinities, Chenjerai Shire contends that colonial legislation transformed Shona traditional ideas of manhood and upgraded the masculinities of the colonial class (Shire 1994: 150). All these factors have an effect on the health of women.

In a sociological study of Zimbabwean society, Michael Bourdillon (1976), argues that there has been a lack of understanding of the status of women in African societies. According to him, critics tend to exaggerate the subordination of women in traditional societies. In his words:

> It is a common misconception that women had little or no status in traditional African societies. There are many reasons given for (t)his view: women are said to be bought and sold in marriage like chattels; at the death of a husband, his widows are inherited with his estate; since women could not represent themselves in traditional courts but had to be represented by a senior male relative, it is said that legally they were minors all their lives; wives are said to be completely subject to their husbands who have the right to beat them within limits; women do most of the work in the fields and in the home while the men spend much of their time sitting in idle chatter. So some conclude that the traditional position of Shona women is little better than the position of a slave. (Bourdillon 1976: 50).

Bourdillon argues that such interpretations of the status of women in Shona society are extreme as women had considerable room to manoeuvre. He accepts that the introduction of the cash economy affected negatively the status of women who tended to dominate agricultural production. Nonetheless, Bourdillon is, in a way, too quick to pardon patriarchy. His argument that modernity has brought new opportunities for women overlooks the continuing struggle by women for equality and justice. Women remain marginalised and their contributions are overlooked in national statistics. Admittedly, Africa's own marginalisation in the global economic order implies that most African women and men remain trapped in poverty. In essence, Bourdillon's analysis of the position of traditional Shona women holds water. It tallies with Amadiume's evaluation of the pre-colonial status of women in traditional Igbo society reviewed above. The most evident gap that is noticeable is that both authors are focusing on "traditional" societies. In this study, I analyse the works of contemporary women writers on HIV and AIDS. There is need to accept that times have changed. Colonialism has had a considerable effect on the status of Zimbabwean women.

There have been a number of studies on women and gender relations in Zimbabwean society. In an informative study, Teresa Barnes (1999) has shown how the growth of urbanisation left Zimbabwean women more vulnerable to patriarchal control. Whereas they could previously assert their economic independence, the colonial state brought new challenges. Josephine Nhongo-Simbanegavi (2000) has traced the participation of women in the liberation struggle, at least through the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA). She confirms how patriarchal dictates ensured that very few women actually featured at the battle front during the 1970s war of liberation. These two works confirm that the status of women in Zimbabwe has not remained stagnant. They capture some of the major factors that have impacted on the status of women, namely, urbanisation and the liberation struggle. Another key factor is the arrival of Christianity.

One of the most socially disruptive experiences of the previous century was the arrival and growth of Christianity. The church has become a significant institution in Zimbabwe. In *Respectable and Responsible Women: Methodist and Roman Catholic Women's Organisations in Harare, Zimbabwe*, Hinfelaar (2001) has described how Shona women have struggled to maintain the ideals of responsibility and respectability in a patriarchal setting. Missionaries sought to socialise African women into virtuous beings who were not aggressive in their response to male aggression. Womanhood was recast to imply subservience to male dominance. According to Gaidzanwa (1985), the curriculum for African women was focused on grooming wives as helpmates for black Christian men. "While male Africans could be trained to lead Christian and heathen natives, native women were supposed to bear children and raise them in a fit manner for these leaders" (Gaidzanwa 2006:196).

The issues discussed above show that historical factors have combined forces to leave women at the lowest level of society. In the past, women had greater leverage through their control of agriculture and indigenous spirituality. However, colonialism saw urban spaces being defined in masculine terms. Women who dared to access urban spaces were constructed as "loose" and "stray." Rural women were constructed as honourable. Unfortunately, this trend has continued in the postcolonial period. This myth has been perpetuated by young urban groove artists in Zimbabwe (Chari 2008).

Gender relations in contemporary Zimbabwe are, therefore, distorted in favour of men. Men wield power in the various aspects of life. Women have struggled for space in a patriarchal system. For example, the girl child continues to be disadvantaged in terms of access to education and employment opportunities. Experience has shown that progressive pieces of legislation do not always translate into advances for women in practical terms. Religious and cultural factors have been used to keep women marginalised. The giving away of girls to appease avenging spirits (*kuripa ngozi*) remains entrenched in the culture. Girls are still being married off to men old enough to be their grandfathers. All these examples demonstrate the point that Zimbabwean society, like almost all other societies in the world, is still searching for equality between women and men.

In this section, I have focused on the relationships between women and men in Zimbabwean society (gender). I described the contestation regarding gender in Africa, with some feminists such as Amadiume favouring the equality model that prevailed during the pre-colonial period, while others suggest that we must focus on the present. I also focused on the factors that have affected the status of women in Zimbabwe. I paid attention to the impact of colonialism, urbanisation and Christianity. In the following section, I focus on the concept of gender in Zimbabwean literature.

2.4 Gender in Zimbabwean Literature

This study focuses on artistic works on HIV and AIDS by Zimbabwean women writers. In order to have a better understanding of the achievements of Zimbabwean women writers, it is important to look at the contribution of African women writers in general. This is useful as various historical factors conspired to ensure that the first novel in English by a black Zimbabwean woman author appeared only in 1988 (Dangarembga 1988). This is significant as it implies that Zimbabwe women writers appeared on the scene late. This is closely related to the patriarchal nature of society. Since the education of the boy child has been a priority in Zimbabwean society and women are also expected to be "invisible," it is only recently that women writers have asserted themselves by publishing challenging works. On the other hand,

women writers in other African countries such as Nigeria and Ghana had published their works in the 1960s.

As noted above, Gaidzanwa drew attention to the negative images of women in Zimbabwean literature. According to her, the dominant image of a woman, especially in the urban context, is that she is a prostitute or loose. For Gaidzanwa, "There is no distinction made between lovers, mistresses, concubines and prostitutes. As long as a woman has sex with a man who is not her husband, she is held to be prostitute, implicitly or explicitly" (1985:12). Gaidzanwa reveals the patriarchal bias in most works by male authors. This had the effect of encouraging women writers to take up the challenge as outlined above.

As noted above, in Zimbabwe, Dangarembga (1988) became the first woman to have a novel published in English. *Nervous Conditions* (1988) has been celebrated as a significant postcolonial feminist novel. It marks the arrival of women writers on the literary scene (in relation to writing in English). In her assessment of Dangarembga's work, Moyana (1996) suggests that Dangarembga had brought a new perspective regarding women's status in Zimbabwean society. This is highly useful to this study as I will evaluate whether women authors addressing HIV and AIDS in their works have sustained Dangarembga's achievements.

In *Female Identity in Contemporary Zimbabwean Fiction*, Katrin Berndt (2005) explores the portrayal of female characters in selected Zimbabwean works. Her work is relevant to this study as it complements Gaidzanwa's pioneering research into this field. Berndt illustrates the complexity that characterises this area of research. In examining the works of Dangarembga, Hove, Nozipo Maraire's *Zenzele: A Letter for My Daughter* and Ndlovu's *For Want of a Totem*, she concentrates on the theme of postcolonial identity. Berndt explains her choice of female characters in detail:

> The female protagonists and their bodies serve as interstices of Zimbabwe's postcolonial discourse. Through the female characters, issues such as the relevance of precolonial values, postcolonial developments, and the psychological impact of colonialism are negotiated. Public and private discourses are inscribed into the bodies of female

characters. They illustrate issues such as the disintegration of traditional family structures, the torture and killing of civilians during the liberation war, (sexual) violence, and the pragmatic appropriation of valued introduced during colonialism, and the dominant patriarchal-nationalist myth, which denies Zimbabwean women an (O)ther, besides a passively caring contribution to the struggle for independence. (Berndt 2005: 8).

Berndt's study offers an entry point to this study. She has been willing to analyse artistic works by authors who do not usually receive attention. In addition, her examination of the portrayal of female characters in works by both male and female characters is valuable. Although this study concentrates on women's writings on HIV and AIDS, it will assess how male characters have been depicted by female writers writing on HIV and AIDS. Therefore, Berndt's study offers some key perspectives.

Although *African Womanhood in Zmbabwean Literature: New Critical Perspectives on Women's Literature in African Languages*, (Mguni *et al* 2006) focuses mainly on women's literature in African languages, it offers some conversation partners. In this volume, Furusa suggests that most of Zimbabwean women writers are too harsh in their portrayal of gender relations. He posits that "most of Zimbabwean women writers' representations of relationships between Zimbabwean women and men paint a picture of a culture that unleashes a large-scale, barbaric, and indiscriminate abuse of women" (Furusa 2006: 18). Could it be that as a male critic, Furusa is more concerned about the protection of African culture? If women experience Zimbabwean cultures as oppressive, is it not only fair for them to voice their pain? How do women focusing on HIV and AIDS represent the interaction between women and men?

Various contributors to the volume draw attention to the portrayal of women in Ndebele and Shona novels and poetry. They describe the role of the Zimbabwe Women Writers and its commitment to activism (Kandawasvika-Chivandikwa 2006) as well as the problematic portrayal of women in selected works (Gaidzanwa 2006). Some of the works examined in the volume address the theme of women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS and will be engaged with in this study.

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2.5 African Women Writers

African women writers have protested against the marginalisation of women in African literature. As it developed, especially in the 1960s, African literature was male dominated. Only a few women writers such as Flora Nwapa could be encountered. With the passage of time, women writers appeared on the scene. Nfah-Abbenyi (1997) has made key observations regarding the determination of African women writers to challenge male dominance. She says:

> African women writers have not just openly lamented, questioned, and criticized the neglect of their work; they have also attacked this neglect through their ongoing exercise of the act of writing. They have slowly but surely used their writings as weapons to invade the battlefields that had hitherto been occupied and dominated by male writers, making tangible gains along the way. These women writers have beaten and are still beating their drums and are letting their war-cries be heard side by side with those of their counterparts at home and abroad. (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997:148).

In their quest to "let their war-cries be heard", African women writers have played a major role in African women's struggle for dignity. Although most have stubbornly refused to be classified as feminists due to the concept's association with middle class women in Europe and North America, they have fought for women's emancipation. In *Post-Colonial and African American Women's Writing*, Gina Wisker (2000: 134) suggests that, African women authors "enable revisionist subversions of women's roles which are represented in conventional fictions as unproblematic, dramatising conflicts and illustrating how women simultaneously fulfill, question and move beyond their roles."

African women writers have sought to weaken the patriarchal hold by articulating women's voices. Where previously the discipline was dominated by men's voices and visions, they have radically altered the face of the discipline. Women's voices and experiences have become an integral part of African literature. They concentrate on women's struggles against suffocation by patriarchal dictates. Where the two choices for wives appear to be "submit or kill yourself"

(Cousins 2004), women writers seek to make mutuality the basis for marriage. Where men use violence as a weapon, women writers preach dialogue, friendship and solidarity.

Whereas previously African women's writing was a small and specialised section within "real African writing," (more or less like children's literature), it is no longer possible to ignore it. In different countries, women are articulating women's experiences with clarity and commitment. In addition, women critics have played an important role in commenting on African women's writing. In the past, literary criticism was an exclusively male undertaking. Currently, a number of women scholars has taken up the challenge of analyzing African women's literature. The tendency has been to conceive of gender as referring to women only and not roles that women and men play in social contexts. The literary works analyzed in this study depict the experiences of female and male characters implying that the problem of HIV is a danger to both sexes.

2.6 Conceptualizing Gender and Danger

Gender and danger are central to this study. Since the clarification of these key concepts is essential to an enquiry of this nature, this section is analyses the fundamental ideas that inform the study. I employ the work of critics such as Saadawi, Gaidzanwa and McFadden. They explore the concept of gender and danger. I also question ideas relating to danger as expressed by selected feminist writers. In a later section, I review works on Zimbabwean literature.

In order for one to understand the struggles that women go through in the context of HIV and AIDS, and their portrayal by women writers, there is need to acknowledge that African society is intensely patriarchal. The patriarchal nature of Zimbabwean society has often meant that women understand life to be troublesome. Social norms and values tend to privilege men. This forces women to become second-class citizens. It is men who are expected to be heads of families, organisations, communities and the nation. Men, in most cases, feature as father- figures in Zimbabwean literature and society (Muchemwa and Muponde 2007). However, women have not hopelessly accepted their fate. They have made use of different ways to interrogate the way things are, and to work towards a society that practices gender justice. Some of the strategies include activism to promote women's rights, engaging in politics and undertaking further studies.

Of significance to this study, is the fact that women have also undertaken creative writing to express themselves.

Women's lives in Zimbabwe have been worsened by the HIV and AIDS epidemic.[2] As will be illustrated in this study, women are undeservedly affected by the epidemic. They are more vulnerable to HIV infection and they carry the load of care-giving. In their creative works, Zimbabwean women authors have interrogated the dynamics of the relationship between HIV and gender. The women have exposed the factors that spell danger to them. In *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, Shaba (2005) shows how patriarchy puts women in danger, as men, more often than not, have financial and cultural power. These women have also critiqued cultural practices that increase their vulnerability to HIV. In their creative and resolute voices, they have looked forward to a better world where women are no longer victims in the face of HIV. This study analyses their contribution to discourses on HIV and gender.

The works of the afore-mentioned gender theorists are particularly strategic to this study. Gaidzanwa, a sociologist and feminist, has published an informative analysis of the portrayal of women in Zimbabwean literature. Gaidzanwa suggests that women, either wives or mothers, are portrayed as loose and dangerous by some authors. She detects the authors', (and society's) double standards in that men do not undergo the same level of hostility when they do not live up to that which society views as the ideal. She says:

> There are no cases where women get away with adultery, promiscuity and disobedience without incurring drastic punishment. This is in contrast with men who may suffer some hardship for their wrongdoing but their punishment is not as drastic as that meted out to women. Men have wives to go back to after committing adultery, brutalising their families or deserting them. These men's function is usually to highlight the indecency and evil nature of the central female characters. (Gaidzanwa 1985: 87-88).

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[2] UNAIDS currently encourages authors to make a distinction between HIV and AIDS and refrain from using "HIV/AIDS" since these are two separate health conditions. In addition, reference should principally be to HIV, unless one is specifically referring to AIDS.

Gaidzanwa's reflections on the social construction of women as dangerous and how Zimbabwean authors have reinforced this idea is significant to this study. She has drawn attention to the general tendency to approach women as dangerous. Her observation that "the fear of women's sexual and social insubordination results in the bulk of town women being depicted as lax and casual in their relationships with men" (1985: 90) is important to this study. However, Gaidzanwa published her work prior to the devastating effects of HIV and AIDS. As a result, she was unable to unpack how the social construction of women as dangerous has massive implications in the time of HIV. Also, Gaidzanwa tends to overlook the efforts by some characters to subvert the stereotype of women as dangerous. This study bridges the gap in her approach by assessing how women characters in selected works focusing on HIV and AIDS refuse to subscribe to oppressive social values and norms. It shows how they make use of their **agency** in a bid to change their circumstances. Gaidzanwa does not give adequate attention to the notion of agency in her analysis of characters in Zimbabwean women's literature. This study brings to the fore the concept of women's **agency** in the face of HIV and AIDS.

For purposes of this study, agency suggests that when it appears reasonable for women to give up, they gather the courage to create a new identity in order to survive. It is such inspired action that allows women to move out of subjectivity. This innovative aspect is crucial to an understanding of the ways in which women and men negotiate changes within gender relations. Female agency in this context would therefore mean a rejection of female powerlessness. Agency promotes the possibility for social change in which women have a role to play. It has the potential to produce the self as an inventive being. However, Motsemme (2007) complicates one's commonplace understanding of agency as only implying positive recreation of the self. She proposes the term 'flawed agency' to suggest that victims of a particular socio-cultural order can also perpetuate it by either taking part in it or not questioning its assumptions. Motsemme's definition of *ukuphanta* clarifies the concept of flawed agency:

> *Ukuphanda* or *ukuphanta* is a philosophy of survival which can be summarized as a way
> of 'getting by', 'making ends meet'. Although the term means doing anything that will
> bring in money, in the townships it is mainly used to describe 'illegal'/non-conventional
> ways to make ends meet. (Motsemme 2007: 80).

Flawed agency, thus, basically means employing unconventional ways in order to achieve the intended result. The end justifies the means. This perspective of agency is significant to this study that explores the images of women and HIV by female writers who possess different levels of conceptualizing the problem.

In this study, I look at women characters as individuals that have the capacity to make informed decisions about their sexuality, even though they are in contexts where their choices are severely limited. I also argue that the individuality of characters does not imply that they are socially dislocated. They participate in, influence and are influenced by the society in which they find themselves. In this regard, Connell's (1994) views are quite important to this study. According to Connell, bodies have their own form of agency. He says that we must, therefore, understand gender within a context "…where bodies are seen as sharing in social agency, in generating and shaping courses of social conduct" (Connell 1994: 13). In this thesis, I understand women characters living with HIV as individuals with the capacity to contribute to the transformation of society's negative attitude towards women. They use their personal agency to contribute to social agency.

Another feminist scholar who has offered key ideas on the social construction of women as dangerous is McFadden (1992). She maintains that the era of HIV and AIDS has compelled communities in Southern Africa that had hitherto remained silent on women's sexuality to be more open about it. She indicates that societies fear women's sexuality. Women are deemed dangerous because of their sexuality, hence, the efforts to control both women and their sexuality. In this process, women's sexuality is demonized while their sexual and reproductive rights are disrespected. McFadden's article, "Sex, Sexuality and the Problem of AIDS in Africa" (1992) suggests that women's sexuality must be approached in a more open and engaging manner.

McFadden has observed that sexuality has generally been a taboo topic, even among African feminists. She describes the fear of sexuality among African women as "socio-sexual anxiety." According to her "the intensity of this anxiety is generated by the fact that there is an extremely intimate relationship between sexuality and power, a connection which is manifested in a range

of circumstances and experiences" (McFadden 2003: 50). In the publication, "Sexual Pleasure as a Feminist Choice" McFadden (2003) tackles a theme that has remained under- researched and under- theorized: African women's sexuality. She maintains that African women need to reclaim their sexual rights and to challenge patriarchal interpretations of culture and tradition.

McFadden's insightful interpretation of African women's sexuality is helpful to this thesis. She has addressed a theme that is often overlooked. The reality of HIV and AIDS must force Southern African societies to face the issue of women's sexuality in an open and realistic way. She raises the painful truth (for patriarchy) that women do and must seek sexual pleasure. This unsettles patriarchy as it is an ideology that thrives on men's control of women in all spheres of life, especially the sexual one. Women's sexual desire and pleasure presents the ultimate challenge to patriarchy, hence, the tendency to label women as dangerous. However, McFadden (1992) has managed to draw attention to women's sexual pleasure. She challenges the patriarchal tactic of linking sexuality with reproduction. Makinwa-Adebusoye and Tiemoko endorse McFadden's approach when they argue:

> Important to the dissociation of sexuality and reproduction is the identity and lives of female members of society. Conflating sexuality with reproduction simply confuses womanhood with motherhood. The implication of this goes beyond the confusion between the function or role and the person, to compromise women's identities and rights outside a reproductive age. Sexuality beyond reproduction is an important concept in research and in advancing a rights-approach to sexuality and reproduction. It explicitly recognises the importance of reproduction in human sexuality, but equally and unambiguously calls for an attention to various forms of sexual expression. Viewing sexuality beyond reproduction makes visible people suffering from discrimination and marginalization. (Makinwa-Adebusoye and Tiemoko 2007: 10-11).

This study makes use of critical insights from McFadden. However, the present study will also highlight some gaps in McFadden's approach. I feel that she did not pay adequate attention to the harsh realities that women in Africa face such as poverty, gender inequality and gender-based violence. While the majority of women in Africa may want to pursue sexual pleasure, the

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strained conditions they generally live in do not make it easier for them. Most of these women seek to preserve their very own lives in the first instance. Poverty leads to lack of food, clothing and shelter; the very basic human needs. In such a set up, sexual pleasure might be a luxury only middle class women may aspire for. We shall see how the characters in selected works by Zimbabwe women writers regard sexual pleasure. For instance, do women in *Desperate* by Phiri (2002) resort to sex as pleasure? How do these women meet their basic needs? We shall then be able to say whether McFadden has been able to go beyond her own status as a middle class woman who empathises with the "desperate".

2.7 Socialisation and the Status of Women and Men

I have discussed the theoretical formulations by Gaidzanwa and McFadden in the preceding paragraphs. In this section, I will pay more attention to how the process of socialization is essential to an understanding of the status of women and men. The social construction of women and men has never been blameless. In most societies, men have been socialized to control and dominate women "politically, socially and economically" (Onyango 2006: 36). On the other hand, women have been socialized to be submissive to men. Through complex socialization processes, male dominance has been portrayed as the natural order of things. Cultural ideologies have been used to maintain male dominance. Writing on this, Kelly (2009) maintains that an analysis of AIDS, sexuality and gender brings out in the open society's double-standards:

> It is about the most enduring, universal, comprehensive, wide-ranging injustice in the world – treating half the human race as if they were of a lesser moment, denying them accomplishment, fulfillment and satisfaction if they do not conform to the conventions, dictates and cultures of male-dominated societies, ignoring the centrality of women's attitudes and concerns. (Kelly 2009: xii).

However, women writers have questioned the trend of portraying the subordination of women as normal. They have felt the need to dispute the distortion and express women's experiences of oppression. Considering the responsibilities of the woman writer in the eyes of feminists, Ogundipe-Leslie (1987: 5) takes note of the following issues: "first to tell about being a woman; secondly to describe reality from a woman's point of view, a woman's perspective." These

observations are of remarkable relevance to this study. I seek to establish whether Zimbabwean women writers focusing on HIV and AIDS "tell about being a woman". I interrogate whether the fictional works describe what it means to be a woman during the time of HIV. I also analyse whether they describe the reality from a woman's perspective, and whether they succeed in showing the reality of women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. Therefore, in this study, I aim to establish whether Zimbabwean women writers have succeeded in articulating women's experiences of HIV and AIDS.

The study pursues the theme of Zimbabwean women's writings on HIV through the concepts of "gender" and "danger." There have been substantial intellectual thoughts on the theme of gender. Gender refers to the socially assigned roles between women and men in society. This point has been made convincingly by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* where she clearly puts it , "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (De Beauvior 1949). She argues that across all societies, women have been constructed as inferior to men. Whereas being male or female is a biological fact, gender is socially constructed. It is society that prescribes and monitors the behaviour of women and men. For example, the strong resistance to homosexuality in Southern Africa is a result of the belief that homosexuality threatens social stability. It can, therefore, be appreciated that gender is dependent on societal values and norms. African women writers have sought to question the strict gender stereotypes that are endorsed and maintained by society.

Conversely, danger has not enjoyed a lot of scholarly analysis. Danger is generally associated with threats to health and well-being. When women are regarded as a risk to the vibrancy of society, there is need for a sober scrutiny. Moi (1999) draws attention to the need to be flexible in relation to gender and identity. She maintains that it is dangerous when women, for example, are exclusively associated with their gendered identity. She maintains:

> There are situations in which we choose to be freely recognized as sexed or raced bodies, where that recognition is exactly what we need and want. Identity politics starts with such identity-affirming situations, but unfortunately goes on to base a general politics on them, thus forgetting that there are other situations in which we do not want to be identified by

our sexed and raced bodies, situations in which we wish that body to be no more than the insignificant background to our main activity. (Moi 1999: 203).

Moi's reading of gender, identity and danger is informative. When women are associated exclusively with "womanly" characteristics, it becomes dangerous to their well-being. In this case, to interpret women writers totally on the basis of their gender is to deny them their various identities. It is dangerous to confine women's potential. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979), often associated with "second-wave" feminism in the United States of America, argue that women writers in particular struggle to assert themselves due to the "anxiety of authorship." As most writers are male, women writers face formidable odds as they do not have role models. They argue that the:

> loneliness of the female artist, her feelings of alienation from male predecessors coupled with her need for sisterly predecessors and successors, her urgent sense for a female audience together with her fear of the antagonism of her male readers, her culturally-conditioned timidity about self-dramatization, her dread of the patriarchal authority of art, her anxiety about the impropriety of female invention – all these phenomena of 'inferiorization' mark the woman writer's struggle for artistic self-definition and differentiate her efforts at self-creation from those of her male counterparts. (Gilbert and Gubar 1979: 50).

Gilbert and Gubar make some noteworthy observations regarding the challenges of women writers. However, they overstate their case. They detect many factors that endanger women writers. Possibly this was the case during their time. Today, many women writers have overcome the "anxiety of authorship"; if at all they have had to face it. The women writers whose works on HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe are analyzed in this study have wanted to respond to women's vulnerability without worrying about the male gaze. It is however, important to note that Gilbert and Gubar have provided some useful perspectives in analysing gender and danger in literature.

Within most societies, women and danger are linked. Patriarchal societies have always felt the need to control women and their sexuality. Independent and assertive women are feared as they

are deemed capable of upsetting "the divine order of things." In particular, women's sexuality is controlled and feared. This is one of the reasons why female circumcision or female genital mutilation as the critics refer to it, is performed in some societies. Alice Walker, a womanist, and Pratibha Parmar have charged that female circumcision is "the sexual blinding of women" (Walker and Parmar 1993). It is ironic that while girls and women are supposed to be virgins prior to marriage, boys and men are expected to experiment with their sexuality. Women's sexuality is supposed to be closely controlled because patriarchy views it as dangerous.

The main reason why women are regarded as dangerous in society is the knowledge that they are capable of challenging the patriarchal presentation of reality. Patriarchy has sought to project women's subordinate status as normal and permanent. Alternatively, feminist writers and critics have exposed patriarchal myths that place men at the centre of reality. Feminist writers have contested male dominance. They have shown that women can achieve a lot on their own, as long as men stop oppressing them. Such authors are deemed dangerous as they allow other women to realise that a world punctuated by gender justice is possible.

The notions of 'gender and danger' are contradictory. As used and critiqued by McFadden (1992), they suggest that HIV and AIDS is a woman's disease. This mode of stereotyping women reveals the relative powerlessness of women in a patriarchal Zimbabwean society. In this study the notions of 'danger' and 'gender' shall be interrogated because of their potential to suggest other possible 'positive' meanings of womanhood as they can be depicted in Zimbabwean literature by women writers. This study follows the lead provided by Chitauro and her fellow researchers (1994) who argue that in the Zimbabwean society, the notion of danger is ambiguous. It might mean that women are depicted as sexually loose and, therefore, dangerous to society; or that as they claim agency, women pose a threat to patriarchy.

However, the 'danger' that female gender can bring to the writing and reading of literature can also be understood as women's power to "…revision; through their expressive art… singers [could] tell terrible things in song and poetry, set out what is not usually heard and survive with impunity" (Chitauro et al 1994: 118). This line of understanding the notions of gender, and danger and how they are related to writing is amplified by the Egyptian writer, Nawal El

Saadawi (2007) who suggests that when men describe women's writings and images of women in those writings as dangerous, this can have positive meanings linking danger to "dissidence and creativity" (Saadawi 2007: 172-177). Dissidence and creativity can then suggest a real possibility of a community of women whose writings transgress and bring into being images of women that can no longer be fixed or stereotyped negatively. This study will engage with these double meanings of gender and danger in women writings on HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe.

2.8 Women's Writing on HIV and AIDS

HIV and AIDS made a quiet and unspectacular entry into the lives of many Africans. Most African countries, including Zimbabwe, acknowledged their first cases of HIV and AIDS in the mid-1980s. As with other unknown diseases, fear, stigma and discrimination greeted the arrival of HIV and AIDS in the country. There were different responses to the new disease. Some dismissed it outright. They claimed that it was an invention by moral purists to stop people from enjoying life. Others framed it within the context of known sexually transmitted infections. Yet others evoked traditional interpretations of illness, including *runyoka* (fatal illness associated with extramarital relations).

By the mid-1990s, it had become clear that AIDS was not a myth. There had been a marked increase in the death of economically active young people. Musicians began to warn the community that there was danger in their midst. In 2003, for instance, a group of musicians known as Extra Large released the song *Wafawanaka* 'the dead person is the ever-good one'. The song criticizes Janet's self- destructive tendencies in stereotypical images of women as carriers of diseases. The song, *Wafawanaka*, however, carries an HIV and AIDS awareness message, "Extra Large also insists that human beings have the capacity to prevent deaths from terminal illnesses such as AIDS by not having unprotected sex, and by not having multiple partners", (Vambe 2008: 138). During the same period, performing groups and artists also undertook educational tours and campaigns. They concentrated on behaviour change. Taking up the public health message, they encouraged individuals to follow the "ABC" strategy of "Abstain," "Be faithful," or "Condomise/use condoms."

It took a little longer for creative writers to introduce the theme of HIV and AIDS in their literary works. It is difficult to establish why authors delayed in taking up the theme. One reason could be that too much controversy surrounds the topic. As a result, very few authors dared to tackle the subject early on. The controversy surrounding HIV includes its origin and racist arguments about African sexuality as driving HIV. Perhaps these factors dissuaded authors from infusing the HIV and AIDS theme in their work.

However, the sheer impact of HIV and AIDS on Zimbabwean society was such that it could not be ignored for very long. Gradually, creative writers began to interact with the epidemic. They began to compose short stories, poems and novels that tried to make sense of its devastating assault on human life. They lamented the loss of young lives, the increase in orphans and other challenges. In particular, women authors drew attention to women's vulnerability to HIV.

One of the most relevant articles to this study is by Ngoshi and Pasi. It is entitled, "Mediating HIV/AIDS Strategies in Children's Literature in Zimbabwe" (2007). Although their focus is on transforming children's literature to reflect the reality of HIV and AIDS, the authors make valid observations that will inform this study. Also, they analyse some of the books that are the focus of this research. They charge that the curriculum for primary and secondary schools remains trapped in conservatism. Children's literature could really benefit from incorporating books that address HIV and AIDS.

Ngoshi and Pasi analyse Westerhof's *Unlucky in Love* (2005) and Luta Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* (2005). They regard *Unlucky in Love* as an impressive attempt to describe the effects of HIV and AIDS to an individual and her family. They observe that the work is seminal in its endeavour to explore human relations at both family and societal levels in the context of HIV and AIDS (Ngoshi and Pasi 2007: 248). They appreciate the autobiographical quality of the narrative as it is more personal and informative. They rightly state that "we need to see the agency of those affected by HIV/AIDS" (248).

In their review of *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, Ngoshi and Pasi appreciate its autobiographical qualities. They describe the stigma and discrimination experienced by women living with HIV.

In *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, Lingarileni is abandoned by her husband after testing positive. They contend that both Westerhof and Shaba experience healing by narrating their stories. According to them, "Autobiography universalises human experience, and again, because for both Westerhof and Shaba, these are narratives of trauma, the autobiographical act becomes a therapeutic intervention" (Ngoshi and Pasi 2007: 248).

Ngoshi and Pasi have provided key insights into two of the works that are covered by this study. They outline the narratives and probe the major themes emerging from the works. This study builds on their observations by critically assessing the literary styles adopted by Westerhof and Shaba. Ngoshi and Pasi give the impression that the autobiographical is "untouchable." The study will also utilise interviews to bring additional clarity to the two works. While Ngoshi and Pasi's main concern was to utilise these works for children's literature, this study applies gender analysis to evaluate the portrayal of women and men in these works. My present study seeks to complement previous studies, from the perspective of how women are depicted by women writers in the context of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwean literature.

Another relevant article on the topic under investigation is the one by Vambe (2003) with the title, "HIV/AIDS, African Sexuality and the Problem of Representation in Zimbabwean Literature." In his analysis of Kala's *Waste Not Your Tears* (1994), Vambe contends that the work brings out "the constraints imposed by African cultural beliefs on an African woman reconfiguring her identity to that of an innocent victim, ill-equipped to deal with the pandemic in a patriarchal society that believes that women are the source and carrier of HIV/AIDS" (Vambe 2003: 475). Vambe also analyses a play and a Shona novel featuring HIV and AIDS. His interpretations of the gendered nature of the epidemic as well as its political significance are of extreme importance to this study. Vambe's conclusion is valuable to this study. He argues that, "In its bid to represent African sexual identities in the era of HIV/AIDS, Zimbabwean literature has been paradoxically implicated in confirming and interrogating the cultural context within which the transmission of the disease from person to person takes place" (Vambe 2003: 487). This study builds on Vambe's insights by paying attention to the emergence of literature by authors who are themselves living with HIV. Narratives by women who are living with HIV are

more incisive and emotional than the abstract reflections by male authors who approach the epidemic from a distance.

In "Zimbabwean Women Writers' Use of Metaphor as Gender Rhetoric in Discourse on HIV/AIDS and Sex-related Issues: The Case of *Totanga Patsva* (We Start Afresh) by Zimbabwean Women Writers," Kangira, Mashiri and Gambahaya (2007) illustrate how women artists have utilised different linguistic techniques to refer to HIV and AIDS. According to them, this is because Shona culture does not allow directness in relation to issues relating to sex. This article informs the current study as it indicates that women artists are sometimes constrained by social considerations when tackling the theme of HIV and AIDS. Of special interest is indirectness relating to sexuality. The study will examine how different women writers address this particular theme as they tackle the subject of HIV and AIDS.

Gaidzanwa (2006) has analysed works in Ndebele and Shona that make references to the epidemic. She argues that women writers "have taken it upon themselves to initiate debate on social and health challenges like the HIV/AIDS pandemic" (205). She charges that most of the stories were moralistic, suggesting that women who get infected are those who go out looking for the disease. Gaidzanwa has serious misgivings about the approach of the women authors. She observes that:

> In these stories, HIV/AIDS is associated with young single women, although in Zimbabwe, the major risk factor for women contracting HIV is marriage. The major form of transmission of HIV is heterosexual sex and married women carry the highest risks since they are less able than single women, to negotiate safer sex. The dominant paradigm when the stories were published was that HIV/AIDS was associated with immoral people, namely, uncoupled women, and, therefore,, decent married women were not at risk. (Gaidzanwa 2006: 206).

In a seminar paper, Muhwati (2006) takes up a similar theme. He examines Shona novels, *Zvibaye Wega* (Self Torment, 1996) and *Mapenzi* (Fools 1999). According to him, authors of these works have succumbed to the tendency to associate HIV and AIDS with women. Muhwati

is very critical of the portrayal of women in the two works. He urges authors to strive for balance. In the case of *Zvibaye Wega*, he complains that the leading male character is a serial womaniser who is made to avoid getting infected with HIV. On the other hand, most of the women he has interacted with get infected. The women are described using terrifying terminologies. On *Mapenzi*, Muhwati contends that the author associates women with dangerous sexuality. Although Vambe (2003) offers an alternative reading of *Mapenzi*, Muhwati's reservations need to be taken seriously. Too often women endure negative stereotypes. For Muhwati (2006: 2), "The unmistakable trend in the novels under study is their ignominious association of HIV and AIDS, including a host of other sexually transmitted diseases, with the female principle."

The works reviewed above demonstrate that the theme of gender and literature in the face of HIV and AIDS has become an important theme. If previously Zimbabwean literature was characterised by silence, secrecy and denial, it now seeks to engage the epidemic. In particular, women writers have examined the impact of epidemic on women. For their part, critics have begun to analyse the portrayal of women in creative works that handle the theme of HIV and AIDS. However, there are no studies that offer an in-depth analysis of the theme. This study fills in the gap by assessing how Zimbabwean women writers address HIV and AIDS in their works.

2.9 Reconstructing Gender Relations in the Face of HIV and AIDS

In the paragraphs above, this study examined works that relate to literature and HIV in Zimbabwe. Artists have shown that the epidemic raises serious issues regarding gender relations. It is no longer possible to postpone engaging with the issue in a very direct way. A number of scholars have suggested solutions. In this section, the study interacts with some of the strategies that have been proposed to address women's vulnerability to HIV. This will assist the study in formulating pathways for more effective interventions.

Gender activists have argued that cultural beliefs and practices that increase women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS must be eliminated or transformed. They argue that since gender is a product of socialisation, it can be deconstructed. It can also be reconstructed to give women a better chance. The literary critics whose works have been referred to in this chapter offer new

perspectives on gender relations in the face of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. Most of them are women scholars who are of the conviction that there must be a profound change in gender relations if HIV is to be defeated. There are also male activists who have suggested new models for responding to HIV.

Mungwini (2008) offers a penetrating critique of cultural constructions of womanhood among the Shona. Mungwini observes that women's vulnerability to HIV has been principally due to "producing" or child-bearing and "belonging" or being married. He observes that these two qualities expose women to HIV and AIDS. In his call for a liberating approach, he asks women to search for alternative qualities. Mungwini offers the following suggestion:

> AIDS requires women and everyone else to seriously think of and possibly start questioning the socially constructed and upheld construction of the ideal Shona woman. There is a real imperative for society to assist women to construct a viable self identity, one that does not only revolve around mothering or 'producing' and having a husband or 'belonging.' The traditional picture of the ideal Shona woman has become anachronistic as it appears to have outlived its usefulness as society battles to confront the AIDS menace. (2008: 210).

This thesis departs from the works reviewed above in some key ways. First, it focuses on women's writings on HIV and AIDS in a direct and sustained way. Second, it employs the themes of gender and danger to analyse the literary works. Third, the thesis will place emphasis on the theme of agency, paying attention to the strategies women characters employ to counter the negative effects of patriarchy in order to survive HIV. It builds on the contributions of previous authors, but proceeds to provide new insights into Zimbabwean women writings and HIV.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that Zimbabwean literature has benefited from detailed scholarly analysis. A number of books and numerous articles have been published to reflect on creative works. Women's writing became a major feature of literary production in the country, especially

after the attainment of independence. After a period of silence, artists began to address HIV and AIDS. This chapter has summarised the historical growth of literary criticism in Zimbabwe. It has illustrated that useful information on women's writing on HIV and AIDS has been published. This study will benefit a lot from the available resources.

However, I have drawn attention to some gaps that I have identified in the available academic literature. These include the fact that most authors have not focused on how the themes of gender and danger are intertwined. Again, factors that put women at risk in the context of HIV and AIDS have not been given adequate attention. Additionally, the depiction of women and men in the fiction on HIV and AIDS has particularly maintained a binary in which men are good and women are bad, or vice versa. This study hopes to contribute by highlighting, explaining and comparing the contradictory constructions and representation of women and men in the discourse on HIV and AIDS. Through an analysis of literary texts selected for this study, the next chapters are expected to address the gaps noted in the literature review.

In the next chapter, I will examine how Phiri's *Desperate* (2002) addresses factors that make women vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. In addition, I will critique her portrayal of male and female characters and how they play their roles in society. I will also illustrate how Phiri draws on the concepts of gender and danger to show women's helplessness or strength in the face of HIV. HIV demonstrates that there are strong women living in dangerous times (Kalipeni, Flyn and Pope 2009). I also seek to evaluate the solutions Phiri presents, paying attention to the concept of women's agency.

CHAPTER 3

BEFORE THE BEGINNING: WOMEN'S VULNERABILITY IN VIRGINIA PHIRI'S *DESPERATE* (2002)

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter was a review of the literature related to this study. Chapter two discussed the growth of literary theory and criticism in Zimbabwe. It also highlighted the dominant themes in Zimbabwean literature. The chapter identified some gaps in literary theory and criticism in Zimbabwe. These included the fact that the literary terrain in Zimbabwe was earlier on mainly dominated by men who tended to depict women in negative terms, to the detriment of women's welfare. Women's literary works were also not adequately integrated into mainstream literature. I also discussed the challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies, emphasizing that there is not sufficient critical discourse devoting to the discussion of how creative art depicts the issues of HIV, AIDS, gender and danger. Since this study focuses on Zimbabwe women writers, it is anticipated that the identified limitations will be resolved, as women narrate their own stories about gender and danger.

This chapter is an analysis of Phiri's *Desperate* (2002).The main thrust of the short stories in *Desperate* is on women who engage in sex work as a survival strategy. Basically, women in *Desperate* resort to sex not for pleasure, but, as a form of livelihood. These women are forced to engage in sex work in order to meet their basic needs. I, therefore, set out to investigate the socio-economic, political and cultural conditions that drive them into this trade. I also seek to establish the factors that make women vulnerable to HIV and AIDS, although *Desperate* does not address HIV directly as most of the stories pre-date this theme. This chapter is central to this study as it sets the pace for all the other literary works to be analyzed. Chapter three foregrounds conditions that lead to HIV and AIDS, a theme that runs across all the other literary works analysed in this study. It gives the basis for issues that shape the discourses in the subsequent chapters.

In this chapter, I argue that different circumstances such as poverty force most women to sell sex. Gaidzanwa (1985) utilizes a sociological approach and argues that socio-economic, political and cultural conditions determine the images of women that writers come up with. Schmidt (1992) also shares this sociological perspective. She emphasizes the inequalities within African households in a colonial context, and how these shape roles that women and men come to play in society whether this is colonial or postcolonial. McFadden (1992), specifically writing in the context of HIV and AIDS, also subscribes to the view that socio-economic and cultural factors put women in compromised positions:

> AIDS cannot be separated from the extreme poverty, lack of resources and the burden of work for women, nor can it be separated from the problems of female subordination, oppression and exploitation through the perpetuation of patriarchal cultures and traditions which underpin most African societies to the present day. (McFadden 1992: 192).

While these theoretical perspectives are important, this chapter notes that there is not necessarily a one to one relationship between social conditions and the images that writers come up with. Because of this, it is important to also evaluate how Phiri uses her own creativity to produce images that can either confirm or interrogate the conditions of its own possibility. Through the use of images, authors are questioning conditions in order to come up with new identities. For example, Tambu in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) moves out of poverty and continues to grow in consciousness. She analyses the different female characters in the novel such as Maiguru, her own mother and Nyasha. She then decides what she wants her life to be. There are oppressive conditions in her life but she transcends them.

Through an analysis of the stories in *Desperate*, this chapter allows one to question whether patriarchal celebrations of African culture are sustainable in the face of HIV. In addition, this chapter helps in the overall evaluation of the portrayal of gender and danger in a world where 'women and girl-children offer the only material asset they have to trade, their bodies', (Martin, 2005). As established in chapter one, gender focuses on the socially defined roles for women and men in society. In line with Dube's views (2003), I argue that the roles played by women and men in society are not gracefully instituted. They can be reformulated to achieve justice. Abused

women can be seen claiming agency by rejecting the negative roles they are given and resisting patriarchal dictates (Moyana 2006). When women positively manipulate societal roles that would have otherwise disadvantaged them, this is danger to patriarchy, but good for women. This observation contradicts Gaidzanwa's perception of danger (1985) and that of Chitauro *et al* (1994). Gaidzanwa understands 'danger' as only a negative force, while Chitauro sees creativity in women who are viewed as 'dangerous' by society. For Chitauro *et al*, to be called 'danger' ceases to be an appellation, but a complement for those women who seek to redefine themselves.

Moyana's (2006) study further contrasts what she describes as passive and assertive women. However, in the ever shifting contexts of HIV and AIDS, women who appear passive may actually be subversive when they chart their own pathways without the advice from men. Similarly, women who appear as resisting patriarchy help others to construct a resistance discourse. However, the same women may display obeisance to patriarchy, particularly when these women feel that the material interests that they were fighting for have been fulfilled. In short, one needs to nuance women's responses and accept the fact that they come from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. These factors usually shape how women respond to perceived threats. Interestingly, a single woman can display uneven or contradictory responses to HIV and AIDS. When this happens, it shows the complicated nature of the notion of gender and danger. For example, Chitauro *et al* (1994) talk about women expanding their horizon when they occupy public space and how this threatens patriarchy. A woman who occupies public space is a danger to a male's conception of what a good woman should be. In this case, goodness is a narrow term which means to be controlled. However, going out of confinement destroys boundaries and there is development. One adapts and discovers new things. This can embody positive danger that promotes women's empowerment.

3.2 Reading *Desperate* with HIV and AIDS Lenses

Desperate creates the basis of analysis for the next chapter. This literary work does not discuss HIV and AIDS per se but provides the cultural background for all the next chapters which discuss HIV and AIDS. *Desperate* includes the period before independence and hence the pre-HIV and AIDS era, as well as the HIV and AIDS era. It is a crucial text for understanding the rapid spread of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. Phiri's sensitive approach to women sex workers

brings out the key factors that drive the epidemic. She has allowed the women to describe their circumstances and shows how various factors in *Desperate* force women to trade their bodies. This is consistent with research data focusing on vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. According to Weinreich and Benn:

> Vulnerable for HIV infection are people who, due to limited self-determination in social, sexual and other areas, have an increased risk of HIV infection: women, children, commercial sex workers, homosexuals, young people, drug users, migrants, ethnic minorities and poor people. (2004: 21).

In situations where men have more power than women, women become more vulnerable to HIV. There are also destructive cultural practices that increase vulnerability of both women and men to HIV. One such practice is *kugara nhaka* (inheritance) where a man inherits the wife of the deceased, and may proceed to have sexual relations with her. In Zimbabwe, such cultural practices continue to be challenged, thereby drawing attention to the need to place emphasis on responsibility rather than the sexual aspect. Women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS has emerged as a critical issue as alluded to by the organisation World Council of Churches:

> Economic, social and cultural factors which perpetuate the subordination of women are contributing to the spread of HIV. In many societies the position of women limits their control over their bodies and their power to make decisions about reproduction. Women may be forced into commercial sex work by their own economic situation or that of their families. Faced with overwhelming poverty, a woman who works in a brothel may reason: 'If I work here I may die in ten years. If I do not, I will die of starvation tomorrow'. (World Council of Churches 1997: 16).

It is against this background that I seek to assess whether the stories in *Desperate* confirm that women's entry into the sex industry is mainly out of desperation.

3.3 Factors Increasing Women's Vulnerability to HIV and AIDS

Instead of viewing sex workers and their clients as independent individuals who are free to make choices, and for whom sex is for pleasure, there is need to interrogate some of the factors that force women into the prostitution. Therefore, before analysing the depiction of sex workers in *Desperate*, there is need to examine circumstances that generally force women into sex work, exposing them to HIV and AIDS. This section briefly discusses the conditions that cause women to engage in sex work. These include poverty, gender inequality, poor governance and oppressive cultural practices. This study does not, however, exhaust the list of factors that cause women to resort to sex work. It concentrates more on the conditions that manifest in *Desperate.*

3.3.1 Poverty

It has been established that poverty, gender inequality and harmful cultural practices are key drivers of HIV and AIDS. Although former South African President Thabo Mbeki (2005) invited controversy when he suggested that poverty, not HIV, caused AIDS, there is an emerging consensus that poverty is a key factor in increasing vulnerability to HIV. Rural homes are zones of financial want. They rely on agriculture only for sustenance, and this may not guarantee food security. Women and men are forced to migrate to the city due to poverty. Once the rural areas are left, a vicious cycle of poverty ensues because mostly, women are left to fend for families (Schmidt 1992). Thus, poverty is very much central to their stories in *Desperate*. Characters that leave rural poverty in the hope of leading better lives end up trading rural poverty for urban poverty. In many respects, urban poverty is worse as they have to contend with fixed monthly charges for rent and transport. They also have to run daily living expenses.

Poverty dehumanises individuals, who, in the end, fail to pause and reflect on their actions. Furthermore, poverty caused by the death of the bread winner in a family forces young girls to enter the sex industry when they are left to head the household. The working class operates a 'hand to mouth' system that leaves no space for savings. As a result, the death of the worker (in most cases the father), threatens the viability of the family. Poverty makes it difficult for families to save if they have many relatives to take care of. There is need to realise that poverty is both real at the individual as well as the structural/national levels. Unless this is tackled with determination, more women will become vulnerable to HIV and AIDS (Mlambo 2008). Poverty

also prevents families from ensuring that all their children attain quality education. Although the discrimination against the girl child should be challenged, there is need to appreciate that most families are forced to make hard choices due to resource limitations. If they had adequate resources, they would send both girl and boy children to school. However, in most cases where there is poverty they end up favouring the boy child, mainly because of patriarchal socialisation. In many cases, both boy and girl children do not access education at all due to poverty. As a result, some women resort to selling sex in order to secure their children's education (Akpan 2007).

3.3.2 Unsafe Cultural Practices: Condemning Women to HIV and AIDS

The rapid spread of HIV and AIDS in Africa has also been attributed to the existence of detrimental cultural practices. These include inheritance, widow cleansing, (where the widow must have sex with a man in order to liberate her from the spirit of her deceased husband), hospitality sex, pledging of girls to placate avenging spirits and others as McFadden writes:

> Throughout the history of patriarchy, the marriage and family institutions, through ritual and ceremony, have provided the socio-cultural guise within which women have been exchanged between men for purposes of sexual and labour services. The existence of forced marriages, arranged marriages, child marriages, and the like, which can be found in virtually all African societies, attest to this system of sexual slavery. (McFadden 1992: 189-190).

Unsafe cultural practices such as child pledging increase women's vulnerability to HIV. In order to escape such arranged marriages, young girls often run away from their home. When their new space fails to offer them better options, they end up selling sex in order to survive. By giving space to a story on child pledging, Phiri utilises her creativity to demand that society reviews such risky cultural practices. The Egyptian feminist writer and critic, Saadawi asks:

> Can I have the passion and knowledge required to change the powerful oppressive system of family and government without being creative? What do we mean by creativity? Can we be creative if we obey others or follow the tradition of our ancestors? Can we be

creative if we submit to the rules forced upon us under different names: father, God, husband, family, nation, security, stability, protection, peace, democracy, family planning, development, human rights, modernism, or postmodernism? (Saadawi 2007: 172).

It is vital to respond to damaging cultural practices in order to arrest the spread of HIV and AIDS. Writing about the status of widows in Nigeria, Damap says:

> In most traditions, relatives make every effort to clear the house of every valuable as soon as the husband dies. The widow is left with the children's clothes and a few pots and pans. Bank books are taken away without any consultation with the widow. All this is done under the guise that 'This is our custom; this is the way things were done in the olden days and this is how they must continue'. (2007: 32).

Many widows in Zimbabwe would identify with Damap's description of the experiences of widows in Nigeria. This has forced some widows to engage in sex work or provide transactional sex in order to raise their children. They do so because their status as widows is a disempowered one. This increases their vulnerability to HIV and AIDS.

3.3.3 Gender Inequality and Women's Vulnerability to HIV and AIDS

Patriarchy invests men with power and authority. This leaves women reeling under patriarchal control. The system favours men and disadvantages women. Gender inequality increases the spread of HIV as it forces women to enter into sexual relationships where the power is with men. Women then find it difficult to negotiate safer sex. However, gender inequality does not expose women only to HIV. Men too are rendered vulnerable due to the power that they have. When power is used irresponsibly, it threatens the interests of its owner. When men clients refuse to use condoms because they have financial power, women sex workers in many instances have no choice but to concede to unprotected sex because they need the money. The narrator in Phiri's *Highway Queen* (2010) brings out the challenges that sex workers who are HIV positive face:

I still had problems to convince customers to use condoms. I felt guilty of spreading the AIDS virus but there was no way I would have told men that I was HIV positive. The least I did was to offer them condoms, which they refused (99).

Gender relations are portrayed as highly tilted against women. Women are forced to engage in selling sex in order to make ends meet. Men abuse their positions of authority to demand sex from women. Virtually every man in a position of power expects sexual favours from desperate women. This ranges from supervisors at night clubs, security guards who provide shelter, and police officers. The fact that women are operating from positions of vulnerability enables these men to access sex from the women. This exposes both women and men to HIV, particularly when men insist on not using protection.

3.3.4 Poor Governance and Women's Susceptibility to HIV and AIDS

Poor governance and lack of support systems such as Social Welfare impact negatively on those who are marginalised in society. A system's inefficiency causes women to resort to sex work. Male-authored and male-centric politico-economic systems that are insensitive to women increase women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. The disregard for the struggles of citizens enables very cruel processes such as Zimbabwe's 'Operation Murambatsvina' to take place (Vambe 2008). 'Operation Murambatsvina' in 2005 saw many houses in urban areas destroyed and thousands of informal traders lost their livelihoods overnight. How the government prioritises 'observing the rule of law' ahead of protecting women's lives is disturbing. Instead of finding ways of supporting women in the informal sector, the system invests in frustrating them. When women are deprived of opportunities to sell various commodities, some are left with no option but to sell themselves.

The poor quality of the governance system is clearly demonstrated in Phiri's *Highway Queen* (2010). The informal settlement of Hope Fountain is destroyed because the settlement is 'illegal.' Even the cemetery is deemed against the law, though residents have no choice but to deposit their dead therein. In the process, the lives of people living with HIV are endangered. It is this brutality and criminalization of poverty that force some women to sell sex , as Mrs. Mumba does in Phiri's *Highway Queen*. When the local currency is worthless, Mrs. Mumba sells herself on

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the highway and in South Africa to access the 'magical' Rand. In *Highway Queen*, the message seems to be that unless the governance system is transformed, women's struggle against HIV and AIDS will be futile. *Desperate* brings out the dynamic combination of poverty and poor governance as factors that promote women's powerlessness, and a condition that promotes the rapid spread of HIV and AIDS.

3.4 *Desperate*: The Stories

The stories in *Desperate* are harrowing but realistic and plain. They deal with conformist perceptions that often project sex workers as a nuisance or a threat to public morality. However, there is need to appraise the structural injustices that force women into the industry. The six stories in the collection are presented without any commentary, forcing the readers to draw their own conclusions regarding women's participation in the sex industry. Phiri depicts the different ways in which women suffer, and how some of them eventually resort to sex work. The stories have titles that lead the reader to become more inquisitive. The first story tells the life of Chido, and is entitled, 'Teenage Bread Winner.' The second story tells the experiences of Susan and has the title, 'For My Children's Sake.' Dorothy's story is entitled, 'Accused,' while Sihle's story is entitled, the 'Child Bride.' Rachel asks, 'Why Me?'. The last story is titled 'Nhamo, The Black and White Girl'. These titles are stimulating and they challenge the trend of presenting women engaged in sex work as 'sexually loose and dangerous'(Chitauro *et al* 1994). The titles directly evoke a sense of sympathy, or at least prevent one from passing ready judgment against women who sell sex. In her renowned study, *Illness as Metaphor* (1978), Sontag challenges society to desist from condescending attitudes when referring to illness. In the same manner, society ought to be sensitive to the plight of women who engage in sex work.

3.4.1 A Teenage Girl Raising a Family: The Story of Chido

In this story, Chido is orphaned at the age of fifteen and is left to take care of her siblings who are aged twelve, ten and six. She has no source of income to look after herself and three siblings. Chido is left with no option but to resort to sex work:

> I started selling sex in the early seventies when both my parents died within a year of each other, leaving me, then fifteen years old, with my two young sisters, Kate and

Chipo, and a young brother, Roger, who were twelve, ten and six years old, respectively. (2).

This direct and striking statement from Chido opens the book and introduces the reader to her ordeal. She indicates that although she had passed her Grade Seven very well, the extended family could not support her quest for further education. Poverty and the desire to send her siblings to school forced her to sell her body. Chido is inducted into the sex industry by Sisi Rhona. Her first customer was a soft-spoken white man of about forty years. When he realises that she is a virgin, he is angry and orders her out of the car. According to Chido, 'I was very disappointed and cursed myself for being a virgin' (3). This is heightened when Rose says, 'Oh! Shit! What do you think you are doing? You are a virgin! Do you think men are kind? They will tear you to pieces'. (4).

To start with, Chido has upheld traditional cultural and Christian expectations surrounding womanhood. She has all along managed to control her body and preserve her virginity. This achievement is however ironic because it plays into sexist cultural values. Virginity is exactly what patriarchy wants to violate, but for a different reason – commodification of the female body. Chido's control of her body is threatened because it is used to benefit patriarchy, and not herself. This shows the paradoxical nature of the whole discourse that insists on maintaining the purity of women's bodies. The woman's virginity benefits patriarchy that can control female sexuality. Wealth for men is accessed through the commodification of female bodies (Schmidt 1992).

Patriarchy constructs sexually active women as dangerous. Chido would have been a danger to patriarchy if she had not preserved her virginity. It would have meant reduced wealth for patriarchy. Men cherish the benefit (bride wealth) that derives from her chastity, not Chido. Chido's virginity is not valued in the brutal urban setting. It becomes a stumbling block to her survival. It is clear that the white man is seeking experienced sex workers and considers Chido as incapable of living up to his expectations. That he is a white man seeking sexual satisfaction from a young black woman exposes the hypocrisy of the white colonial state. The white colonial state presented white men as virtuous and sought to exclude black women from urban spaces.

Alfonso and Antonio are two other white men who utilise Chido's services (5). Antonio uses her and is racist in his address: 'Stay where you are! Don't come to the front. You are filthy!'(6). It is this lack of respect for women's human rights that fuels the spread and exacerbates the impact of the disease (Chinouya and O'Keefe 2006). Women are there to service men's needs. Hence, they are used and discarded. White men defy the colonial legislation prohibiting sexual relationships between whites and blacks. Schmidt (1992) writes that in a colonial context a white man who raped a black woman could only be asked to pay a fine, whereas a black man who raped a white woman would be hanged. Ironically, a black man who raped a black woman could only be sent to jail, all revealing that whether sex was performed with white men or black men, the main loser was the black woman.

Alfonso and Antonio represent white masculinity's abuse of black women's sexuality for their own gratification. Although Alfonso appears sensitive, he remains exploitative; 'But he was stingy, he paid me only $30 for my night's work' (5). As Pape (1990) has shown, the colonial state's preoccupation with the 'black peril', that is, cases of alleged sexual violence by black men against white women, was largely mistaken. What was more prevalent, he argues, was 'white peril' that is, sexual abuse of black women by white men. Chido discloses this when she describes her relationship with Alfonso:

> We went out twice per month and spent nighys at his house in the suburbs. I could not tell which suburb because I always went there at night. The man was breaking the law by taking me to his house. Mixed relationships were illegal, if found out, he would be arrested. (5).

The above revelation contradicts white mythology that blacks are filthy. Although Antonio pays $200 to Chido, he is abusive and has bought into the myth of white superiority. Fortunately, Chido begins to master the trade and her clients begin to pay in advance so that she is compensated adequately for her work. On busy days she would 'go through as many as six men' (5). She adjusts to the demanding industry, making a serious effort to suppress her feelings of disgust, and concentrate on the task at hand: to raise enough money to see her siblings through school.

It is clear that poor governance and inadequate support structures have an adverse effect on those who are less privileged in society. A system's ineffectiveness drives women into sex work. Male-governed political and economic structures that are unfeeling towards women add to women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. The lack of meaningful support mechanisms allows nasty processes to take place. In the story of Chido, it is evident that the oppressive colonial context leaves her vulnerable when society fails to give her support when she needs it most. At first, there is no social security for her and her siblings. This is clearly brought out in the following statement: 'My sisters and brother were now at secondary school. The Social Welfare was finally helping with school fees. This was too late for me. I had already sold my body many times to pay the fees' (7). Help for Chido and her siblings comes too late, causing a hopeless situation. Hence, Chido takes desperate measures and engages in sex work for survival.

Desperate demonstrates the powerful permutation of poverty and poor governance as factors that advance women's subjection and the spread of HIV and AIDS. Poverty and the need to send her siblings to school force Chido to resort to sex work. Poverty increases vulnerability to HIV. It prevents Chido from attaining quality education. The theme of poverty is quite central to the stories in *Desperate*. Most female characters in *Desperate* are dehumanised by poverty as it forces them into the sex industry when they are left with no options. It is poverty that sends Chido into prostitution.

The weight of Chido's story in relation to HIV and AIDS can be seen in her comments on sexually transmitted infections. She says that, 'Being a sex-worker means exposure to all sorts of sexually transmitted infections (7). Although Chido is careful to seek medical attention, she is accused of passing on the infection to her clients. This is confirmed by McFadden when she states that:

> In Africa, STDs will carry the double stigma-of being sexually related as well as being believed to be 'a woman's disease'. Numerous examples across the continent attest to the widespread belief that women are inherently sexually unclean and that therefore sexually transmitted diseases are caused by women. Even men with high educational standards do

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articulate such erroneous myths. The sex-worker is the most obvious scapegoat of such superstitions. (McFadden 1992: 159 -160).

Such sexist attitudes are damaging to women's health. Women end up not seeking medical help because they dread being disgraced. These are the negative socio-cultural and psychological effects of sexually transmitted infections on the health of both women and men. Chido endures violence at the hands of some of her clients who accuse her of infecting them.

Later on, Chido insists on using protective devices ('durex'), but some refuse. She could not always persuade men to use protection and would give in because of the need to get the money. However, the new reality of AIDS becomes a menace. Chido reflects, "Aids is wiping out a lot of people: the innocent, the promiscuous, the young and even the naughty oldies have not been spared" (Phiri 2002: 10). Because of poverty, Chido sacrifices her youthful life in order to educate her sisters and brother. The price she has had to pay is quite high. Her health status has been compromised as she has had an operation to have her appendix removed. Emotionally, she is scarred for the rest of her life. Chido admires married women. However, she is not aware that the marriage institution does not always come with joy, as noted by (Oyewumi 1997). Oyewumi (1997) argues that marriage and motherhood, the standards for many African women, are no longer places of safety that they are alleged to be in a patriarchal society. This argument is reiterated by Ngcobo (2007) who affirms that:

> African motherhood is one experience that is shrouded in layers of assumptions. At a distance these appear like billowing soft, pink clouds of a joyous, profound and an exciting experience... that literature will present impressions of motherhood that are very revealing and are alive with a different reality. (Ngcobo 2007: 533).

The above insights show the contradictions within the marriage institution. In marriage all is not joy and happiness for some women. If there is joy at all, it is the one defined by men. Chido's story leaves one wondering as to how many women share Chido's experiences. Some have been made vulnerable to HIV and AIDS as they try to support their siblings, particularly with the exceptional increase in the number of orphans and child-headed households.

Women activists in Africa have identified a number of dangerous cultural practices that expose women and girls to HIV. These include the pledging of young girls (*kuzvarira* in Shona), inheritance (*kugara nhaka*), and others (Schimdt 1992). African men who defend African culture argue that criticising these cultural practices is tantamount to dancing to the tune of a Western agenda that seeks to demonise African culture. However, African womanists argue that there is need to adopt a critical attitude towards African cultures. What is life-giving in African cultures must be celebrated. What is negative ought to be rejected and removed in order to ensure that the lives of women in particular are protected. The feminist programme has sought to promote "the production of knowledge that would empower women in the struggle for liberation in the context of social transformation" (Pereira 2004: 2). The next story deals with the notion of inheritance and how it is abused by patriarchy, leaving women and children very vulnerable to HIV and AIDS as well as to physical violence from men.

3.4.2 Enduring Oppressive 'Cultural' Practices: Susan's Struggle

The second story in *Desperate* focuses on Susan who struggles to raise her family after her husband's family grabs their property when her husband dies. The story is an exploration of cultural practices that leave women vulnerable. In the name of 'upholding African culture,' the family of Susan's late husband, Enock and others, engage in a shameful act of taking what they did not work for. They do not take long to jump for the property that was owned by the deceased and his family. Inheritance and customary law are being used to appropriate others' property. Phiri gives us a scenario that is fraught with images of dispossession. According to Susan:

> When I got back to town, I was shocked to find that Luke had broken into our house and was occupying one of the bedrooms. We had only two bedrooms. Uncle Joe had taken a three-plate stove; we had nothing to use for cooking. We had to borrow a paraffin stove from Mrs. Nkomo. Auntie Joyce had taken with her the bundles of furnishings she had put outside the house when her brother had just died. (13).

This theme is also found in the film *Neria*, written by the award winning writer Tsitsi Dangarembga (1993), and brought alive in song by the Zimbabwean musical maestro, Oliver

Mtukudzi, which depicts the challenges that widows in Zimbabwe face. Many men abuse patriarchal authority and engage in property-grabbing. This leaves widows and their children struggling for survival. In Phiri's story, when Susan questions a life-denying decision, she is told, 'Shut up, woman! Do as you are told!'(12).

In the Susan's story, Uncle Joe and Luke represent patriarchy that abuses customary laws to take over people's property. They also co-opt other women such as Auntie Joyce to work against Susan. Patriarchy's co-option of women comes out clearly with Auntie Joyce's active participation in plundering the deceased's family property. Whereas traditionally Auntie Joyce would have represented her brother's lineage in family deliberations, in the capitalist society she has been co-opted to seize the deceased's property, without any consideration for the welfare of the surviving spouse, Susan and children. This story demonstrates that it is not only men who are a danger to women; women who have either been co-opted by patriarchal structures or who act out of their own selfness pose a threat to women such as Susan. Put differently, this story is one in which the author expands the notion of gender revealing that there are women who act as men and that the consequence of the actions are negative to other women.

Luke has no respect at all for Susan, his sister-in-law. Whenever he addresses her, she is a nameless 'woman' who must submit to patriarchal authority at all times. However, it is refreshing to note that in Dangarembga's *Neria* (1993), Chitsike's *Magora Panyama* (1999) and Phiri's *Desperate* (2002), all the widows finally recover their property. While it is true that the issue of inheritance is a problem in Zimbabwe, there has been an effort to empower women through legislation. However, this has not met with maximum success due to cultural expectations. Amadiume (1987), writing in a Nigerian context, makes reference to society's effort to empower women in order to stop the extension of patriarchy. She argues that women can be allowed to assume roles meant for males, hence, the title of her book that paradoxically ring of 'male daughters, female husbands'.

In Susan's story, uncle Joe and Luke decide that Susan has to take the children to the village to start a new and unfamiliar life. Due to insensitive cultural practices that throw her out of her house, Susan has to sell sex in order to augment what she earns as a maid, and be able to send

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her children to school. Susan offers her services to caretakers and cooks, earning at least two hundred dollars per month (21). However, she soon learns the dangers in the industry when one day she is raped by a gardener who threw five dollars at her. At one party, she has Mr. Dhudhuza, a retired cook, paying her a hundred dollars for quick services as he is afraid that his wife would discover them. For Susan, sex is entirely a business engagement:

> During the time John was dancing, I had disappeared into the wooden hut three times. I made one hundred and fifty dollars per customer. I got my money in advance and the guys were really useless. They were so drunk and that made my work easier. I did not have to work hard like with Mr. Dhudhuza. (21).

Susan clearly demonstrates how women have power to manipulate men. Ultimately women can have the power to decide whether or not a man enjoys the sex act. It is a small act of resistance that must be celebrated. If a woman withholds joy, a man's ego is deflated. Susan becomes a good example of women who can recreate themselves and emerge with advantages over the men they interact with. Motsemme acknowledges the significance of human agency displayed by women who engage in sex work for survival when she comments:

> In addition, when we consider the broader social processes of economic marginalisation, political apathy, material lack and employment racism within which their subjectivities are being produced, we are left with celebrating what at best can be termed a flawed agency. (2007: 84).

When these women sell sex they are creatively strategizing around patriarchy. Such acts show the multi-layers of gender and danger, where positive danger creates new values, and destructive dangers pull women back. The hazards of Susan's occupation include facing violence from the wives of her clients and the ever present danger of contracting sexually transmitted infections, HIV included. That she does not enjoy selling sex can be seen in how she cries and wishes to have a miracle that would take her out of the industry. Even getting her house back does not give her a break as she has to find school fees for her children. Her rhetorical question to Abel, the

caretaker who protects her and provides her with the space to facilitate her activities, is significant: 'Do you think I enjoy it?'(30).

Susan is forced into selling sex by the greed of her husband's family. As with many widows in different African contexts, she is forced to survive because her husband's family contends that she is an 'outsider,' *mutorwa* in Shona. "She will always be an outsider among his people, always the first suspect when things go wrong" (Ngcobo 2007: 535). Although she is a 'danger' in that her spirit is believed to be highly effective if she dies angry, the demands of a cash economy do not let the deceased Enock's extended family reflect on the implications of their actions. Instead, they come across as very selfish and inconsiderate individuals who are willing to sacrifice a widow and her children. If she had a choice, Susan would not be participating in the sex industry. She is a reserved woman who is a victim of circumstances.

The control of the economy by the white minority emerges as a major issue in both Susan's story as well as Chido's. The economy favours the white minority and has relegated the black majority to doing menial jobs for survival. If black men have to become gardeners and cooks, the fate of black women is even worse. Women such as Susan are forced to sell sex if they are to take care of themselves and send their children to school. By doing so, these women dispense of men and show that they can take control of space that men would otherwise want to degrade (Motsemme 2007). Having looked at the plight of women who are widowed and thrown into susceptible environments because of harmful cultural values, Phiri extends her concerns in *Desperate* in the next story that examines socio-cultural factors that expose women to HIV and AIDS.

3.4.3 Dorothy and the Quest for Survival

Dorothy's story is of a woman's struggle against cultural prejudice. When she fights the woman who had taken her husband, she is labelled a witch and is expelled from the village. She undertakes a journey to nowhere. She seeks shelter in an Anglican church. Although the church does well to mobilize some money for her, it ultimately lets her down. This is in sharp contrast to the church's support that is clear in Rachel's story. In Dorothy's case, Reverend Goto fails to provide protection and support. He says, "We are sorry, Mrs. Gumbo. You have to leave and find

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a safe place, away from this village. Some villagers have threatened to burn the church together with you" (33).

The notions of danger associated with witches, and those possessed as spirit mediums are that they can transgress and see beyond what patriarchy cannot control. Witchcraft has negative purposes (Ranger 1985). However, the same witchcraft that is portrayed as negative can also be positive. The consequences of being labeled a witch are disastrous because once one is marked as dangerous. This leads to *othering,* and, in the case of Dorothy, to social ostracism and cultural marginality. This is confirmed by Ngcobo (2007) who says:

> The accusation involving witchcraft is a common ploy designed to cause the mother's social demotion. It will often be used against a powerful woman when the real aim is to discredit her socially or to even have her physically removed from her in-laws and sent back to her people, even after many years. (Ngcobo, 2007: 537).

Dorothy is chased away from the village. There are images of death when she passes through the cemetery. She recreates herself as a prostitute. Dorothy is excluded from the community of the living and descends into the community of the dead (cemetery). She is thrown out and alienated by society. The church further rejects her and she goes to self destructive acts of prostitution. Prostitution is a dead occupation. It is linked to death, because it dehumanises the spirit. Death is pursuing Dorothy as suggested by the image of the cemetery. She opts for another form of death, which is prostitution. One dies in other areas such as conscience. When the church rejects her, it fails to be a support system. This reveals the hypocrisy of the society. Her journey is revealed in images that suggest that she is doomed to die. Prostitution kills her spiritually.

For example the journey away from the church towards "the cemetery" (33) is a sad moment. The journey to sex work starts with one of the most helpful of social institutions, the church, letting a woman down. In Dorothy's case, the church ceases to be a caring institution. Although the church has given Dorothy some money to relieve her plight, ultimately she has to rely on selling sex in order to survive. Phiri suggests that Dorothy resorts to sex work not out of choice. Circumstances force her to employ unconventional ways in order to survive. This form of agency

is flawed and blemished (Motsemme 2007) because it further degrades Dorothy's spirit. Before long, Dorothy is working as a cleaner at Night Grove. Mr. Zulu, her boss, does not take long to rape her. Indeed, as I shall comment later on, rape is pronounced in the narratives of women who sell sex. Actually, it matters little that a woman looks after herself very well in the domain of exercising restraint in sexual issues. One day, a man will come along and impose himself on her. McFadden has even insightfully commented that, "The sex act is invariably posed as empowering to the male and degrading to the woman, and positions in the sexual act reinforce male power over the female" (McFadden 1992: 179). Mr. Zulu uses the power granted to him by patriarchy to relieve his sexual frustrations on Dorothy.

Dorothy does not report Mr. Zulu to the police for having raped her. While her choices could have been limited, she could have left this place and seek employment elsewhere. This situation is similar to Wariinga's in Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* (1982) who refuses her boss' advances and loses her job. When she tells her boyfriend about the incident, she is also rejected, but moves on with her life. Dorothy is however caught in between. She has nowhere to go. Perhaps she realises that even the police is a patriarchal institution whose mode of 'policing' is not only national but also cultural, and will likely dismiss her case. Dorothy, thus, continues to work at Night Grove. It is as if society has signed a death sentence for girls and women such as Dorothy. In an effort to come to terms with her systematic dehumanisation, Dorothy resorts to smoking *mbanje* (marijuana). It gives her momentary escape but when its effects wear off, she has to face her situation. Clients such as Ray will use her as a sex object. In effect, Dorothy uses the term 'a real beast' (38) to describe him. She also indicates that young men, including secondary school students, were willing to pay for sex. From her account, men who occupy different social locations utilize the services of sex workers. Society's hypocrisy comes out clearly when only the women who sell sex are the ones who are demonized. Their male clients do not feature in society's condemnation.

Dorothy forms a sound friendship with Anna, who travels to the village to find out how her children are doing. This is another feature that runs through the stories in *Desperate*. In their poverty and deprivation, women form strong bonds of friendship. This makes one appreciate Flora Nwapa's observation that a "woman-centred world concentrate[s] on feelings of sisterhood between women who both demonstrate their strengths and bewail social impotence", (Wisker

2000: 134). There is admirable solidarity among women as they seek to survive, as expressed by Ogundipe-Leslie:

> Women may differ about strategies and methods, but they do not differ on basic assumptions: that women are oppressed as women and they are oppressed as the majority members of subordinate classes which are also in the majority. (Ogundipe-Leslie 2007: 546)

Because society has made it too difficult for women to thrive, these women have realized that they need each other. Patriarchy has no interest in seeing solidarity among women because it fears that this can engender subversion instead of submission. For example, Mr. Zulu behaves in typical patriarchal fashion when he suggests that Dorothy becomes his fourth wife if she wants a better life. The contrast between Anna, the true friend, and Mr. Zulu the selfish man is striking. It would seem as if when men interact with women, they expect to be granted sexual favours in return. Dorothy asks Mr. Zulu to help her find land in his village so that she can transfer her children. In addition, he agrees to let Dorothy and Anna run the eating-house. Her story has a happy ending, though, with a reunion with her children and financial security through her running of the eating house. Financial security is a form of creative danger that is quite encouraging. Through her operation of the eating house, Dorothy becomes self-reliant and can take charge of her life. This innovative danger should be celebrated because it creates new affirmative meanings of danger that empower society's underdogs. Nonetheless, it is clear that the scars from sex work will remain with Dorothy for the rest of her life. For her, sex work was the price she had to pay in order to survive. Even as she engages in sex work, the welfare of her children back in the village remains uppermost in her mind.

While Chido and Susan in the stories discussed above are portrayed as victims in patriarchal settings, Dorothy's story offers a more liberating point of view. It suggests that it is possible for women who sell sex to abandon the profession when they find alternative survival strategies. She finally redefines the notion of danger to defeat social norms that would like to limit what women can do. Phiri is aware of the paradoxical nature of women and men's identities. Mr. Zulu has a contradictory nature when he helps Dorothy in the end. Dorothy finally leaves the sex trade and unites with her children. Phiri's portrayal of women and men is, however, limited in Dorothy's

story. Phiri seems to suggest that women's salvation can only come with the intervention of men. Herein lies the significance of Africana womanism. Both sexes have to find ways of cooperation for a better life. Susan and Dorothy are women who are forced by patriarchy and a brutal economic system to adopt selling sex in order to survive. Their stories focus on the challenges that black women in Zimbabwe face. The institution of marriage does not bring any joy to them. Ironically, many girls are eager to get married, but often meet disillusionment. Ngcobo (2007) substantiates this view by articulating that:

> The major weakness in this formidable role of motherhood is that women can only exercise it from outside, for they remain marginalised at their new husband's homes. At her in-laws she does not move in to attain independence or find her place of centrality, instead, she is reduced to a permanent state of dependence and estrangement. (Ngcobo 2007: 534).

Consequently, one is compelled to view marriage as a risk, culturally, since the woman will never really belong to where she is married or where she is born into. The next story probes damaging cultural values that violate girls and women's right to choose partners.

3.4 .4 The Girl Child in a Harsh World: Sihle's Experience

Sihle's story focuses on the pledging of a girl due to poverty. As she puts it across herself, she was given away to a polygamist when she was six years old (54). Her family was poor and they saw Sihle as a potential solution to their survival needs. Sihle comes up with a plan when she becomes aware of her predicament. She resolves to avoid marrying the rich polygamist by running away from home. With the assistance of Auntie Mary, she runs away from home and proceeds to Chiko Mine. At Chiko Mine she stays with Mr. And Mrs. Siziba who treat her like their own daughter. She stays there for fifteen months. Tragically, Mr. Siziba dies in an underground explosion at the mine. Mrs. Siziba has to retreat to the village, leaving Sihle in a desperate situation. Sihle is a victim in a system that is dominated and controlled by men. According to McFadden:

In the analysis of sexual relationships between women and men, whether these are mutually acceptable, abusive (rape, incest, assault) or experienced within the context of commodity exchange, male dominance invariably places the woman in a victimised position. A woman who is battered by a man she cannot leave, is a victim of male abuse; a child who is sexually abused by an older male relative is a victim of that situation which she/he does not control and often cannot escape from; a sex worker who is forced into selling her/his body through poverty, racism and gendered inequality, is a victim of that situation of commoditised sexuality. (1992: 164).

Sihle is caught up within the context of exchanging commodities. She tries to escape from her predicament with limited success. Sihle moves to Mrs. Joko's place and survives by selling vegetables. However, the mine police harass vendors (59). This is a telling statement. In the name of 'preserving law and order', society condemns many women and men to lives of sex work and robbery. Many informal sector traders in Zimbabwe's urban areas have to constantly be on the lookout for municipal police. The postcolonial state, like the colonial state, continues to uphold notions of 'standards' that do not take into account the struggles of citizens. With her source of livelihood having been undermined, Sihle has no choice but to approach Mrs. Joko and work as a waitress. Soon, she is fully engaged in sex work. Mr. Sono, a manager at the mine, is her first client. He deflowers her in no time and rewards her with an additional twenty-five dollars for being a virgin (63), as if to say Sihle's virginity can be priced and is worth twenty-five dollars! This is different from Chido's story where her white client is angered by Chido's virginity. To blur the pain induced by her new trade, Sihle resorts to taking brandy and coke. This reminds the reader of the use of *mbanje* (marijuana) in Dorothy's story.

Men's self-understanding as sexual predators runs through the stories in *Desperate*. Men reckon they are 'desperate' for sex and utilize the services of sex workers. However, in most narratives, the sexual encounters are brief, "In ten minutes, it was over. He left fifty dollars on the pillow. He was really in a hurry"(64). Men who occupy different social ranks are shown as clients of sex workers. These include soldiers, teachers, gardeners, supervisors, students and others. Most men, especially the soldier who preferred the standing position and could have three women in one night (65), succumb to the social construction of men as a species with an insatiable sexual

appetite. The soldier's reminds one of Duri in Phiri's *Highway Queen* (2010) who wanted ten minutes with Mrs. Mumba. This is Mrs. Mumba's first experience with sexual exploitation. The men in the literary works under dioscussion consider women as sex objects. In Phiri's *Desperate*, Joel grabs Sihle 'like a bag of maize' and 'behaved like a barbarian, a real animal' (67). In almost all the descriptions of sex, the men finish the act very quickly, without any consideration for their partners. Presumably, they would have paid to get instant satisfaction and, hence, do not need to be sensitive to their partners' other needs.

Sex workers are real human beings, with feelings and emotions. This reality is often disregarded by society's ready condemnation and dehumanisation of women who are active in this industry. Sihle falls in love with Fernando. The dynamics within their relationship are enlightening, as revealed by the following dialogue between Sihle and Fernando:

> I didn't charge him for the good time. I really liked him and he liked me.
> "Would you want to marry one day and have children?", asked Fernando.
> "If I get a man I really love," I would try it,' I told him.
> "Try me", he challenged me.
> "Are you serious?" I asked.
> "I am serious. Think about it, and take your time. I still have to think where I can
>   run away to if I marry you. Joe would kill me if he hears that I want to marry you",
>   said Fernando.
> "Why would you want to marry a sex worker in the first place?" I asked him.
> "I can see that deep down you are a nice girl who could make a good wife and
>   a mother". (70).

This dialogue demonstrates the boldness of both characters that defy social norms, showing how roles can be subverted and reshaped for the social good. Sihle is not dead metaphorically. She still has a real loving heart. She is marginalised in society. When she meets Fernando, who is also marginalised as a foreigner, the two come together in mutual love. Sihle meets Uncle Edson and Auntie Emma, Fernando's relatives and they settle in a deserted town. They start a family, with Sihle giving birth to a baby girl. Soon, she is reunited with her family and discovers that the

herbalist she would have married had since died. Her story ends on a folkloric positive note, with her celebrating her new family. Sihle's story ends on a folkloric positive note, with her celebrating her new family, just like Dorothy who ends up reuniting with her family and abandoning sex work. This is the gist of womanism as expounded by Walker (1983). The womanist concept emphasises the centrality of family, with women and men complementing each other in roles they play in society. The next story focuses on rape as a condition that violates women's rights to sexuality, and dehumanises its victims.

3.4.5 Rachel: Raped and Forced into the Hostile World

In this story, it is rape that drives Rachel into sex work. She is raped by two men at seventeen while coming from school. Like the other women whose stories we have encountered, she was a virgin when this terrible, life-changing incident happened to her. She experiences nightmares and has to contend with stigma. She overhears boys and men saying, 'She is now like a prostitute. Two men! Can you imagine?'(80). Fear of going through a 'second rape' during the trial of one of the rapists forces her to flee to Harare. Rachel soon turns to sex work after she quit working as a domestic worker. Rape is a violent act that forces Rachel into the hostile world. Commenting on the subject of violence on women, Wood and Jewkes explain that:

> Violence lay on a continuum which included such diverse acts as slapping, 'persuading' a woman to have sex, threatening to beat, hitting with sticks and other objects, pushing, assaulting with fists, violent rape, stabbing with a knife, and public humiliation. Much of the violence was of a less severe kind, such as slapping and issuing threats. Nevertheless, many young women described having been visibly injured on various parts of their body at some point in their sexual histories. (Wood and Jewkes 2001: 319).

The passage above captures the struggle that many women in Southern Africa face. Sexual violence and rape are daily realities. To a large extent, rape seems to have been normalized. Women are constantly on the lookout for attackers in a world assumed to be free. Despite the region having witnessed liberation struggles, women remain imprisoned. The stories of rape in *Desperate* suggest that every woman is a possible rape victim. This makes her vulnerable and calls for constant vigilance on every woman's part. The male leaders in the political arena are

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slow to react and in many instances have been themselves culpable. After being raped, Rachel chooses to stay with this dehumanization. She too, like Dorothy, does not report to the police. Survivors of rape are in many cases stigmatized. The era of HIV has worsened the situation. There is a higher likelihood of HIV transmission in the case of rape. Uncle Jim suggests that Rachel takes up sex work to service men in the neighbourhood. Rachel has no other ways of surviving in this restricted context. Her first client is a man of about fifty who is drunk and is done in no time. However, some young men resort to concoctions in order to get their money's worth (84). It is Uncle Jim who accompanies Rachel on her first visit to Moonlight Hotel.

Rachel takes one client after another, and finishes the task in five or ten minutes. Her humanity comes through when she buys herself some new clothes and 'even a cap for Uncle Jim' (87). Phiri demonstrates that sex workers are not machines that simply meet the sexual needs of men. They are human beings with feelings and emotions like any other. This is reinforced when Rachel retreats to her rural home and reunites with her family. In fact, it can be argued that the refusal by most women to be conquered spiritually during the sex act is in itself a reversal of roles. It is men who tire easily. And when they do, they view women as sex maniacs, thereby imposing an aggressive stereotype to a woman they have failed to sexual tame, domesticate, control or capitulate. Women are then viewed as a danger women they decide how the men should enjoy the sex act. Women can pretend to enjoy, can withhold joy and can manipulate men's ego in order to get as much (money) from men as is possible. Although Motsemme (2007) argues that this is flawed agency, it is one in which women have control over, even when that control can, in other situations, prove costly when women contract HIV and AIDS.

In the story, when Rachel returns to town, she discovers that she is pregnant. This causes her a lot of anguish as she does not have one man whom she can hold responsible for the pregnancy. The dangers of sex work are confirmed when she is also diagnosed as having a sexually transmitted infection. To worsen her situation, the medical practitioners insist that she must bring her husband for treatment (93). However, her life changes when she joins an Apostolic Church. Whereas the church has limited effectiveness in Dorothy's case, it comes to Rachel's rescue. The church elders are sympathetic to her version of events and she is given shelter at the church's mission station that is located outside the city. The church members were friendly and

welcoming (98). After staying with the pastor and his family for two weeks, she moves to the hostel for unmarried women.

Rachel gives birth to boy twins, who are named John and James. Her story ends positively, with her working at the mission station and welcoming her Grandmother and Mother, who are overjoyed at seeing the boys (100). It is significant that it is fellow women who are available to support Rachel. Though some men such as the pastor offer assistance, they are emotionally distant. The pastor did not hug or kiss members, as he only shook hands (100). It is women who provide solidarity with Rachel in her hour of need. Positive human agency is manifested when Rachel abandons sex work and works at the mission. This implies that she will be in a position to raise her twin sons well. This idea of self-reliance by women is in itself a threat to men, who have often enjoyed the high social standing of being bread winners. So, when women begin to win bread, men's egos are challenged. Danger is then seen operating as a metaphor for women's capacity to conform as well as to transgress. In fact, the idea that the author of *Desperate* does not show Rachel being desperate and frantic, looking for the actual father of the two boys is also meant to come across as one weapon that women could use to deflate male ego. None of Rachel's male clients can come and claim with certainty that they are the father to the boys. In other words, it is women who know their children's fathers and this knowledge can be subversive to patriarchal ideology that relies for its reproduction on the women's trust in matters of determining the paternity of children. In the next story, which happens to be the last story in the anthology, the main female character is also a rape victim. However, she is endowed with a higher level of self consciousness as compared to her predecessors. Her agency is manifested by the different options that she has as she negotiates her space in a male dominated society.

3.4.6 Nhamo: A Coloured Woman in a Challenging World

Nhamo, the coloured girl, grows up in a rural village and her formal education ends at Form Two. She drops out of school at that stage and has to contend with the death of her grandmother who had fended for the family. While Nhamo and her grandmother try to eke out a living in a difficult environment, their plight becomes desperate when there is a drought. Nhamo decides to go to town in the hope of improving their circumstances. She goes to town, works as a baby minder and finally takes up a position in a salon. She changes her hairstyle and moves in with

Sheila. As with the other girls in *Desperate*, she loses her virginity to a client as she is inducted into sex work (110).

Nhamo's story is closely connected with the struggle for Zimbabwe and its impact on women. Sexual relations across the racial divide were a major preoccupation of the colonial state. In particular, the state sought to protect the idea of racial purity and sought to punish those who had the courage to transgress its strict rules. Studies by Mandaza (1997), among others, show the obsession with preventing sexual relations between blacks and whites. However, the masculine character of the colonial state is betrayed by the extent to which white men force themselves on black women. The macho identity and celebration of militarism became key aspects of the masculinity of Rhodesian men (Parpart 2007). Nhamo's mother was raped by a white member of the Rhodesian forces when she was a sixteen year-old virgin girl (101). It had even been discussed that her pregnancy be terminated, or that the child be killed soon after birth. Nhamo's coming into the world was not met with the usual excitement, as she reports:

> So, when I was born there was no joy, no ululation as usually happened at the birth of any other child; neighbours were notified of the birth as usual but just a few came to see the baby. The few who came only did so out of curiosity. My grandmother tells me that the majority of the neighbours had wished for a stillborn. To their disappointment, I was born alive. (102).

Studies of Shona nomenclature, for example a book by Pongweni (1983)**,** have confirmed that most names are laden with meaning. What is lacking in the studies that have been undertaken to date is a critical assessment of the gendered nature of the names. Due to the patriarchal nature of Shona society, boys tend to have positive names, while girls' names speak of the shame that the parents face solely on account of having brought a girl into the world. Names such as *Tavavanhu* (We have been humanised) celebrate the arrival of a boy child, while *Sekai (*laughing stock) shows a family's regret at receiving a girl child. In the case of Nhamo (Poverty), the name captures her family's material conditions (102).

For the Shona, names are not empty labels. Names are believed to shape the character and destiny of their bearers. One can already anticipate that Nhamo will come face to face with the harsh realities of life. As it is, she is led into sex work. However, Nhamo transgresses the meaning of her name and social norms that are supposed to hold her down. This is a positive danger that undermines social expectations. The story of Nhamo has a happy ending. She does not allow her name to determine her destiny.

Rape as the fate of women features strongly in Nhamo's narrative. She verbalises it, 'I thought of my mother, she had met the same fate, rape (111). A white male soldier rapes Nhamo's mother during the liberation struggle. An anonymous black man (later identified as Joe) rapes Nhamo in an urban setting. Different generations of women have been raped in this story. It seems society has licensed men to force themselves upon women, "White men who not only attempted, but actually achieved the rape of women of any race were not sentenced to death, nor were black men who raped black women (Schmidt 1992:175). It does not matter whether the men are black or white, or whether the women are 'decent' or 'sex workers': they are there to gratify men's sexual appetite. Later on, Nhamo is again raped by a man who claimed to be an off-duty police officer (114). Here, the danger to women is coming from the very police who are supposed to fairly enforce the law across the sexes.

When she engages in sex work, Nhamo's first client is Marco, a man visiting from South America. She gets over five hundred dollars for her services. However, the realization that she is now selling sex makes her feel 'really rotten and guilty' (113). Nonetheless, she continues with her trade, and counts business executives amongst her clients. Unlike the Shona culture which "places restrictions on words and expressions which directly refer to HIV/AIDS and sex-related issues", (Kangira, Mashiri, Gambahaya 2007: 31), the language in the industry in *Desperate* is brutally open. Sheila, Nhamo's friend, says this of a client, 'The man was so brutal my pussy is sore but he paid me well' (114). This happens to be one of the characteristics of all the stories in *Desperate*: sex workers speak openly about sex. This is counter-cultural as society expects all women to be guarded when talking about sex. It is a taboo topic but sex workers have demythologized it, and tell their stories in exactly the way they experience them.

Nhamo befriends a white man, Richard Jackson. However, she continues with her trade. One gets some insights into the operations of sex workers when she indicates that she had regular customers who phoned her to arrange for meetings, as well as having lunchtime sessions called 'appetisers'. She counts a medical doctor among her clients. This confirms the fact that men from various professions and backgrounds make use of the services of sex workers. Nhamo 'worked like a machine and strictly on business terms' (117). The possibility of exiting the sex work industry is indicated when Sheila falls in love and moves out with an expatriate man. Mr. Jackson encourages Nhamo to further her education in order to wean herself from selling sex. Nhamo's mother also supports this idea. Nonetheless, Nhamo continues to sell sex as it brings her good money. Towards the end of the year, she travels home with Mr. Jackson, who is embraced by the villagers. One elder actually thinks that he is a 'nice white man, with kind eyes' (122). Upon returning to the city, Nhamo realises that she has passed her Ordinary Level examinations and she is fortunate to get a job as a trainee clerk. However, she gets viciously raped by Robert and has to be hospitalized. This violent episode persuades her to abandon selling sex (126). Her story ends with her marrying Mr. Jackson. There is a positive outlook as she has found employment, love and has quit the sex industry.

Phiri, the author of *Desperate* succeeds in her portrayal of Nhamo as exhibiting a more defined and positive form of agency that has come about through the long and treacherous road of being a forced sex worker until she realizes that sex work is not all that can define the humanism of a woman. Nhamo has more options than the rest of the characters in *Desperate*. For example, she has education, employment and has found love, unlike some of her fellow women in the other stories. Nhamo can afford to choose the kind of life she wants to lead. She does not marry Mr. Jackson as a way out of poverty. She is employed as a trainee clerk. Her agency is manifested in the different options available to her. However, Phiri's vision for women's liberation still falls short. In this story it is Jackson, the man, who is influential in Nhamo's attainment of education. This is not to suggest that all men are a danger to women; the concern here for a critical reader is that by letting Nhamo and Mr. Jackson marry, Phiri again seems to imply that women are incomplete without men. However, from a womanist point of view, there is strength in Phiri's vision. The family is central, with women and men reciprocating in the roles they play.

3.5 Women: Victims of a Harsh Environment

Consistent with her project of depicting harsh conditions that threaten women's welfare, Phiri ensures that the collection of short stories is principally about women. Nonetheless, the women do not operate in an island. They are gendered beings as they interact with men. In *Desperate,* women come up against brutal systems that favour men and endanger them. Women are constructed as needing men to survive. In fact, even the escape route that Sihle and Nhamo follow, namely marriage, implies that women need men to rescue them from their troubles. Selling sex, though dehumanizing and humiliating, is the only option open to some women. It is only a few women with education, such as Mrs. Nyoni the teacher (62), who do not need to give in to the advances of men.

Women and girls are at the mercy of patriarchy. Phiri's other book, *Destiny* (2006) looks at the plight of hermaphrodites in a patriarchal society. It questions where humanity is destined to when parents force their hermaphrodite daughters to get married against their wish. Gloria's father only comes to appreciate the importance of correcting her hermaphrodite condition when she runs away on the wedding day they had planned for her. In *Destiny*, just like in *Desperate*, men make all important decisions, while women are expected to comply. Obviously, society in these books is constituted in a way that favours men, and is against women. Due to their economic power, men are in a position of strength when negotiating for sex. As it is, many men refuse to wear condoms. This is a clear demonstration that they dictate the terms upon which sex transactions take place. With limited choices to make, desperate women have to give in to these demands as they need the money. It is McFadden who posits:

> Women find themselves in a passive situation where they are unable to protect themselves from infection, because they feel they cannot change the behaviour of their partners. They often cannot even discuss these problems with their husbands. They are afraid they themselves will be accused of promiscuity if they ask their husbands to use condoms. (McFadden 1992: 192-3).

Although women display creativity in a bid to survive, not all are able to overcome the odds that are against them. The lack of compassion in society is prominent. Oppressive structures

ultimately render women vulnerable to men's quest for pleasure. Women sex workers come across as victims of 'systems of death.' Sex for these women is not enjoyment.

However, women's powerlessness is not total. They have devised survival strategies to enable them to find space in an oppressive environment. Society expects women to be loving and tender. However, women who sell sex have erased these traits in order to thrive in their industry. They 'work like machines,' deliberately denying their clients the power to imagine that sexually, women are on top of the situation in matters of expressing emotional attachments. Sihle reports that, 'the girls popped in and out with customers, none of them spent more than fifteen minutes outside' (65). Women have learnt to beat men at their own game and have become subversive. When men think they are using women, they are being used too. These women have learnt to outwit patriarchy. It is similar to the way Lucia rebels against male authority in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988). Lucia identifies the line of weakness in patriarchy and utilizes it to achieve her goals, "while complimenting Babamukuru's power and benevolence, she manipulates him to get a job at the mission school". (Uwakweh, 1995**:** 82).

3.6 Violent Sexual Predators: The Portrayal of Men in *Desperate*

Although Phiri does not wholly focus on men, she still characterises them using womanist strategies. Womanists have questioned the portrayal of men as leaders, responsible citizens, protectors and guardians of the moral code of society. They have challenged "socio-cultural norms, values, and practices that relegate women to a subordinate position in the society" (Meena 2007: 95) by showing that men hardly live up to social expectations, while women can achieve great things when given the opportunity. In *Desperate,* men fail to measure up to the ideal of being guardians of the moral code of society. They are noticeable as a reckless and pleasure-seeking gender that poses as a danger to society. This turns the notion that women are a 'danger' to society that they can toy with and then turn society's discriminatory founding values upside down, sometimes in favour of women.

Luke, young brother to Susan's husband, confirms the construction of men as having been socialized to command. As quoted earlier, he says to her, 'Shut up, woman! Do as you are told' (12). This theme runs throughout *Desperate*. Men give commands and women have to comply.

When women refuse to comply, violence is used against them. It appears that men have been socialized to get whatever they want. As a consequence, women experience physical violence and rape at the hands of men in *Desperate*. Their feelings are not men's primary concerns. A major characteristic of men in *Desperate* is their belief that they need sex to survive. It is in fact contradictory that while it is women sex workers who need sex to survive, men imagine themselves as desperate for sex. Every chapter in *Desperate* recounts how men from various social positions solicit sex from sex workers, even when they are in no condition to perform the task. They are unable to stay away from sex as they think that they must engage in the activity as regularly as possible. This makes them vulnerable to HIV and AIDS as they go out of their way to look for sex, some or all of it unprotected .

The refusal to use condoms by many men (including professionals) is a product of the masculinities that the men operate with. Mr. Zulu, a leader in his community, says, 'I will never use the stupid rubber things, never!' (40). Men have been constructed to think that 'flesh-to-flesh' sexual contact confirms their manhood. Men are also expected to be totally fearless. Putting on a condom is a sign of vulnerability. However, vulnerability negates a key characteristic of masculinity, that is, fearlessness and risk taking. For men who take the bull as the ultimate masculine symbol (Kabaji 2008), the idea of having unprotected sex with many women is quite appealing.

In *Desperate,* men such as Mr. Sono, Uncle Joe and Enock are emotionally detached and insensitive. They have been socialized to suppress feelings and emotions in their dealings with women. Mr. Sono cheats on his wife when he buys sex from Sihle, a sex worker. Uncle Joe and Enock are insensitive to the widowed Susan. All these men do not stop to consider the feelings of women. This suppression of feelings enables men such as Mr. Zulu to rape women and to demand sex without regarding the trauma that women face. In a number of instances, narrators describe men as 'beasts,' indicating the total loss of their humanity. This is mainly in relation to men's actions when pressurizing women for sex. They impose themselves on women. From the accounts in *Desperate*, men from diverse social classes and backgrounds buy sex. The men may or may not be married, young or old. The author's latest publication, *Highway Queen* (Phiri, 2010: 99-101), includes a man with disabilities as one of the clients for a sex worker. Medical

doctors, supervisors, teachers, truck drivers, gardeners, security guards and school boys are among those who buy sex. Surprisingly, society does not focus on these various groups of men who enable the sex industry to thrive.

When *The Herald*, a government-owned daily newspaper in Zimbabwe, threatened to name men who were arrested while soliciting sex in Harare's avenues areas in 2008, there was a major outcry. It was felt that this would be an invasion of privacy. However, politicians and activists have not protested against the publication of the names of women sex workers who would have been arrested in the same area. This confirms the double standards that are operating in society. In 1983, the nationalist government's 'Operation Clean-up' "targeted black women and assumed that they were prostitutes. White men and African men were not targets of Operation Clean-up", (Vambe and Mawadza 2001: 58). All this is a result of society's attitude of associating black women's bodies with dirt and impurity.

The abuse of alcohol emerges as another aspect of dangerous masculinity in *Desperate*. Women who sell sex frequent drinking places in order to attract their clients. When men are drunk they become careless and approach sex workers. Beer drinking is part of the social construction of masculinity in Zimbabwe (Pattman 2001). However, the men in *Desperate* use drunkenness as an excuse to engage sex workers. This endangers the men and their other women sexual partners. In this regard, men become a danger to the vibrancy of society through their reckless actions. Hegemonic masculinities are not unchallenged (Connell 1995). There are some men who do not subscribe to the harsh treatment of women, but they tend to operate at personal levels in their confrontation with hegemonic masculinities. Fernando, who is terribly scared of Joe, ends up marrying Sihle. In Shona, Fernando is a *mbwende* (coward) who is not worth to be called a man. Marrying a known sex worker further compromises his manhood. Could it be that his foreign identity enables him to marry Sihle? Nhamo too is married by an 'outsider', Mr. Jackson who is a white man. It could be that indigenous masculinities are so rigid that no 'insider' would dare marry a woman who has served as a sex worker. However, the existence of subordinate masculinities offers hope as there are some men who are willing to give sex workers a chance in marriage.

3.7 Rape and its Impact on Women in Contexts of HIV and AIDS

In *Desperate*, rape comes across as a patriarchal strategy used to control and domesticate women. McFadden has rightly articulated that:

> Sex is a weapon men use against women – and rape is the most blatant expression of that violence. Men rape for a myriad of reasons, during times of war as well as during times of so-called peace, all of which are essentially linked to their search for male realisation through the sexual act. Raping not only confirms that the male is in control, it also satisfies the desire to dominate… which is inculcated into the male child through a sexist socialisation process that defines the male as strong and the female as weak. (McFadden 1992: 184).

In other words, men employ rape and violence to dominate women. According to Liv Haram (2009: 200), 'rape and gang rape are an invasion of the female body and a woman's most intimate area.' Men engage in rape to 'discipline women.' This is made possible by the social construction of women as being available to meet men's needs whenever they arise. In this set up, women are not self-governing beings. They only exist to quench men's burning sexual desires, without considering the sensitivities of women. In this way, men are a danger to the welfare of women.

Rape is presented as a terrible crime. It causes trauma and has life-long implications for women and girls. Nhamo is forced into sex work as a consequence of rape. Sex workers in *Desperate* are repeatedly raped, as if by selling sex they have perpetually consented to availing sex to every man who wants it. Unfortunately, society does not take rape seriously. To a certain extent, society has 'normalized' rape and there is a disturbing relaxed attitude that greets reports of rape. It is as if society *expects* women to be raped. The reality of HIV has made rape even more fatal. The chances of getting infected with HIV go up in the case of rape. This means that rape is an effective medium for spreading HIV. When the sexual act takes place by force, the likelihood of damaging the female genitals is higher, thereby facilitating the transmission of the virus. Furthermore, some survivors of rape lose self-respect and may end up willing to take risks in relation to sexual matters. Women who live in environments where they are constantly in fear of

being raped may also not be productive to their fullest potential. As a result, the whole community suffers. Women in *Desperate* are raped without having 'attracted' their attackers. Rachel is raped while coming from school. This reminds readers of the fact that no woman ever 'deserves' to be raped. The reality of HIV requires society to strive even harder to come up with mechanisms that minimize or remove totally the threat of rape. While the characters in *Desperate* do not become HIV positive since their stories pre-date the era of HIV, they help to highlight factors that lead to HIV, as I shall demonstrate in the next chapters.

3.8 Conclusion: A Critical Appreciation of *Desperate*

Phiri dares give voice to sex workers in *Desperate*. The combination of Christian and traditional moralities has led to a wholesale condemnation of sex work in Zimbabwe. The Shona terms for sex workers, *pfambi* (prostitute) and *hure* (whore) are totally negative. In dramas and novels, especially in African languages, the image of sex workers is that of loose women who are out to wreck marriages (Gaidzanwa 1985). Sex workers are regarded as dangerous women who threaten the moral fibre of society. It is married women (*madzimai)* who are celebrated as they form the backbone of society, according to one Shona proverb, '*Musha mukadzi'*(home is made by the woman). In general, sex workers are deemed to undermine this philosophy as they do not make any homes but are threatening existing homes. Phiri defies the trend that demonize sex workers and seeks to let them tell their own stories. In line with Chitauro's (1994) view on positive danger, Phiri portrays female characters who subvert patriarchy and create new and positive identities. On one hand, the ideology of '*musha mukadzi'* celebrates married women for putting their sexuality under patriarchal control. On the other hand, sex workers are a definite challenge to patriarchy as they seek to operate independently. Where men assume that they must receive sex on demand, sex workers subvert this notion by insisting on advance payment. In *Desperate*, many men express surprise when sex workers demand their money. Through the payment of bride price, men assume that they have secured their wives' sexual services for life. However, sex workers fall outside such arrangements and demand that men part with money for services rendered. Within patriarchal thinking, sex workers are a 'danger' as they refuse to bring their sexuality under male regulation.

Patriarchal societies place emphasis on male experiences and gloss over the struggles of women. Phiri focuses on women's vulnerability from oppressive cultural practices and economic systems. One does not read *Desperate* and fail to appreciate the women's resilience. All the women encounter serious challenges but they persevere. They do not give up the struggle for survival. Phiri effectively questions the portrayal of women as weak by showing how they press on in extremely difficult circumstances. Although some feminists question the inclination towards encouraging women to sacrifice themselves, the women in *Desperate* have gone to extreme lengths to safeguard their families. While Phiri's female characters are motivated by the need to ensure that they and their families survive, it should not go without mention that the women in *Desperate* resort to desperate strategies that society frowns upon. *Desperate* is, however, redemptive as it also shows the human side in some of its women characters who ultimately abandon sex work.

The stories are convincing in their depiction of the negative conditions that lead to HIV. The sex industry is shown as a condition that leads to HIV as the characters infect each other with sexually transmitted infection. To a large extent, Phiri stands aside and allows sex workers to narrate their experiences in the sex industry. In the womanist discourse, this is a crucial strategy which gives voice to women. According to Brown, African women writers are "the voices unheard, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and predictably male-oriented studies in the field" (1981: 3).

Womanists assert that women have been silenced and obliterated by a patriarchal society. In patriarchal societies, it is male views, perspectives and decisions that are normative. Women who are daring to question and resist patriarchal dictates are invariably labeled and demonized. This happens even in academic institutions where one would expect civility and tolerance, (Tamale and Oloka-Onyango 2000). *Desperate* is a significant contribution to the womanist strategy of giving voice to women. In its pages, sex workers become living human beings who have feelings and emotions. Their humanity is restored as the reader encounters their struggles. They cease to be faceless bodies that carry out detestable activities under cover of darkness. In place of common assumptions that present sex workers as spoilt women who are out to make quick money, in *Desperate* the reader is forced to stand back and realize that this is a vicious industry

that, given a choice, practically no one would wish to remain in. To reinforce this point, sex workers such as Sihle and Nhamo quit the industry as soon as they have alternative means for survival. Phiri considers her role as a spokesperson for voiceless women seriously as she says:

> There are certain situations where women cannot speak for themselves because of fear, embarrassment and the lack of a forum. Some have even gone to their grave before speaking out. So I cover the voiceless in the areas that I cover so that society comes up with corrective measures. (Zvinonzwa 2010: 5).

The literary point of view of using the first person singular is highly effective as the stories come alive. The reader identifies with the characters as they narrate their struggles in the sex industry. This allows the reader to see the point of view only of the narrator, and no other characters. In fact, the narrative form co-opts and engages the reader.

Where the reader has nurtured the belief that sex workers are a 'danger' to society, she/he soon realises that society has been a 'danger' to sex workers. Indeed, women are a danger to oppressive values especially when they challenge them. This kind of danger should be celebrated. The literary style adopted is forceful in leading the reader to question the notion that women who enter the sex industry do so out of their selfish personalities. From each of the stories, it becomes clear that it is *desperation* that forces women into selling their bodies for money. However, the first person narrative method also has its shortcomings. For example, the narrator's reliability in his or her evaluation of the situations in which she/he is involved as a participant can be questioned. The reader is left to solely rely on the narrator's reportage of the facts of the situation she/he presents for the reader's inspection.

Each of the stories in *Desperate* is a brick in the author's overall building. The building itself is quite impressive. It is a headstone that testifies to the painful journeys that sex workers travel. It rejoices in the persistence of women in a brutal world that was not created for them. Each story helps the author to explore different reasons that drive women into sex work. This technique enables Phiri to avoid repetition. Each story brings a new perspective to women's participation in the sex industry. For example, the reader becomes aware that cultural, political and economic

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factors fuel women's entry into the industry. In the stories in *Desperate*, Phiri brings the voices of women who sell, or have sold sex to life. This is a daring act in a conservative context such as Zimbabwe's. Although she does not go as far as suggesting that sex work must be legalized, in *Highway Queen,* the narrator becomes an activist who supports the empowerment of sex workers. Phiri has succeeded in enabling her readers to get new perspectives into sex work. No one reads *Desperate* and *Highway Queen* and persuasively condemns sex workers. Above all, Phiri suggests that it is desperation that drives women to sell sex. Each one of her characters admits that sex work is degrading, but is quick to add that the alternatives are worse.

Reading *Desperate* in the context of HIV and AIDS challenges society to tackle factors that put women at risk. Facing these challenges will protect women and contribute towards reducing the spread of the virus. *Desperate* is also a plea for men to care. Many of the male characters in the book are too preoccupied with releasing their sexual frustration to contribute meaningfully towards social transformation. If women and men would be sensitive to the struggles of women who sell sex, they would take more time to reflect on the following rhetorical question by Susan and those in her situation today, "Do you think I enjoy it?" (30).

In line with this study's central thrust of the interplay between gender and danger, *Desperate* is purposefully situated as it brings out the experiences of women sex workers and the survival strategies they utilize. Phiri has done well to grant space to sex workers. In general, Zimbabwean society has no time for women who sell sex. They must neither be seen nor heard. The combination of Christian and traditional moralities regarding sex and sexuality (Pattman 2001: 230) suggests that sex workers pose a serious threat to social stability and, therefore, should not be accorded any space in society.

When women sex workers are allowed to voice and narrate their own stories, it becomes quite clear that being a woman in a male dominated society locates one in danger. The social, political, cultural and economic systems have not been designed to allow women to thrive. If anything, the feminization of poverty positions women at the bottom of the pile. To worsen the situation, men who are in sites of power abuse their status to force women to give them sexual favours. In this regard, the fact of being a woman makes one more vulnerable to HIV. The women selling sex in

Desperate have to contend with rape, abuse by male clients as well as sexually transmitted infection.

When reading *Desperate*, one can conclude that gender implies danger. In particular, the male gender endangers the female gender. Men come across as selfish and insensitive beings that do not miss the opportunity to exploit women. On their part, women are forced to undertake extreme measures to guarantee their families' survival in a harsh environment. Women are portrayed as self-sacrificing people who will expose themselves to danger in order to achieve positive results. For example, women deny themselves luxuries and work hard to give their children an opportunity to access education, while men are willing to pursue pleasure at the risk of their health and their family's well-being. Despite being endangered, all the women who recount their stories in *Desperate* challenge the system. They take advantage of men's weaknesses in the domain of sex to pursue their agenda of subverting the system. Women who come from the rural areas quickly learn that men are vicious but can be controlled through their imagined limitless sexual desire. They soon learn to demand advance payment and set the conditions for having sex. Formerly submissive housewives such as Dorothy are soon able to order sophisticated men around.

In the final analysis, although sex work increases the women's vulnerability to HIV, the women do retain some control over their sexuality. Unlike married women who are expected to be permanently available for their husbands, sex workers such as Nhamo can decide whether, when and how the sexual act takes place. Of course, the need to secure cash can compromise this possibility, but the window is always open. It is paradoxical that in the time of HIV and AIDS, it may be women selling sex, such as Nhamo, who have a better chance for survival than Mr. Zulu's three wives. As Ankrah says:

> Most HIV-positive women have been infected by their husbands. This undermines the problem of the woman's self-protection: even when she knows that her companion or husband has other sexual partners". (Ankrah 1993: 393).

The aim of this chapter was to consider the conditions that lead to HIV and AIDS flourishing.

The chapter established that all the female characters who engage in sex work in the collection do so not out of choice. Phiri demonstrates this by laying bare the socio-economic, cultural and political factors that drive these women characters into the trade. These include poverty, lack of education, society's hypocrisy, insensitive cultural beliefs and oppressive political structures. *Desperate* depicts conditions in which HIV could thrive. While Phiri suggests that women who engage in sex work can abandon it when their conditions improve, she presents most of her female characters resorting to defective agency. It seems as if most of Phiri's characters are predetermined by these oppressive conditions. Phiri's approach to women's emancipation is limited. It appears as if women can only succeed in their endeavours when men intervene. This is the case with Dorothy who is helped by Mr. Zulu to run the eating house. Phiri operates in the womanist realm rather than the feminist one. That is why she she differs from the views of critics such as Saadawi (2007) who insist on creative danger that rejects patriarchal dictates and empowers women. Phiri's female characters seem to be in no convincing position to determine a positive destiny on their own. However, characters such as Nhamo transcend the oppressive conditions, although with a tainted past. By reflecting on their previous perception, they generate new consciousness. Having noted these gaps in Phiri's *Desperate*, it is hoped that the next chapter on Mukonoweshuro's *Days of Silence* will address these limitations in its analysis of how women who are HIV positive negotiate their space in contexts of HIV and AIDS.

CHAPTER 4

BREAKING THE CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE: SHARAI MUKONOWESHURO'S *DAYS OF SILENCE* **(2000)**

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter analysed *Desperate* (2002) by Phiri. It discussed conditions that force women into sex work and make them increasingly vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. The concepts of gender, danger and agency were dealt with. Central to the argument was the contention that women can manipulate patriarchy and reconstruct the contours of the system to their own advantage. In this chapter, I focus on a publication that addresses HIV and AIDS stigma. Stigma refers to unhelpful attitudes directed at people living with HIV and AIDS. This chapter focuses on *Days of Silence* in a bid to get insights into the lives of women who are HIV positive, and how they react to their condition and to stigma. Stigma, discrimination and denial promote the culture of silence. Consequently, this intensifies the adverse impact of the HIV pandemic on individuals, families and communities. It is, therefore, the task of this chapter to discuss stigma and discrimination associated with HIV and AIDS. Furthermore, the chapter will assess how Mukonoweshuro's characters respond to the problem of secrecy, silence, shame and stigma promoted by a society that has failed to deal openly with the issue of HIV and AIDS.

Theorists such as Gaidzanwa (1985), McFadden (1992) and Tumusiime (2010) have argued that most discourses on gender are skewed against women. The dominant images of women are disempowering. Women are described as lacking independence and dynamism as well as needing men for their survival. Worse still, women are projected as carriers of disease. This generates rampant stigma and discrimination against women. HIV and AIDS stigma feeds on this pre-existing stigma. Women living with HIV are often accused of having brought the infection upon themselves due to "loose life-styles." This takes us back to the concepts of gender and danger, which are central to this study. According to Sontag (1978) such unconstructive attitudes manifest in the metaphors that people use to refer to illness. Stigma can cause one to be shunned by family, peers and the wider community. It also can result in poor treatment in healthcare,

erosion of human rights and emotional hurt. Constructing HIV and AIDS in negative terms has depressing effects. This is why Sontag (1988) calls upon society to try and move away from the use of some metaphors which imply HIV and AIDS in ways that promote stigma.

4.2 Gender and Danger: *Days of Silence*

As discussed earlier in this thesis, gender refers to roles played by women and men in society. Danger denotes that social behavior which jeopardizes one's well-being, or poses a risk to public health. However, danger can also carry a positive meaning, particularly when it is recreated to correct societal ills (Chitauro *et al* 1994). Women are often portrayed in stereotypical images of being loose and dangerous, especially when they contravene patriarchal norms. I argue that the position of being 'loose and dangerous' can actually be the condition of possibility of an alternative way of life if and when women manipulate social structures for their own benefit.

Patriarchy tends to project hackneyed images of women as promiscuous, while presenting men as righteous. Men also think they have a right to police women's sexuality, mainly when they have paid bride price. They then regard themselves as possessing women once they have married them (McFadden 1992). This is a dangerous assumption that promotes women's oppression. Men always want to control women. This is why they feel threatened when women are self-reliant, sometimes thriving in contexts that many men would have found to be challenging. Tumusiime discusses how patriarchy labels career women as bad. However, there is "no scientific evidence to the effect that educated women [are] necessarily bad wives" (2010: 46). Patriarchy always seeks to undermine career women because this category of women subverts roles and challenges the status of men as bread winners. Career women become bad in the eyes of patriarchy because they are assertive. The 'good woman' is one who gives in to patriarchal rule.

Men are keen to regulate women's behaviour in all aspects of life. They rush to dictate what women should wear and to 'punish' transgressors by rape and other forms of violence. They regard themselves as custodians of culture and feel a sense of moral repugnance when female bodies are exposed. There is hypocrisy on the part of men; on the one hand they revel in women's nakedness (in private spaces), on the other hand they show their disdain towards

women's nakedness (in public spaces). One would, therefore, expect women writers to challenge such patriarchal inconsistencies.

Patriarchal notions suggest that once the woman sets her foot in urban space, she becomes a whore, who is out to destroy men. Images of the woman in urban space usually manifest themselves as dirty, sick, wicked or bad (Musisi 2001). The side of the story in which the man is an equal accomplice is often ignored. Society seems ready to pardon men more than women for the behaviour that results in HIV and AIDS. Even a married woman who has been infected by her husband often stands accused in male-dominated societies. The man is never wrong. In *Days of Silence*, when Mr. Hove advises his son Simbarashe on choosing a life partner, he gives examples of marriages that did not work out. He implicates women thus:

> I guess you remember the story of that business man who had six wives. We heard that the sixth wife was an AIDS carrier which resulted in all his wives contracting the virus. When the man died, he left a trail of graves at his home. Both wives and babies were dying one after the other. So think again my son before you chain yourself to a woman. (4-5).

Mr. Hove incriminates women as sources of infection and yet it is the husband who has six wives. His worldview is limited in that it does not interrogate the polygamous man as the source of the problem. It really becomes difficult for the women like Tsitsi in the novel, since being infected with the virus will be seen as a fair result of their sexual misbehaviour. As a result, they choose not to disclose their status. Mr. Hove's use of the term 'chain' in the above passage is not innocent. It suggests that the man loses his freedom once he is married. Such ways of thinking confirm the stereotype of the woman as a menace to society (Gaidzanwa 1985). This is why, after Tsitsi's confession, Simbarashe sees her as the source of all his misery, even though he also has a questionable past. All this is a result of the gendered nature of HIV and AIDS, where the woman's body is often regarded as diseased (Harris 2008) and, therefore, dangerous. We are, however, not given more insights into Tsitsi's past life, for anyone to judge her as loose, immoral, or 'dangerous'.

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4.3 The Plot of *Days of Silence*

Days of Silence is about a Christian family of six daughters and a son. The family, guided by patriarchal thought-patterns, places a lot of hope in their son, a university graduate. Unfortunately for them, the son contracts HIV. What follows is the pain Simbarashe and his family undergo. Mr. Hove and his family had put so much trust and placed his hopes "in his son whom he thought would carry on the family name" (2). The Hove family had thought that Simbarashe would ensure the continued existence of the family name by bearing more children. However, this does not happen. Simbarashe marries Tsitsi who later confesses her HIV positive status. She dies when their marriage is still in its infancy. HIV shatters all the dreams the Hove family had. At this literal level, the title '*Days of silence*' represents how the Hove family experience silently, the pain of waiting for the painful moment when the virus in Simbarashe would become fully blown AIDS. Shame, silence, secrecy and stigma characterize the lives of the infected in *Days of Silence.*

HIV is not only sensational. It is a real problem with consequences. One wonders why Mukonoweshuro punishes Tsitsi by making her die soon after she confesses her HIV positive status. This is censorship on Mukonoweshuro's part. We would have learned more from Tsitsi if she had been allowed to live positively. Her death seems symbolic. It comes as a punishment. Simbarashe also dies and this is symbolical annihilation. Gikandi and Mwangi (2007) see such an approach as religious dogma that punishes those perceived as wrong doers. Mukonoweshuro forces her characters into the death option. Anyone with HIV must die. However, Mukonoweshuro revises her images within the same book. There is self revision when Grace, who is also HIV positive, does not die. There is also the birth of Tariro who is HIV negative although borne to HIV positive parents, Grace and Simbarashe.

In *Days of Silence* Pastor Taguta is quite enlightened when he talks of HIV as a disease rather than some moral problem. Through Pastor Taguta, Mukonoweshuro moves the discourse from the moral to the medical field. Most people become infected with HIV through sex, which unfortunately, often carries moral stigma. Some religious or moral beliefs lead people to believe that being infected with HIV is the result of moral deviance that is punishable. Pastor Taguta however, surpasses this and counsels with wisdom, thus, allowing marriage even among the

infected, as long as they look after themselves, and guard against re-infection. He advises Simbarashe:

> But being an HIV patient does not stop you from enjoying a normal life… You cannot live by yourself. You need a wife… And of course you cannot go and marry someone innocent and pass on the AIDS virus. That is murder number one. But you can also marry an AIDS victim. In fact I was thinking that you and Grace should marry if you agree. (78-79).

The advice ultimately leads to the two's marriage. Mukonoweshuro deals here with the need to do away with the stigma attached to HIV and AIDS. While it is a fact that AIDS is incurable, it can never be overemphasized that those living with the virus should not be shunned in society. Pastor Taguta and his wife are accommodative. They stay with Grace, an HIV positive widow. It is through their support that we see Grace emerging to be a powerful woman, ready to take control of her life. She is strong-willed and so confident that she can still make it in life. She is a source of encouragement when Simbarashe loses hope in life.

4.4 Contesting Images of Womanhood in *Days of Silence*

Mukonoweshuro resists the notion of female stereotypes, but in a rather paradoxical and ambivalent way. For instance, we have, on the one hand, old(er) women who have forms of behaviour that promote women's subjugation. This old(er) and conservative brand of women is usually seen interfering with the lives of the young generation. They sometimes pose danger (Chitauro *et al* 1994) which is completely destructive. On the other hand, there is an alternative image of dangerous women who destroy patriarchal structures in an effort to reconstruct a new way of life. The latter is an example of useful danger, often exhibited by the young generation of women, who are trying to give new meaning to their lives, in contexts once dominated by oppressive patriarchy. They defy patriarchy as they map out their journey in life. Such women are regarded as dangerous by men, because they shake the roots of patriarchy. Patriarchy has always wanted and tried to put women under male control, especially the assertive ones. They use disempowering images of women in order to destroy their dignity and confidence. Moi (1985) rejects ideologies that promote sex separation by demeaning the other through stereotyping.

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In *Days of Silence*, three types of images of women are noticeable. Firstly, is the old(er), retrogressive and conservative generation of women. Traits of this category of women are exhibited by Mrs. Hove who quickly disapproves of Tsitsi as her prospective daughter-in-law:

> Mrs. Hove disapproved of Tsitsi the moment she was introduced. She thought Tsitsi was too old for him… Mrs. Hove was quick to remark that the girl was too old for him. "She is old enough to be a mother of five children... I guess this is not the girl you are intending to marry. I must tell you the truth Simbarashe, your girlfriend did not impress me and she has no good manners". (7-8).

The passage above demonstrates that Mrs. Hove has embraced patriarchal values. Men expect women to be younger than them, although there is silence from men about how old they should be to attract a girl. This is oppressive to women and a danger to them because it prevents them from choosing men of any age that they like. Men have prescriptive understanding of the manners of women yet nowhere in the novel do women dictate how men should behave. As I shall argue below, Mukonoweshuro herself appears to have accepted patriarchal values and norms.

Mrs. Hove disapproves of Tsitsi, basing on rather trivial cultural issues such as:

> First she did not like the way she dressed. She also thought the girl was bad mannered. She said,Tsitsi did not kneel down when she greeted the elders. She vowed that Tsitsi would never come to stay with the Hove family until she herself was dead. (8).

References to dressing and kneeling down show the influence of patriarchy. They show how men dictate terms to women. Mrs. Hove becomes the stereotypical woman who joins patriarchy to oppress fellow women. By denouncing Tsitsi's way of dressing (jeans), Mrs. Hove subscribes to some Christian values which prescribe 'decent' dressing for women. According to Manyonganise (2010: 21), "sports attire is criticized for exposing women's bodies, something which is deemed provocative to the sexual feelings of men. This is true of mainline churches and African initiated churches in Zimbabwe". When she asks Simbarashe to choose between her "and that old girl" (8), Simbarashe's mother makes it really difficult for her son to make a choice. She does not seem to realise how hurtful it is to her son. Her motherhood becomes

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questionable as it threatens its offspring with destruction. Mukonoweshuro, however, shifts from the pessimistic images of women, to moderately positive, and sometimes, puritanical representations of women.

The second image of women in *Days of Silence* is that of the moderately affirmative, young and progressive women who are out to recreate new meanings to their lives. Tsitsi belongs to this generation. She is educated and gainfully employed. She is persuasive and determined to achieve what she sets her eyes on. Mukonoweshuro, however, portrays Tsitsi in an ambivalent way, particularly when persuades Simbarashe to marry her, even when she knows that she is HIV positive. Tsitsi does so out of fear of being stigmatized by society if she does not get married. She is a conformist to patriarchal ideology. This however destroys her in the end. Fear of stigma and social pressure causes Tsitsi to get married in set-ups that are questionable and threatening to her well- being. This ambivalence in Tsitsi's response to the menace of HIV is a result of the uninformed desire to live up to societal expectations.

The third image of women in Mukonoweshuro's *Days of Silence* is rather puritanical. Such representation is manifested in the character of Grace. She is portrayed as virtuous and clean of any blame. She is a widow who is living positively. The reader learns that, just like Tsitsi, she is a victim of unfaithful ,men. She was infected by her late husband. In this representation, men (Grace's late husband, and Tsitsi's former boyfriend who infected her) are shown as a threat to women's health and welfare. Grace is transformed into an object of pity when it is emphasized that she was infected by her husband, who is dead. She becomes a victim of HIV. On the other hand portraying Grace as virtuos after the death of the husband only reveals how the author narrows the discourse on HIV and AIDS to a blame game, where tainting one sex entails the ideal of the other. Such a perception is limited. It does not quite engage the intricacies in different human relationships.

However, in *Days of Silence*, Grace is also manipulated and given a complex character personality. Apart from having been infected by a husband, who is dead, the author invests Grace with a life-giving force, a bearer of strength and humanity. Her words of encouragement give Simbarashe a new lease of life. He begins to appreciate life once more. He regains the will power to live as he says:

I had lost hope, but now I am ready to start my journey of life again. And I hope to succeed. It is a waste of time to spend hours and hours thinking and crying over spilt milk. It brings nothing to brood on one's misfortunes but sorrow and depression. I have made up my mind that I will not waste my time but I will look forward and hope to do something constructive that will help my parents. (77).

Grace is presented as graceful and full of life. Simbarashe "thought that her testimony was very good and what impressed him was the courage Grace had" (77). Pastor Taguta describes her as faithful, and encourages Simbarashe and Grace to marry. Grace is also said to have refused to get married to her polygamous brother-in- law as dictated by tradition. Grace is thus depicted by Mukonoweshuro as an assertive woman who challenges repressive patriarchal ideals. Hers is creative danger. She liberates herself from traditional patriarchal dictates that seek to oppress the woman and asphyxiate her. Grace defines herself and is strong enough to choose the man she wants to marry. It is important to note that while Grace shuns retrogressive customs, she upholds those that she deems meaningful and constructive, and, we are told:

When Grace heard the news that Simbarashe loved her, she welcomed the news. She did not hesitate to give a positive answer. The only thing that she feared was that it was too early for her to marry again. "I feel more time is needed for me to mourn my dead husband. And according to our Shona custom, it has to be about a year before I show my interest in other men". (81).

Grace is ready to cooperate with progressive men who do not look down upon women as inferior. In this case, Mukonoweshuro seems to subscribe to the womanist discourse that emphasizes the importance of a balanced family, where women and men live in mutual harmony (Hudson-Weems 2004).

4.5 Responding to HIV and AIDS: *Days of Silence*

The fear of HIV and AIDS is aptly captured in *Days of Silence* through Simbarashe. It is so maddening and frustrating that he just cannot bring himself to believe it when he tests HIV positive. To know that he would not be well, not just for one day, but forever, is equally

exasperating. Simbarashe cannot imagine himself with fully- blown AIDS. Mukonoweshuro writes:

> Simbarashe's mind was tortured greatly. He feared for his life, for his parents and Tsitsi. He wondered how he would cope when his AIDS was fully blown. He also wondered whether he would live until he was just a heap of decaying bones. He screwed up his face as he thought of another relative of theirs whom he had seen dying of AIDS. He thought he would not allow himself to live to that state…He shook his head as he was telling himself that he had to die before that horrible time comes. (31-32).

Simbarashe's reaction when he tests HIV positive shows that he is afraid of being stigmatized by society if his condition becomes obvious. Mukonoweshuro succeeds in capturing society's different responses to the virus, with emphasis falling on both her male and women characters. There is a quest to establish the source of infection. However, because of a culture that has pronounced gender bias, women come worse off because society views them as carriers of disease. Tsitsi is suspected of bringing HIV home because society tends to judge women especially by the way they dress. Certain types of female clothing such as tight jeans and miniskirts are associated with sex work (McFadden 1992: 173).

According to Suthrell (2004 :14), "clothing as an artifact, with its clear gender divisions, illustrates, as few other things can, the socially constructed nature of gender which goes beyond biological sex." In the same way, conservative Shona society associates the wearing of trousers and mini-skirts by women with immoral behaviour. Zimunya's poem *She Danced,* for example, illustrates such views. " The white mini-skirt clung to her figure/like icing on a cake" (Zimunya 1985: 38). The imagery 'like icing on a cake' suggests that the persona solicits different men to engage in sexual relationships with her, thus exposing herself as well as her partners to HIV and AIDS.

The discourse on HIV and AIDS is gendered. Women are often portrayed as whores endangering patriarchy. "Whores" threaten patriarchy as they are independent and demand direct payment for rendering sexual services. They also destabilise society since they do not subscribe to its

ideology of male superiority. In Zimunya, (1985), cited above, the idea is to present Loveness, the persona, as someone who is making an open invitation for men to come and 'eat' her. In the end, such men are portrayed as victims of Loveness' 'wicked' ways of enticing them to poverty or death. Therefore, in *Days of Silence*, when Mrs. Hove condemns Tsitsi's dressing, the reader's judgment is already coloured when, later in the story, Simbarashe contracts the virus. One might be quick to apportion blame on the woman, Tsitsi in this case.

The mini-skirt and the jeans in this case symbolize sexual desire and danger. This typifies what Simpson (1988: 202) views as the "persistent relationship between women, sex and danger …", where women's bodies are often depicted as a source of danger, as in implying promiscuity, or danger, as transgressing male expectations that bid women to cover their bodies. Mukonoweshuro, however, tries to balance the argument. She also portrays Simbarashe's lifestyle as one that is conducive for one to get infected, as well as infect others with HIV. Mukonoweshuro exposes Simbarashe's thoughts:

> He thought of his wife. She was lucky to die after confessing her sins. He felt he needed to make his life right before he died. He then prayed a short prayer. He told himself he had to forgive his wife too. After all he was not quite sure whether it was Tsitsi or his girl friend who had infected him with HIV. (68-69).

Mukonoweshuro deliberately leaves this issue open-ended. She does not seem ready to pass judgment on which sex is a danger to the other. This heightens the complexities that surround the whole discourse on gender and danger.

4.6 Life After Testing HIV Positive: Insights From *Days of Silence*
Days of Silence addresses the theme of HIV and AIDS by implying that being HIV positive does not mean that one is destined to die from AIDS. One can live with it in the sense of taking control of oneself. In that way, one is able to relegate AIDS to the status of any other disease. Grace and Simbarashe marry towards the end of the novel. They are both HIV positive. In them, Mukonoweshuro suggests that there is life even after having tested HIV positive.

In her approach to the HIV and AIDS pandemic, Mukonoweshuro views the woman as more vulnerable than the man. She portrays the woman as a mere victim of the predatory patriarchy. Gaidzanwa (1985), however, contests such a stereotypical depiction of women as victims. She argues that:

> While it is clear that women have been portrayed negatively as adulterous, prostitutes, domineering and evil, it is necessary, in the process of contesting this negative imagery, not to veer to the other extreme whereby women are considered as victims of society and men. This kind of view would overestimate society and men's power over women. (98).

Gaidzanwa (1985) advocates a more constructive approach which acknowledges women's efforts to redress the challenges they face in society.

Because of fear and stigma, Tsitsi keeps her HIV positive status a secret. She only confesses to her husband, Simbarashe, just before she dies:

> Tsitsi later spoke with a quivering voice. She told Simbarashe, she wanted to confess her sins. Simbarashe did not give a quick answer. He was still thinking when he heard Tsitsi telling him that she was HIV positive. Simbarashe thought he had guessed right to say his wife was already infected by the AIDS Virus. He was not sure what to say to his wife. Tsitsi went on to tell Simbarashe how she had caught the virus from her ex boyfriend who had since died of AIDS. Simbarashe remained silent. Tsitsi told her husband that she was so sorry for passing on the virus to him…I feel that I cannot die before I tell you this secret. (67-68).

The above paragraph is quite significant in narrating gender and danger. It reveals that both women and men can be dangerous to the self or other. They can, in certain situations, become victim and vector. It is this paradox that makes Mukonoweshuro's novel important. However, what is liberating about Tsitsi isthat she reveals her status. The confession absolves Tsitsi as it becomes clear that she is herself a victim.

Tsitsi is remorseful and fears that she might have infected Simbarashe with HIV. It is of importance to note that Simbarashe had also feared that he was the one who had infected Tsitsi with HIV. Both Tsitsi and Simbarashe seem to be a danger to each other. They both conceal their HIV positive status from each other. In her dealings with Simbarashe, Tsitsi is calculating. Disclosing her HIV positive status at an early stage would have meant that she would not get married to Simbarashe. According to Gaidzanwa, (1985: 13), 'the kinds of calculations and choices a woman creates are the mark of liberation and freedom". Tsitsi, in this instance, chooses to be silent and succeeds in fulfilling her wish of getting married to Simbarashe. This, however, is defeatist on Tsitsi' part. She later compromises her health as she tries to have children in her marriage. Again, at play here is the cultural factor which places emphasis on procreation once one is married. Tsitsi gives in to cultural beliefs and constructs that seek to undermine women. In the end her life is endangered.

Although she has material comfort, Tsitsi seeks social fulfillment by getting married. In her interaction with Simbarashe, Tsitsi shows the predicament of young women, particularly when they are less empowered economically, socially, or politically. When Simbarashe proposes that they break their engagement, Tsitsi's desire to get married blinds her to the extent that she does not get the actual message Simbarashe is trying to convey as she fears losing him. It is the same kind of predicament that Fleshman (2004: 6) notes when saying, "women, particularly young women, are not in a position to abstain. They are not in a position to demand faithfulness of their partners."

In the same way, McFadden (1992) has argued that women in needy relationships are usually not in a position to coerce the exercise of preventive measures by their partners, or are reluctant to raise the concern as this may result in rejection or physical attack.

The fear of being stigmatized and rejected usually ends up in women being unable to look after their sexual and reproductive health. Infected individuals may choose not to change their behaviour to reduce the risk of HIV transmission as they fear that a change in behaviour would engender suspicion and stigma. This is portrayed by Tsitsi in *Days of Silence*. She insists on her marriage to Simbarashe, yet it later turns out that she had suspected that she was HIV positive even before the marriage. Tsitsi represents women who are resolute to get what they want in life,

particularly from their male counterparts. They are prepared to sacrifice men for their own advantage.

4.7 The Moral Voice in *Days of Silence*

The author gives a moral interpretation to HIV and AIDS. Religious leaders are being called upon to preach tolerance and use their influence to advance social change in the era of HIV and AIDS. According to Mukonoweshuro, society will only become better if people change their behaviour and become Christians. However, such an understanding of society is rather naïve and reductionist, particularly when one considers how diverse society can be at any given time. Consequently, the story line in *Days of Silence* is too simple to strike a lasting mark in the literary world. However, Mukonoweshuro's concerns in *Days of Silence* are relevant. The subject of HIV and AIDS was quite topical when she wrote the book, and still is.

Mukonoweshuro seems to fall in the trap of idealizing human experiences. This was the trend in earlier literary works in Shona that focused on the theme of HIV and AIDS. The writings largely tended to assume moralizing and pious attitudes. Possibly, this could be tracked back to the romanticism that was encouraged by the then Rhodesia Literature Bureau, which wanted to put off blacks from frequenting towns and cities where they were deemed to engage in immoral forms of behaviour. The Rhodesia Literature Bureau also promoted romanticism, as it feared that writers would incite people politically if they engaged real issues without any form of censorship. According to Sheehan:

> Before 1980 African writers in Rhodesia faced a major obstacle in the Rhodesian Literature Bureau. Any material proposed for publication had to be approved by the bureau. This was the minority government's way of preventing the publication of anything critical of the status quo. The result of this censorship was that very little literature of any value was published before 1980. (Sheehan 2004: 106).

The theme of HIV and AIDS remains contemporary. Mukonoweshuro displays an awareness of the intricacies associated with accepting the reality of being HIV positive, with shame, silence, secrecy and stigma, sometimes occupying the centre stage.

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4.8 Shame, Silence, Secrecy, Stigma, HIV and AIDS: A Course to be Explored

Shame, silence, secrecy and stigma are cultural conditions that cause or perpetuate HIV. These are also a manifestation of the challenges faced by people living with HIV. If one lives in shame, it creates another dimension. Since HIV is associated with sex, a taboo topic in African culture, silence and secrecy become coping strategies. Shame and stigma often accompany people living with HIV. An awareness of this cultural context enables one to understand why it has been difficult to promote openness about the pandemic in conservative communities.

HIV and AIDS stigma is extensive, although it is sometimes handled differently across societies, individuals and religious groups (Alonzo and Reynolds, 1995). HIV and AIDS stigma can be aimed at those caught up in what is perceived as socially unacceptable behaviour, such as prostitution or promiscuity. Tsitsi chooses not to reveal her HIV positive status for fear of being stigmatised. She is aware of society's harmful attitudes towards women in general. The situation is worse for those women who are HIV positive.

The nature of stigma varies across illnesses, and it is important to explore how individuals with HIV and AIDS experience stigma. The trajectory starts from the time one is suspicious of compromised health. The individual goes for tests, the HIV positive status is confirmed and one has to face a new and changed identity. This is then followed by fluctuation between illness and health, then manifestation of AIDS, finally leading to social and ultimate physical demise. In this whole path, individuals infected with HIV tend to personalize the illness, and encounter dilemmas in interpersonal relations (Alonzo and Reynolds 1995).

According to Gikandi and Mwangi, (2007: 23), "the AIDS and HIV motif has been employed, especially in the 1990s, to inject sensation into literary texts: the infection has been ascribed to negative characters as a form of punishment in the texts' moral scheme". Geteria's *Nice People,* (1992), for instance, depicts AIDS as retribution to the promiscuous nurses in the narrative. In the same breath, Ogola's *The River and the Source*, (1994) is punitive and recounts danger in gender. Becky is portrayed as beautiful and attractive to men, but her moral bankruptcy results in her demise due to AIDS.

Becky is stigmatized because HIV infection is often thought to be the result of personal irresponsibility. Religious or ethical beliefs point to the idea that being infected with HIV is the outcome of immoral behaviour that deserves to be punished (Esack and Chiddy 2009). There seems to be no sympathy to the victim of the infection. Conditions that lead to compromised lifestyles in Becky's case are not even interrogated. Such moralising approaches fail to do justice to complex factors that have a bearing on vulnerability to HIV and AIDS.

Mukonoweshuro calls for society to come up with strategies which avoid or minimize HIV related stigma. She demonstrates how such strategies would go a long way in enabling the infected to adjust to an HIV positive status. Mukonoweshuro, in *Days of Silence,* demonstrates this through Pastor Taguta who is portrayed as mature and very supportive. Mukonoweshuro suggests that people need to accept the reality and be helpful through making sure that the remainder of the life of the infected is supported, with the family working as a safety web.

According to Heath (2009), in order to reduce or get rid of stigma, people must talk about HIV as a disease rather than some moral problem. The desire to know how the person got infected is unhelpful and only serves to complicate the situation further. It is interesting to note that as Tsitsi pleads guilty, she, for the first time in the narrative, talks about her tainted past, and identifies her late boyfriend as the source of her infection, as if to exonerate herself. She has to say this because she knows Simbarashe has unvoiced and judgmental questions as to how she contracted the virus. This is why perhaps she had chosen to be secretive about her HIV positive status, even to the man who was to marry her.

As previously discussed, Tsitsi is not ready to face the shame of not getting married, which is a possibility once she reveals her status. Marriage is of great importance in many African societies. It is viewed as mandatory for women as, "Unnmarried women are sometimes likened to social outcasts", (Coulter, Persson and Utas 2008: 35). This yearning for marriage among African women generally does not have anything to do with one's social and economic footing. It has everything to do with what patriarchal society socializes the woman into believing. Tsitsi is educated, employed and from a well-to do family, but is desperate for marriage, even when her

life and that of the one she loves could be at risk. The fact that Tsitsi is relatively advanced in age shows the kind of social pressure she finds herself in.

When Simbarashe reveals his HIV positive status to his family, they initially find it difficult to accept. The HIV dilemma is that it can have a great impact on a person's life. It, therefore, requires social support. Unfortunately, the stigma attached to this makes it difficult for people to disclose their status. They fear the social disgrace of speaking about it; such consequences seem quite strong in *Days of Silence.* Grace declares, "I had lost hope, but now I am ready to start my journey of life again. And I hope to succeed", (76-77). This demonstrates Grace's resoluteness and agency.

It is also through the counselling sessions from Pastor Taguta that Mukonoweshuro succeeds in allowing some of her characters to live positively after testing HIV positive, "Simbarashe and Grace were married privately by Pastor Taguta" (85). Grace and Simbarashe, both HIV positive, marry and lead fairly fulfilling lives, although this is short-lived when Simbarashe succumbs to HIV and AIDS. The couple is blessed with a baby boy whom they aptly name Tariro, which means hope. Hope is essential in people's lives.

4.9 Naming in *Days of Silence*
Mukonoweshuro's focus in *Days of Silence* is on HIV and AIDS and its impact on the lives of the young people who get infected. In *Days of Silence*, Mukonoweshuro adopts a simple plot that makes the book even qualify for children's literature. This is an effective strategy in mitigating the pandemic, as she tries to impart words of wisdom to young people in the face of HIV and AIDS. The book is written within the context of the HIV and AIDS pandemic at a time when many of the infected and affected are not ready to accept their condition.

Naming HIV and AIDS creates fertile ground for stigma and discrimination (Mashiri, Mawomo and Tom 2002). Mukonoweshuro is quite sensitive to the plight of those affected and infected by the virus. Consequently, she adopts a style of writing that does not make use of derogatory metaphors when making reference to HIV and AIDS. Just like Sontag (1978) who objects to the use of metaphor when referring to illness, Mukonoweshuro uses no other terms except HIV and

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AIDS when she refers to either of the two. She is aware of the negative nuances that may be linked to the two conditions. Sontag (1978) advocates the need to be sensitive in society's selection of the language to use when making reference to illness as this may result in adverse perceptions of the illness. Brandt (1988: 146) contends that disease cannot be freed of metaphors because it is "too basic an aspect of human existence". For him, social values shape how people view certain diseases and their reactions. As a result, disease becomes a social construct, with issues of gender coming into play.

In *Days of Silence*, Mukonoweshuro makes use of names to further her narrative and seeks to achieve effective results from the names she gives to her characters. As this study has continued to observe, names give important insights into the values of African cultures (Mashiri 2003). Simbarashe (the power of God) is aptly named for a long-awaited boy child. As highlighted above, patriarchal societies place emphasis on the arrival of the boy child. It is the boy child who is expected to carry forward the lineage. The boy child enjoys a privileged position within the family and in society. Not having a boy child is considered a disaster as it results in what Shona culture fears the most; the collapse of the geneology. The Hove family has struggled to get a boy child. The arrival of a boy child, therefore, signifies the power of God, hence, the name Simbarashe. Within the context of Mukonoweshuro's narrative, there is a combination of traditional and Christian concepts in the celebration of the boy child.

Tsitsi is a name associated with mercy and tenderness. It is the author's own way of challenging society to change its negative attitude towards people living with HIV. Through the name and the character, Mukonoweshuro is calling upon society to understand people living with HIV and avoid stigma and discrimination. In one sense, the name is appropriate as women tend to be identified as the source of HIV infection. The author might be pleading with society to deal with women more justly. The name might be indicative of her sympathy towards women who are not accorded a fair hearing when it comes to accusations of sexual impropriety. Mukonoweshuro could, therefore, be asking society to be more considerate when dealing with women, particularly in the context of HIV and AIDS, which is central to this study.

Although the name Tsitsi has a positive slant, it tends to portray women as weak and needing special favours. This overlooks the inherent capacity that women possess to look after themselves and achieve their own goals. The tendency to associate women with being compliant is a result of gender stereotypes. Unfortunately, Mukonoweshuro misses the opportunity to challenge these in her work. This is in sharp contrast to the apt naming that one finds in *The Uncertainty of Hope,* as shall be illustrated in the next chapter. By upholding the name Tsitsi, Mukonoweshuro has failed to transcend the socially prescribed values regarding women. She overlooks the subversive potential women possess to work their way out of problematic situations, as argued in the preceding chapter. By insisting on Tsitsi, Mukonoweshuro prevents her character from asserting her agency.

Tsitsi becomes a pitiable object, incapable of charting her own destiny. The situation is compounded by her HIV positive status. While the author would like to undermine stigma and discrimination, allotting the name Tsitsi to an HIV positive woman character does not empower her. Whereas we have seen some women in *Desperate* taking on subversive strategies in order to survive, in *Days of Silence* there is very little scope for them to negotiate their way through the challenges imposed on them by life. To a large extent, the name Tsitsi leaves women as objects of pity. They have to be helped in order for them to help themselves. Tsitsi desperately pleads with Simbarashe to marry her when the latter suggests they break their engagement because of his poor health, "No ways, it's either we get married or I go to the cemetery in a coffin" (41).

The naming of the pastor as Taguta is also quite deliberate. The author is keen to present Christianity as a religion that brings abundance to its followers. Taguta means, "we are full/well fed/satiated/satisfied." The name is an open invitation to those who are still outside the church to join and experience spiritual and material fulfilment. Although the pastor is quite sensitive, the suggestion that the church is welcoming to people living with HIV could be suspect. Pastor Taguta seems to be everything to everyone. Anyone who interacts with him always leaves a satisfied being. Grace says this about Pastor Taguta and his wife:

> They are wonderful people of God. Humble as they are but I think before God, they are
> great people indeed. I have stayed here for quite some time yet they haven't changed.

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They keep on encouraging me. I had lost hope. But now I am ready to start my journey of life again. And I hope to succeed. (76-77).

The Tagutas are presented as holy and perfect beings. Yet, if anything, the church has been heavily implicated in supporting stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV. By demonising sex and suggesting that only promiscuous individuals get infected, the church has been responsible for generating a lot of the stigma in contexts of HIV. Mukonoweshuro therefore fails to capture the other side of the story.

The emphasis on prosperity in emerging forms of Christianity in Zimbabwe can also be seen in the selection of the name Taguta. According to Maxwell (2006), younger Pentecostal churches promote a prosperity message. The major teaching is that God wants Christians to be prosperous in this world. By naming the pastor Taguta, Mukonoweshuro is endorsing the message that Christians should access earthly riches. However, this fails to interrogate the socio-economic context in which believers are located. As Tagwira demonstrates in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, it is very difficult for ordinary citizens to even survive in Zimbabwe. Taguta may, therefore, be more of an aspiration than a description of reality.

The names in *Days of Silence* are not neutral. The author carefully chooses her characters' names to advance her themes in the book. Grace and Simbarashe (HIV positive couple) give the name Tariro to their son. Tariro is a Shona term that means hope. Thus, the author leaves the reader with hope. The name suggests that HIV is not the end of life. One assumes that there will be life beyond infection. Tariro meets both the Christian and traditional expectations. In Christianity, hope is essential as it suggests faith in God's promises. Traditionally, Tariro ensures that the homestead is not destroyed as the boy child will carry the lineage on.

To a very large extent, therefore, Mukonoweshuro's naming is consistent with the cultural expectations regarding women and men. Pastor Taguta and Simbarashe are men who exhibit patriarchal traits, although the former tampers it with his 'new' identity as a Christian. Grace largely fits into the role expected of her as a 'gracious and merciful' woman.

4.10 Rethinking the Image of African Womanhood in the Context of HIV: *Days of Silence*

Days of Silence highlights women's vulnerability to HIV. Although the author leaves the matter open regarding the source of infection, it is clear that Tsitsi is more vulnerable than Simbarashe. A combination of biological, cultural, religious and economic factors increases women's vulnerability to HIV. Although Tsitsi's family may be considered economically well to do, this does not protect her from infection. Her vulnerability is tied to the overall situation of women in Zimbabwe and the world today. The following statement captures the prevailing situation of the women in the world as the organization Plan avers:

> In most societies and families, traditional gender roles and power relations place women and girls in disadvantaged situations relative to men and boys. This is true throughout the life cycle; female babies in many countries are aborted or simply go 'missing'; adolescent girls often have few rights over their own lives and their own bodies; they are 'owned' by their father until they are married by their husband. Subjected to early marriage, female genital cutting, more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and given less basic nutrition than their brothers, girls are also less likely to be educated and more likely to be poor than boys of the same age. (Plan 2007: 14).

As discussed earlier on, the pressure to have relationships with men and ultimately get married leaves women vulnerable to HIV. In this regard, the concept of womanhood that emphasizes being married poses a danger or risk in the time of HIV. Womanhood in this regard has negative implications. Women have been left to count their losses in a world that prioritises men. Mukonoweshuro has sought to draw attention to their circumstances. It emerges that Tsitsi is under severe pressure to get married as she feels she is getting older and may very well not find a suitor. This pressure to get married has meant that women in heterogeneous relationships in Africa are constantly negotiating this demand. Their families and communities expect them to do the 'natural thing' and enter into the institution (Morgan and Wieringa 2005). But it is in this socially sanctioned marriage setup that most women often compromise their health from the danger posed by HIV and AIDS.

Days of Silence also brings into the open the absence of solidarity amongst women. Tsitsi's mother-in-law does not readily accept her. This confirms the point that patriarchy co-opts women to fight its wars. In the Shona culture for example, the tension between mothers and sisters-in-law on the one hand, and daughters-in-law on the other hand, is fabled. Mukonoweshuro has pursued this theme in some of her works in Shona. The absence of solidarity among women as they compete for patriarchal favours prevents them from maximising their potential. Instead of joining forces to forge a united front, women have allowed patriarchal dictates to put their survival at risk. *Days of Silence* makes it clear that women have to close ranks and assist each other in the face of HIV and AIDS. They must renounce stigma and discrimination and provide support for women and men living with the virus.

The theme of women's subordination runs throughout *Days of Silence*. Patriarchy socialises women to defer to the authority of men. In the novel, men take the key decisions, with their wives coming in to provide support. As a Pentecostal woman pastor, Mukonoweshuro might be reinforcing the view that wives should be subordinate to their husbands. However, this stance compromises women's agency and creativity, as presented by Ogundipe-Leslie:

> The point to note is that religious fundamentalisms in Africa, and fundamentalism as a worldwide movement, are issues to be looked into as they affect attitudes towards women and the struggle for progressive conditions for women all over the world. (Ogundipe-Leslie 2007: 542).

Subordination presents women as being only available to comment on proposals that men would have made. Women are reduced to commentators on male initiatives. This overlooks and downplays women's intellectual abilities. Worse still, subordination increases women's vulnerability to HIV as it vests the power to decide when and how the sexual act takes place. Subordination in other spheres translates into subordination in the area of sexuality. The empowerment of women becomes critical in this regard (Phiri 1997: 160).

Days of Silence explores the theme of women's struggle for quality life in the face of gender-based violence, skewed economic systems and HIV. Tsitsi epitomises this struggle. There are so

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many hurdles that she has to surmount, including patriarchal biases and lack of co-operation by fellow women. That the character dies speaks volumes about the struggles of women in society. Many meet physical death. Many more go through life while 'dead'. They die to the extent that their opportunities and aspirations are killed even while they are still physically alive. Life for many women is a form of pre-lived death.

Despite the low status of women in *Days of Silence*, they are portrayed as enigmatic. This is where women constitute constructive peril. Even as they appear to merely endorse decisions made by men, they actually have the power to subvert these decisions. Tsitsi's determination sees her getting married to Simbarashe, despite facing a number of challenges. Women, therefore, possess hidden potential to attain their goals. According Egara Kabaji (2008: 51), Luhyia women in Kenya are presented as "subordinate, an object of pleasure, dangerous and mysterious with dark powers that can either destroy or make a man." It is this ambivalence that makes men quite wary of women. While men are attracted to women and seek to keep them in subordinate positions, men are also well aware of women's capacity to rebel and refuse to remain oppressed. This is the affirmative hazard that women possess.

4.11 The Representation of Men in *Days of Silence*

Days of Silence succeeds in demonstrating male dominance in society. In patriarchal societies, it is men who are 'breadwinners' and 'decision makers'. Mukonoweshuro subscribes to the biblical and African patriarchal systems that place men at the centre. She suggests that this model 'works', with women coming in to provide support to men. Men in *Days of Silence* take the initiative. The women in their lives (mainly wives and daughters) are there to predominantly endorse their programmes. The novel leaves the reader convinced that it is indeed, 'a man's world'.

In her effort to demonstrate multiple and complex masculinities, Mukonoweshuro brings out two different types of men: Simbarashe and Taguta. Whereas Simbarashe's youth is characterised by beer drinking and womanizing, Taguta is a faithful, righteous family man. Although both have power by virtue of being men, Mukonoweshuro suggests that they act out this power in very different ways. Simbarashe's beer drinking leads him down the path of HIV, Taguta's Bible

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reading leads him towards salvation. In the end, the masculinity of Simbarashe is made subordinate to the masculinity of Taguta. It is Taguta, possessing the 'higher truth' who counsels Simbarashe to face HIV with courage. The author suggests that men who are fully committed to the church are not/less prone to HIV. However, this is problematic as in real life some pastors have come out openly to declare that they are HIV positive.

Mukonoweshuro's moralizing tendency leads her to associate beer drinking with men's vulnerability to HIV, without paying critical attention to the factors that lead men to beer drinking in the first instance. As the stories in Phiri's *Desperate* confirm, men do get more reckless when they are drunk and are more willing to take risks. However, it is necessary to appreciate the colonial influence in promoting a close association between masculinity and beer drinking. Mager (2010) has demonstrated the close connection between beer, sociability and masculinity in South Africa. In a similar way, beer drinking in Zimbabwe carries with it notions of what 'real' masculinity is and creates a sense of belonging among men. Mukonoweshuro does not invest time to investigate this version of masculinity. Instead, she is quick to dismiss it in favour of a religiously-inspired notion of masculinity.

Men in *Days of Silence* feel the pressure of patriarchy and its suggestion that they must 'win bread'. Mr. Hove struggles to fend for his family in the face of a rapidly declining economy that is characterised by hyperinflation and retrenchment. Mukonoweshuro comments:

> Another thing that Mr. Hove dreaded was retrenchment. Quite a number of people at their factory had already been retrenched. Their clothing company was said to be in financial difficulties. What was bad was that those people who were unfortunate to lose their jobs were given little packages to take away. (2).

Men's masculinity is compromised in times of economic challenges. Their leadership becomes threatened by their failure to secure goods and services for their families. The myth of masculine permanent improvisation can be shattered by a harsh economic environment.

Simbarashe's battle with his HIV status symbolizes masculinity's greatest limitation. Men find it difficult to open up and share. Their socialisation teaches them that a 'real' man is self-sufficient and solves his own challenges. Simbarashe is a prisoner of this teaching. He allows himself to degenerate while keeping his secret. It is only when he cries out that he finds help. As Mahala (2007) has demonstrated in *When a Man Cries*, men need to cry out when they find themselves in desperate situations. Mukonoweshuro is challenging harmful masculinities that prevent men from seeking help early. She is encouraging men to be more open and proactive in the face of HIV and AIDS.

In *Days of Silence* the depiction of men could be described as at best positive and at worst contradictory. Mr. Hove is a caring family man. Pastor Taguta is a devoted pastor who fights stigma against people living with HIV. Perhaps as a woman pastor herself, Mukonoweshuro the author of *Days of Silence* is unwilling to condemn men totally. Her vision of marriage and complementary relations between women and men leads her to promote optimistic images of men. She reminds one of Ba's reflections on marriage when she declares:

> I remain persuaded of the inevitable and necessary complementarity of man and woman. Love, imperfect as it may be in its content and expression, remains the natural link between these two beings. To love one another! If only each partner could only melt into the other! If each would only accept the other's successes and failures…The success of a nation therefore depends inevitably on the family. (88-89).

Mukonoweshuro, just like Ba, is confident that progressive men are useful in addressing HIV and AIDS. They can remain faithful to their partners and also help men living with HIV to regain their confidence. It is the same concept of the woman being in concert with the man in all struggles of life that Hudson-Weems (2004) also writes about.

4.12 Conclusion: A Critical Evaluation of *Days of Silence*

In evaluating *Days of Silence*, it is important to bear in mind that it was published at a time when the whole issue of HIV and AIDS was shrouded in fear and secrecy. Jackson (2002) has shown that up to the end of the 1990s, there was very little open discussion of HIV and AIDS in

Southern Africa due to the prohibitions around sexuality. Mukonoweshuro must be commended for her brave effort. She opened the topic for discussion at a time when most authors would not tackle the subject due to the fear, stigma and discrimination. In this regard, she must be saluted for her willingness to focus on a very relevant theme. To this end, one may argue that Mukonoweshuro has broken the conspiracy of silence around HIV. She has succeeded in promoting discussion around the theme, although some of her constructions are problematic.

Days of Silence succeeds in exposing the dangers of stigma and discrimination in the face of HIV. Mukonoweshuro shows the anguish that people living with HIV go through as they negotiate stigma. The labelling forces people to hide their HIV positive status. This prevents them from getting assistance early. Mukonoweshuro wrote at a time when very few people could access anti-retroviral therapy. However, she shows that when people living with HIV receive love, acceptance and counselling, they are able to look forward to the future. Her work seeks to motivate individuals and families to have faith and hope in the time of HIV and AIDS.

Mukonoweshuro avoids the extreme of portraying men as reckless and incapable of making useful contributions in their families and communities. She does well to open up the idea of masculinity and showing the possibility of different ways of being a man. In the section above I showed how she uses the figures of Simbarashe and Taguta to critique one type of masculinity while promoting the other. The importance of this to HIV and AIDS struggles should not be missed. Men are not the same and there are some types of masculinity that promote responsibility. According to Ratele:

> The politics and psychologies of men's gender thus reveal the instability of masculinities, the idea of there being vital distinctions among men. In other words, when society is looked at through the view of men as transgendered, bisexual, straight or HIV-positive subjects, in addition to being poor/rich, African/American, it is enabled to understand that masculinity changes with circumstance, history and culture, that in fact one can only talk about several masculinities within a society. Politicizing masculinities offers society a way to see that, at any point in time, there is no single idea of how to be a man. Knowing

that there are dominant masculinities, and alternative and subordinate ones, a challenge can then be mounted. (2008: 32).

However, Mukonoweshuro's image of an infected woman is ambiguous; on one hand the woman appears to be blamed in portrayals that suggest that women are carriers of HIV, diseased and, therefore, loose and dangerous to society. On the other hand, Mukonoweshuro appears to deliberately resist the temptation to disclose who infected the other between Simbarashe and Tsitsi. As I said above, this is convincing artistic achievement. The reader is left to wonder whether the issue of establishing the source of the infection is helpful in any way. The author questions the tendency to associate sexually transmitted infections (including HIV) with women and shows that Simbarashe might as well have infected Tsitsi.

Despite having a number of constructive qualities, *Days of Silence* is disappointing in many ways. The story line is too thin and the author allows her Christian stance to dominate. *Days of Silence* suggests that 'decent' women do not get infected. Mukonoweshuro fails to negotiate the reality of living with HIV and her characters die prematurely. While she would like to undermine stigma, her way of writing suggests that there is very little hope after getting infected. Unfortunately, this undermines her original vision of producing a work of art that would equip people living with HIV with skills to hold on and have meaningful lives.

Mukonoweshuro's womanist sensibility comes out from the fact that she is concerned about the lives of African women and men in the era of HIV. Her feminist sensibility is, however, highly muted. She appears paralysed by the church's teaching on the subordination of women. Her female characters are either obedient wives who bring family stability or women with a questionable past who die prematurely. She does not bring forth several assertive female characters that are willing to either confront patriarchy or to at least subvert it. In this regard her succeess in empowering women in the time of HIV and AIDS is partial, confined as it is to depict the difficult lives that women with HIV and AIDS experience. Her commitment to the Christian faith makes her portray women as submissive to men. She overlooks the forceful efforts of some women within the church who champion women's rights and dignity.

Days of Silence also fails to position women to work towards open forms of liberation. It continues to grant authority to men. Women's vulnerability to HIV calls for radical steps to be taken to ensure liberation by women. Traditional approaches must be challenged and new strategies adopted. In *Desperate* for example, Phiri proposes women's education as a vital strategy in mitigating women's vulnerability to HIV. In *Days of Silence*, Mukonoweshuro stops only at the stage of fighting stigma and promoting positive living. She does not offer a new vision of society where women can challenge oppressive forces and survive. Regrettably, *Days of Silence* perpetuates women's silence in the face of life-denying practices. However, the fact that the book is written by a woman in a way gives the woman a voice in the era of HIV and AIDS. This breaks the conspiracy of silence.

Gaidzanwa (1985) calls for more liberating images of women in Zimbabwean literature. An analysis of *Days of Silence* reveals that Mukonoweshuro does not transcend the limitations highlighted by these theorist in any radical way. Mukonoweshuro remains constrained by her religious background. Her female characters are not radical and tend to conform to gender stereotypes created by society**.**

Despite the literary shortcomings, *Days of Silence* must be acknowledged as one of the first novels written in English by a woman writer to explore the theme of HIV and AIDS. Mukonoweshuro deemed the subject so important that she switched from Shona to English in order to reach a wider audience. She succeeds in covering significant ground in her effort to undermine stigma and promote hope among people living with HIV. Given the time of publication (2000), when HIV and AIDS were topics covered in shame and secrecy, she must be commended for her openness. She also actively opposes the tendency to ascribe sexually transmitted infections to women. Mukonoweshuro challenges society to deal justly with women, although she does not put forward a radical agenda for women's emancipation in the face of HIV and AIDS.

This chapter serves as a bridge between the previous chapters and forthcoming chapters. The previous chapter discussed how Phiri outlines the conditions that increase women's susceptibility to HIV and AIDS. Both Phiri and Mukonoweshuro have done well to highlight the intricacies of

gender and danger within the terrain of HIV. However, their vision of a new society in which women are taken seriously is rather blurred. It is anticipated that *The Uncertainty of Hope,* discussed in the next chapter, takes the discourse to a higher level.

CHAPTER 5

HAZY FUTURES: HIV AND AIDS IN VALERIE TAGWIRA'S *THE UNCERTAINTY OF HOPE* (2006)

5.1 Introduction

Chapter four analysed Mukonoweshuro's *Days of Silence*. The discussion was on Mukonoweshuro was brave to explore the issue of HIV and AIDS when very few authors were not courageous enough to do so. She challenged society to address the shame, secrecy and silence that surrounded the pandemic. The chapter further discussed Mukonoweshuro's engagement with the aspect of stigma and how women negotiate this stigma in contexts of HIV and AIDS. Mukonoweshuro succeeds in highlighting some of the social and cultural factors that place women in situations of vulnerability and victimhood. She, however, does not ascribe sufficient agency to her characters. Most of her characters are constrained in their quest to respond effectively to HIV and AIDS.

This chapter focuses on Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006). It anticipates that Tagwira offers an empowering view of gender roles that women can play in the era of HIV and AIDS. The chapter is theoretically informed by critics who discuss and emphasize how women survive in situations that threaten their well-being. These critics include Spivak (1995), McFadden (1992) and Saadawi (2007). These critics contend that most of the existing creative works by man and sometimes by women have disempowering images of women. Women are portrayed as clueless victims of patriarchy. Instead of such negative images, the critics have proposed that authors ought to project more liberating images of women.

Tagwira's novel, *The Uncertainty of Hope*, (2006) explores the increasing difficult lives for women in postcolonial Zimbabwe. The author, a Zimbabwean woman creative writer, discusses the survival of Zimbabwean women at the height of the socio-poitical and economic Zimbabwean crisis occasioned by ZANU PF's misrule. The author deals with the topical issues in HIV and AIDS, Operation Murambatsvina (Clean-up trash), land redistribution,

unemployment and urban destitution and other issues. While reference will be made to some of the issues mentioned above, this chapter mainly focuses on women and how they negotiate their survival in the context of HIV and AIDS. Tagwira introduces us to a wider cross-section of Zimbabwean women; Faith and Melody, university students, Onai Moyo, a market woman, Katy Nguni, a vendor and black market dealer, Ruva an Ordinary Level student, and others. All these women deserve recognition as they try to define themselves outside cultural and societal definitions of a 'respectable and obedient' woman. In situations where women define their own destiny, retrogressive masculinities often fear that their power and position in society are threatened and turn to violence against women.

The Uncertainty of Hope is a depiction of the relationships between Zimbabwean women and men in contexts of HIV and AIDS. Central to this chapter is how the different female characters in the story re-define gender and danger. To a large extent, Tagwira upholds the vision articulated by the literary critics cited above. She extends the thrust of the discourse on narrating gender and danger when her women characters subvert gender expectations. They express individual as well as collect painful experiences that characterize their lives in the era of economic hardships and HIV and AIDS. By so doing, women in Tagwira's novel become authors of their own narratives which were unheard of during the literary period when it was the male author "writing the lives of women using female characters and voices that women could be writing for themselves" (Attree 2010: 68). The act of writing about HIV and AIDS by a woman writer is a rejection of the common notion that the woman is a silent sufferer. Tagwira's women characters, as will be demonstrated in this chapter as it progresses, show the different levels at which gender and danger can be experienced, depending on who creates the meanings at any given point in time.

What the women do to improve their lives may be deemed dangerous when it hinders the dominance of patriarchal power. The novel, thus, becomes a good example of "how women redefine and reconstruct notions of femininity and gender when writing about HIV/AIDS", (Attree 2010: 65). The artistic work goes a long way in endorsing Sontag's suggestion that, while society cannot operate without metaphors, there is need to refrain from, or try to stop using metaphors which refer to AIDS in ways that promote fear and stigmatisation (Sontag 1988).

Tagwira questions the popular portrayal of women as "sitting ducks" in relation to HIV and AIDS and shows how one woman, Onai, negotiates with, and survives, the disease.

Tagwira offers the reader insights into patriarchy and its grip on women in Zimbabwe. However, these women are resilient and their efforts materialize in varied ways. Her debut novel constitutes a call to the women of Zimbabwe to press on, work hard and redefine their role in society in ways that promote their own liberation. As argued in chapter one, agency is a key concept in my interpretation of the notion of 'danger' within Zimbabwean women's writings on HIV and AIDS. Emphasis continues to be placed on whether and how an author presents her women characters. Is it within these women's power to change their circumstances, or do they believe their fate is already determined? This chapter maintains that in Tagwira's novel, women are empowered to shape their destiny, in spite of the difficult contexts. The women in Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* take charge of their lives even when they are endangered. They adopt different survival strategies, thus, becoming a danger to oppressive values. The novel's strength lies in its ability to afford the reader to understand the multi- layered-ness of gender and danger, where positive danger is related to new and constructive roles that women create in their struggles against social oppression resulting in new and liberating values, while negative danger denotes the diminished roles whose values are informed by a destructive thread that pulls women back.

5.2 Hope in Gloomy Circumstances: A Synopsis of *The Uncertainty of Hope*

Tagwira's fascinating narrative highlights the challenges that women face in an urban area in Zimbabwe. The novel is set in Mbare, one of Harare's high density suburbs. Mbare stirs up different emotions in Harare. In many conversations it is a notorious suburb that is packed with criminals and sex workers. Popular imagination would associate Mbare with squalor, poverty and botched urbanization in Zimbabwe. Scholarly studies on Harare have confirmed that high density areas were meant to be a source of cheap labour for the economy that served white interests during the colonial period. High Density suburbs have remained congested and poor and a hive of crime after independence (Zinyama, Tevera and Cumming 1993). In particular, the image of Mbare, with its crowded flats and rundown infrastructure comes across as an example of the challenges of urbanisation. It is, therefore, quite significant that Tagwira chooses Mbare

as the setting for her novel in order to underscore the desperate hopes that women hold on to in uncertain contexts that promise very little by way of improvement to their lives.

The novel focuses on the struggles of women in Mbare. The year is 2005 and the overall national context is a strenuous one. Onai, the main character, is a woman married to Gari. She is the mother of three children, namely, sixteen-year old Ruva, fifteen-year-old Rita and ten-year-old Fari. Onai is effectively the family's 'bread winner' as Gari does not bring his resources into the family. Onai has a stand at the market stall in Mbare, which enables her to fend for the family where Gari has failed. This creativity by Onai ought to be celebrated. However, Gari sees this as a threat to his masculinity. He adopts violent behaviour in all his dealings with Onai. Thus, from the beginning of the novel, Onai is viewed by her husband as an embodiment of danger because she does not depend on men for survival. She provides for the family when Gari fails to do so. Onai represents the socially conscious women who can take care of themselves as well as their families. She is an empowered woman and emerges a victor. Characters such as Onai dispense of men and show that they can take control of space that men have always wanted to monopolise. Onai is resourceful even when there is food shortage. She joins long queues to secure food for her family. Onai comes up with survival strategies when the formal economic system has given in and compromised by the mismanagement from the male-dominated nationalist government. Beauty Vambe observes that in Zimbabwe:

> In a context of national economic decline since the 1990s, and of the high mortality rate from HIV/AIDS, black women from the urban townships and rural areas participated increasingly in the economy as informal traders. Informal trade had , by Zimbabwean standards, become 'formal' trade. (Vambe 2008:76).

Thus, women are initially pushed to work within the informal sector or participate in the illegal foreign currency trade. The women are resourceful and manage to transform this economic space into one that they controlled for the benefit of their families. In the process, their roles change, and men cannot take women for granted anymore. However, patriarchy is unsettled when women take up these alternative survival strategies. Instead of Onai being celebrated for ensuring the survival of her family, she is subjected to severe ill-treatment by Gari. The resourceful woman is

seen as a danger to patriarchy. When the roles are reversed, patriarchy feels threatened. Female agency is experienced as a threat in this particular case. Later on in the novel, one encounters women demonstrating to have their economic rights upheld.

Katy is Onai's best friend. She is married to John, a truck driver. Katy and John have a daughter, Faith, who is studying at the University of Zimbabwe in Harare. Faith is in love with Tom, a young man who has recently acquired a farm. Tom has a sister, Emily, who is a medical doctor. These characters are equally central to the novel, as they are used by the author to advance her concerns in the book. These women's responses to patriarchy and to the threats posed by HIV are depicted as assertive and creative.

In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, the gaze is mainly on Onai and her struggle against difficult conditions such as unemployment, inflation, domestic violence, food shortages and HIV and AIDS. The omniscient narrator describes Onai's thoughts and feelings as she lives in an uncertain environment induced by the breakdown of cultural, economic, political and social institutions (Raftopoulos 2009). At the beginning of the novel, the reader meets Onai and her fears when Mbare thieves attack at night. Gari is nowhere throughout the action, and only comes home when the thieves have struck (7-8). The reader gets to know of the women who also sell at the market with Onai. These include the prying Maya, who dominates her husband and has information on every one. However, in a bid to give a balanced and realistic representation of her women characters, Tagwira almost falls into the trap of demonizing Maya, thereby confirming the stereotype of women as gossipers.

Negative stereotypes of women persist in spite of all the contributions different women have made in national development. This explains why Maya is portrayed as too assertive, a description that fits male authority's definition of a dangerous women who can mislead other 'docile' women into challenging patriarchy. Maya is depicted as a woman at the vegetable market stalls who seems to enjoy the misfortunes of other people. Although a minor character, Maya's gossiping nature is emphasized to the extent that her earnest efforts as a cross border trader are overshadowed by her big mouth. For one moment, one may forget that Maya too, just

like Onai, struggles to make ends meet in a society that swims in economic hardships. She too deserves the reader's admiration, as she relatively does well as a cross border trader. She is an epitome of the new generation of Zimbabwean women who determine the course of their lives. This generation of women does not allow patriarchy to dictate their lives. They are dynamic in that they have taken over the mantle of providing food and other forms of the means of livelihood that men can no longer give to their familes. In these new ways, women redefine their roles in positive ways and take the responsibility for their actions in advancing the economic wellbeing of a collapsing society, whose political, economic and cultural institutions have been run down by men's misrule. Women characters such as Onai, Katy and Maya thus break away from oppressive conventions that spell out what is appropriate for the woman and conventions that are informed by patriarchal ideology. Tagwira challenges traditional women stereotypes of women as hangers-on and shows that cultural constructions can continually be contested and renewed by women on new social grounds that the Zimbabwean crisis has made possible to enable black women to re-occupy spaces that once were dominated by men.

Onai's generosity towards the 'mentally challenged' man, Mawaya, also introduces Mawaya to the reader. Mawaya, the mysterious man who goes begging from door to door, and to whom Onai has been very kind, later turns out not to be who he appears to be. He ends up being Onai's understanding employer, (Mr. Jongwe) in Borrowdale, and opens a new window of hope for Onai when he employs her as a tailor. In short, Onai's quest for a life worth living occupies a significant place in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. However, Onai is not the only woman whose struggles constitute the heart of *The Uncertainty of Hope*. The reader encounters the determined Faith who organizes a women's group, the sacrificing Emily who continues to work as medical doctor even when her salary cannot sustain her and the compassionate Katy who is generous towards her friend Onai. All these women's endeavours give a new flavour to the discussion on gender and danger. They are unwilling to let patriarchy have an upper hand. They come together in complex ways and wage impressive struggle against oppression. Tagwira is convinced that when women come together and challenge gender values and norms that are stifling, they can score some successes.

5.3 Exploring the Social and Economic Background Informing *The Uncertainty of Hope*

Patriarchy continues to be a dominant ideology that sacrifices women to achieve male happiness. Men such as Gari condition women to tolerate abusive marriages. Toro is empowered by patriarchy to temporarily dispossess Onai and her children of their house. In spite of all the socio-economic hardships that are evident in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, women such as Onai and Katy are at the fore front, trying to fend for their families. Tagwira makes use of Onai's trip to the rural areas to show that the whole of Zimbabwe has become a *House of Hunger* (Marechera 1978). Even the "sunshine city" has become a more difficult place to live in.

Harare (and Zimbabwe by extension) as described in *The Uncertainty of Hope* represents an oppressive environment where women struggle to eke out a living. As if the food shortages and hyperinflation were not enough, there is the HIV epidemic causing suffering and death. Sheila, Gari's former girlfriend, is sickly and succumbs to AIDS. Sheila's life illustrates the idea of conflating women with AIDS. That women are evaluated on the basis that they are a danger to society is confirmed by Jackson who writes that in the context of AIDS, "Single African women are no longer represented as the venereal filters sapping away at colonial capitalist efficiency, they are represented as angels of death in the age of HIV/AIDS" (Jackson 1999: 163). However, HIV does not strike women only. This one-sided depiction of gender and danger is challenged by Tagwira when she shows the devastating effects of AIDS on both women and men. Tagwira's depiction of men such as Gari suffering from HIV reveals a complex understanding of the political economy of HIV and AIDS.

In the novel, Sheila is a woman who is disempowered. She has a stall at the flea market but also 'sells her body' to supplement what she gets from the market. She trades in sex for basic needs such as food. However, by going out with Gari, she brings misery to the life of a fellow woman-Onai. In the end, Sheila is remorseful and apologises to Onai before she dies of AIDS. Sheila represents another category of women who conform to the negative stereotype of gender and danger. She is depicted as a dangerous woman or a husband snatcher. Above all, she is ill-informed about the dynamics of HIV and sexuality. She jeopardizes her health further when she conceives when she is HIV positive. She dies and leaves behind an unhealthy baby. Sheila's lifestyle proves to be different from that of the other women such as Onai. This is why Butler

(1990:14) contends that variously positioned women articulate separate identities, and warns against the danger of using the term 'women' to suggest a mythical uniformity of identities of women as a social grouping.

In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, AIDS is personified and depicted as having an evil sense of humour: it causes death to Onai's twin brothers within two hours of each other. Indeed, "death had failed to separate the two brothers who did everything together" (273). AIDS has sponsored the flourishing of the death industry. Remarking on John's polishing of bricks, Tagwira says:

> These had been ordered by a man who specialised in making granite tombstones, a flourishing business with the AIDS pandemic, when everything to do with funerals had become a potential money-spinner – enterprising entrepreneurs had soon discovered that it was possible to make huge profits from another's misery. (163).

AIDS destroys families because the collapsing health delivery system cannot cope with the great number of patients. In fact, in the novel, the health delivery system is depicted as if it is a person in an intensive care unit. There are no drugs at the hospitals and the few remaining health professionals, such as Emily, are overworked. The collapse of the health delivery system causes suffering and death on a large scale. When Onai goes to the hospital after Gari has beaten her up, she has to endure pain as medicines are in short supply. Worse still, those who require anti-retroviral therapy die prematurely because they are too poor to access the life-saving medication. Sheila dies because she belongs to the category of those whose lives are made by society to appear as if they do not count. When asked by Onai to go and try to secure medication from the hospital the following week, Sheila retorts, " No point going back next week. Ha ha! They said I must try next year. *Hakusi kupenga ikoko*? It's madness! I am sure to be dead by then. They don't care. So why should I care?", (61). Sheila is forced to think that her life is of little or no consequence. Sheila gives up the fight against men and HIV. She eventually dies. Through Sheila's death, Tagwira shows how Sheila plays up to the stereotype of women as innately weak and powerless (Mohanty 1995). This is an argument that suits some sections of patriarchy. By not going for medical help and dying, Sheila confirms the powers of those naming her as useless. The author uses Sheila's death to differentiate women's responses to HIV and AIDS in

Zimbabwe. Sheila chooses not to seek medical help. This is spirit thievery. Her reason to live, her will power and initiative to survive are taken away. Sheila is, thus, both a victim and a potential perpetrator in her self-destruction. This is a dangerous tendency. However, this is not a case of blaming the victim. It is an acknowledgement that even in the most distressing situations, humans have always made every effort to maintain a sense of order and semblance. Unfortunately, in this case, Sheila allows herself to give up and she dies. Sheila falls short of Moyana's (2006) category of assertive women. Sheila is inherently passive. Her argument suits some patriarchs. Her resignation through a death that could have been prevented demonstrates flawed agency.

In the novel, the author describes the conditions that create unnecessary deaths such as that of Sheila. In Harare, instead of helping the ailing population, the government intensifies political repression on its citizens. Those who are in power do not consider the plight of the poor. If anything, they have perfected the art of coercion. When members of the Kushinga Women's Project undertake a peaceful march, riot police beat them up mercilessly (264-265). These women activists question the injustice perpetrated against women, thus posing danger to patriarchal rule. This is why they receive the brutal treatment from the male police officers who want to keep them in their 'right place'. Thus, apart from the danger that women face from a collapsing health system, political repression worsens and makes the lives of women miserable in a country that is supposed to champion their rights. As depicted in the novel, Zimbabwe has become a country where political repression has become normal. Operation Murambatsvina in which the government demolished the shacks and some houses that the mainly urban population were renting out to augment family incomes reveals the cruelty of a class of people who no longer rule with the mandate of the people. The widening gap between the ruling elite and the poor masses testifies to a dangerous society in which life is measured in terms of wealth one has and not the health of the citizens. In such a context it is apt for the women's project as to be called 'kushinga', which literally means women have to be brave. The women have to be courageous enough to have their voices heard in a hostile political and cultural environment. It could be argued here that Tagwira is deliberately inviting women to challenge the oppressive system in ways that transform their agency into positive 'danger' so that with a new resolve the women can critically reflect on their conditions and work towards gaining freedom.

One of the consequences of a collapsing economy, in the novel, is that economic hardships lead many Zimbabweans to flee to other countries, such as South Africa, Britain and Botswana, where they are considered economic exiles. However, this exit option has occasioned the destruction of many families because of the physical separation of spouses. For example, Chanda's wife goes to the UK. The husband takes the absence of the wife as an opportunity to sleep with other women such as Melody (172). In fact, Melody articulates the issue so well when she says:

> I haven't done anything to his wife! I'm not the one who told her to become a 'dot.com' in the UK. You tell me what she's doing there, leaving her husband and children, visiting them only twice a year…risking her marriage to chase the pound. How foolish is that? (80).

Again, through Chanda's wife and Melody, it is suggested that the life choices that these two women make are bent on the desire to lead meaningful lives in trying times, although the two's strategies are completely different. While the motivations of Chanda's wife can be described as altruistic because she is going out of the country to fend for the family, Melody's agency is destructive as she takes advantage of the absence of Chanda's wife to sleep with her husband. This slots her image into that category of women who service men's sexual needs, only to be named prostitutes by the same men.

During the colonial period, the colonial patriarchy dictated that it was basically the men who would go into towns to seek employment, and occasionally come back home, (Schmidt 1992). However, in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, women are the ones who go to the Diaspora, ready to do menial jobs and serve their families, where most men are not inspired to do so. The new construction of women's social place and role can have a liberating aspect to it. People such as Chanda's wife are no longer confined to the home. They can also explore the world in more creative and gainful ways. It is Chanda, the husband, who is portrayed as reckless when he engages in lifestyles that threaten his marriages. In other words, in the novel, where patriarchy

depends on women's labour to sustain itself, it views any attempt by women to liberate themselves as a danger.

5.4 Facing Terrible Situations: Women's Struggles in *The Uncertainty of Hope*

Tagwira has given a detailed account of women's struggles at the height of socio-economic and political problems in Zimbabwe. Where the authors discussed in the previous chapters described the cultural factors that fuel women's subordination and their vulnerability to HIV and AIDS, Tagwira does well to draw attention to the impact of the economic and political factors on the welfare of Zimbabwean women. The author contextualizes the discourse of AIDS within the economic and political spheres. She has succeeded in demonstrating that the quality of women's lives is compromised when the economic system is highly unfavourable to their social advancement. Through Faith who tends to be highly analytical, the author seems to summarise the impact of the economy on women as follows:

> She thought of her mother engaging in unlawful foreign-currency dealing to put her through university, and build a dream home. She thought of *mainini* Onai struggling to raise three children within an abusive marriage; of Melody, trading her innocence for university fees and groceries. How far was she from promiscuity? She thought of *mainini* Onai's lodger, Sheila, a self-proclaimed ex-prostitute whose fear of hunger had been greater than her fear of AIDS. Even she had niggling suspicions about the man she loved, and his farm. Hadn't the promise of security been an initial attraction? Was Melody right in saying, 'Blame the economy for forcing… [me into a corner]'. (82).

The passage above constitutes a summary of Harare women's struggles in the face of HIV within a collapsing economy. Tagwira asserts that women in different circumstances face serious economic challenges, but are always navigating their way in social murky waters in order to survive. A decently married woman who has a happy relationship with her husband is Katy but she is still forced to enter into the dark world of dealing in foreign currency. Onai has to 'win bread' in an environment where there is little or no bread to be won. A young woman at the university, Melody, has to have an affair with a married man in order to ensure her graduation. Sheila has to sell her body in relationships that are tantamount to prostitution in order to survive.

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Dagin (2005) traces prostitution from ancient times, through various historical facets up to the present day. In his analysis of what generally drives people into prostitution, he argues that "this is principally promoted by various problems ranging from social inequality to economic deprivation", (2005: 24). Sheila confirms this observation when she has to choose between dying of hunger or AIDS. Since AIDS is a more distant threat when compared to hunger, she chooses to sell her body to satisfy the immediate need for bread on her table. Faith, although having prospects of a successful career as a lawyer, also suspects that Tom's promise of financial security has been a big factor in their relationship.

Tagwira seems to be suggesting that women's lack of economic empowerment increases their vulnerability to HIV and AIDS, especially in the context where men do not care less for protected sex. For example, Melody enters into a relationship based on transactional sex with Chanda in order to meet the specific goal of completing her studies. She silences Faith with these words:

> Do you think this is what I wanted for myself? This is what I have to do, not what I want. For the first time since I came to varsity, I haven't had to scrounge and get by on one meal a day…or have you passing me your left-overs. For the first time, I haven't had to worry about which one of my pompous relatives I should approach to beg for money, only to endure lectures about how they are struggling as well. For the first time in months, I haven't spent sleepless nights considering whether I should become a prostitute to finance my studies…(81).

It is clear from Melody's explanation that at stake are not moral issues. What is at stake here is basic survival. If she does not go out with Chanda, she is doomed. For her, transactional sex is the price she has to pay for survival. The novel ends when Melody and Chanda's relationship having soured although Melody has learnt quite a lot from her affair with Chanda. She graduates and focuses on her career as a lawyer. Here, Tagwira suggests that it is possible for women who engage in transactional sex, to abandon negative behavior once their needs have been realized. This can be taken as a form of creative danger employed by women to fight patriarchy. Though a

debased form of survival, prostitution can allow women to realize their potential, and undermine the barriers erected by patriarchy. White's study (1990) of prostitution in colonial Nairobi has shown that some women who were initially caught up in unequal sexual relationships sometimes ended up benefitting from these relationships in ways that empowered them to send their children to school and accumulate property in an urban context that was basically hostile to women.

In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Melody does not have a relationship with a married man for fun, but it is because of need. As long as women do not have adequate financial resources and depend on men, they will remain vulnerable to HIV. Tagwira, like Phiri in *Desperate* and *Highway Queen*, cautions against the tendency to dismiss sex workers as immoral women who are out to make money quickly. Even Gloria, who openly parades her attractive body to entice men, is a victim of circumstances. Without using her body, she will not survive in the harsh world of Mbare. She has neither the education nor the social skills to enable her to negotiate her way around the treacherous urban terrain. She, thus, snares men such as Gari who are unable to control their thoughts, lives and roving eyes. Of course, the wives of such men will not understand her situation, as they too are struggling under patriarchal oppression. Women such as Gloria feel that they are victims of patriarchy. Living in a world where poor women do not receive any cushioning from the harsh economic situation, they harbor bitterness against men in particular and society in general. Gloria reckons that she needs to get even with men who have used her as a sex object. She is highly dangerous to patriarchy and is in no way a hapless victim. Gloria strategises to strike back against patriarchy, as demonstrated by Tagwira who writes:

> Gloria had no illusions about her own HIV status. She was shrewd enough to realise that it was just a matter of time before the inevitable happened. She did not want to die a lonesome death on the streets of Mbare, or in a ditch somewhere, as had happened to some of her dearest friends in the profession. She needed a man to call her own, a man who would look after her when HIV laid its claim on her. (39).

Ignorant of her HIV status as she is, Gloria is quite clear of what she wants, that is, to find a committed man for her own security. She identifies Gari for that man whom she manipulates to

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ensure some form of permanence of their relationship, all to her advantage. However, as fate would have it, Gari dies first, leaving Gloria quite insecure. Tagwira makes it plain that to be a woman is to be marked out for possible HIV infection. Womanhood implies vulnerability to HIV. It does not matter what one's social standing is. One could be *Amai* (Mrs.) Onai Moyo, a respectable married woman, but HIV is still a threat. One could be either Sheila or Gloria, both sex workers: HIV is an occupational hazard that would ultimately harm them sooner or later.

Ambitious young women studying at the university such as Melody are equally at risk. HIV appears to affect women the most. However, while it seems death from hunger is more painful than death from AIDS, when one is now in the death throes due to AIDS, the opposite seems to be the case. Melody reflects:

> When I was a prostitute, I didn't care about catching HIV. I thought I would die from hunger, anyway. As a prostitute, I could at least die with a full stomach. Now that I know I will die of AIDS, I think dying of hunger is far much better. If I could have another chance…(62).

It is unfortunate that this woman has been forced to choose 'ways of dying.' In an ideal world, she should choose ways of living. Unequal gender relations have left her debating less painful ways of dying. Tagwira seems to be protesting that society has set up women to succumb to HIV and AIDS. Through the painful sharing from woman to woman, that is from Sheila to Onai (who, ironically is the wife of her former boyfriend, Gari), these two women express collective pain, an act of solidarity, which, if sustained, should advance gender equity in a once male-dominated society. The author is calling upon society to reverse its social ideologies constructed to disadvantage women. Tagwira challenges those in charge of policies to produce more humane and women-friendly policies.

The novel shows that many women are forced to sell sex, both inside the country and outside. Desperation forces some women to engage in sex work for the *kwacha*, the Zambian currency that has traditionally been ridiculed in Zimbabwe (179). Young girls are being smuggled by truck drivers such as John to undertake sex work in South Africa. As is the case with Sheila and

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Gloria, it is not as if these young women are not aware of the dangers posed by sex work. It is just that they do not have the comfort that those who condemn them have. Whereas their critics have the luxury of choosing alternative strategies for survival, these young women do not have such a choice.

The culture in which women such as Sheila and Gloria operate is quick to describe them as carriers of disease. Women are accused of facilitating sexually transmitted infections, without considering the role of male co-conspirators, and the conditions that force women into sex work. It is this unfair labelling of women that leads men to deal harshly with sex workers such as Sheila and Gloria. The overall socio-economic and political context worsens the plight of women in the time of HIV. In particular, poverty has encircled women, leaving them struggling for survival. In the novel, John is brutal in his assessment of the possibilities of poor women climbing out of the poverty trap. He says, "This is Zimbabwe. A poor woman will always be a poor woman. *Hazvichinje*!"(18). The emphasis on "*hazvichinje*"(things will not change) appears to be directed at the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)'s promise of bringing positive change to the country (Raftopoulous 2009). However, women in *The Uncertainty of Hope* do not easily give up, even when the people such as John express no hope for them. These women's success, either in informal trade or formal employment, is feared because it threatens patriarchal hegemony, hence, the effort to dampen women's spirits by men such as John.

Having illegal dealings with men such as Nzou also leaves women such as Katy vulnerable to HIV. Although Nzou does not seek to seduce Katy, the nature of their interaction makes her quite vulnerable. In the novel, Nzou is a senior police officer who can make Katy's life uncomfortable, particularly as she is dealing in foreign currency. In this regard, the general social decay makes women engage in risky pursuits. Unfortunately, men retain power and control. This leaves women at the receiving end of gender relations, even though they try to recreate themselves. Nzou and Katy's partnership is an unequal one. Katy is at the mercy of Nzou by virtue of his elevated position in the police force where he is an Assistant Commissioner.

Desperate circumstances also lead girls to be vulnerable. Rita takes to vending in an effort to supplement the family income. However, touts, representing an aggressive version of manhood,

pose a real threat to her (187). Girls like Rita are prone to HIV as most men are likely to take advantage of her vulnerability. Actually, the world is a dangerous place for girls. Among the men who arrest Rita for illegal vending, one of them squeezes her breast (199). Even in the rural areas, supposedly the reservoir of cultural authenticity, girls are not safe. Rita writes a letter to her mother informing her that a boy had touched her breasts (337). The possibility of being forced into intimate relationships and, therefore, contracting HIV hovers around mothers and their daughters. McFadden (1992) has offered a penetrating analysis of the gendered nature of HIV and AIDS and the violence associated with it. She has shown how false narratives have been yarned, mostly, by men and some women describing African women as the carriers of HIV and AIDS.

5.5 Gender-Based Violence in *The Uncertainty of Hope*

In Harare, violence appears to be a socially acceptable means of settling conflict. At the level of the state, violence has been institutionalized as a means to control the restless population. In the novel, a group of women carrying flowers is brutally attacked by riot police. This makes one become aware of the total disregard of women's rights and dignity. This brutality against women is not confined to state actions. Men in homes and in public spaces do not treat women with respect. Gari does not respect his wife at all. He attacks her for no apparent reason. He appears to believe that as a man he has the license of using violence to 'discipline' Onai. Surprisingly, no one 'disciplines' him for his many faults. Violence against women is not only experienced in its crude form as in the assaults by the police and men such as Gari. Under the pretext of searching for illegal foreign currency, the dignity of women is violated. Katy reports that some of her travelling companions had "spoken of being stripped, poked and prodded in private places" (284). There is also verbal abuse against women by touts and men in general. It is, therefore, difficult to be a woman in an environment where men are in control.

Women have been forced to endure gender-based violence because they do not see any alternatives. They have been socialised to accept that men have a right to beat them. Worse still, the police take the issue lightly, encouraging couples to go back and settle the matter harmoniously. However, abusive men such as Gari are also likely to expose their partners to

HIV. Since they do not respect their partners, they do not like to be challenged over their infidelity. HIV and gender-based violence are two-linked epidemics (Musasa Project 2003).

5.6 Rape

As observed in *Desperate*, communities that do not uphold the rights and dignity of women leave women vulnerable to rape. In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Onai is fortunate not to be raped by Mr. Boora who wanted to take advantage of her desperation for a new house. She uses self-defense tactics to render him immobile. Having had a conversation with Katy, she decides not to pursue the matter through the courts as they feel that he is probably protected by the corrupt system (294-295). Although they could be wrong in their perception, the point of the matter is that these two women are convinced that the rules of this patriarchal society are meant to protect men and to disadvantage women. The rapist, Boora's name is apt as it suggests violence and violation. 'Boora' is a Shona term that means 'pierce or penetrate'.

Having lost a husband and a house, Onai is severely compromised because she does not have any source of financial support and shelter. Her circumstances do not give her protection from an attempted rape. This confirms the fact that women must be constantly on the look-out for rapists, as men seem to persistently violate women sexually. It is up to women to act 'dangerously' in self-defense and frustrate men such as Boora. Tagwira is rallying women to kick men in their most vulnerable spots if the epidemic of rape is to be contained. Such acts will curb cases of men raping women. Rape is a violent sexual act that increases women's susceptibility to HIV and AIDS. Forced and unprotected sexual cohabitation imperils women's bodies. It violates their freedom to choose a man. Patriarchy has always sought to daunt women's agency. The act of a man raping a woman demonstrates how he imagines himself as having power over her, and acting out this assumption. According to Gqola (2009: 99), "some forms of black women's agency are actively discouraged, most visible in the policing of black female sexuality and inscriptions of sexualized violence on the bodies of black female characters". It is unfortunate that in most cases when a man rapes a woman, the victim is blamed.

5.7 The Cultural Context of HIV and AIDS

Although *The Uncertainty of Hope* places more emphasis on the economic and political factors that render the lives of women challenging, it still pays attention to the impact of culture on women's subordination. It is culture that informs (but does not support) Gari's abuse of Onai. Culture too comes into play when Toro dispossesses Onai and her children of their house. Patriarchy co-opts some women in order to preserve male privileges. A good case in point of the creative growth of women's consciousness is manifested when Katy had to go against her aunt's suggestions that men were to be allowed to roam in order to preserve marriage. Katy recollects:

> She sighed, remembering her *tete's* words of advice when she got married. Her father's sister had told her to accept that men had needs that could not be fulfilled by one woman. Animalistic needs that drove them to seek out other women. *Tete* was of the opinion that it did not matter if a man strayed, as long as he returned home. Even in those bygone days, when AIDS had not been an issue, Katy had been skeptical of her *tete's* advice. (244).

Culture has been tactically positioned by men to secure their advantage in their interactions with women. Men contend that 'our culture' allows them to do as they please. Culture is behind the vulnerability of women as it is employed to keep them in positions of powerlessness. It is culture that has socialised Onai to persevere in an abusive and unsustainable marriage. She has to put up with Gari, for the sake of her children and her dignity as a married woman. However, Katy acquires the power to question and go against adverse cultural values.

Gender-based violence already described above is also influenced by culture. Boys and men are made to believe that women are there to serve them. They regard women as their entertainers. Traditions that have been handed down from one generation to another have led men to treat women with contempt. It is painful to note that even young women who enter into marriage soon come face to face with patriarchal culture and its consistent abuse of women. In the novel, an eighteen-year-old married woman explains to Emily:

He is always hitting me, *chiremba*. He does not give me enough money to buy the bread, butter and eggs that he wants. And today I could not heat the leftovers for him because there was a power cut. He hit me with a knobkerrie. The pain in my arm…(185).

Women's vulnerability is often caused by culture, which charges that, it is a man's prerogative to run his household as he wishes, with no allegiance to any rules, especially those dictated by a woman. McFadden (1992) comments on how culture can construct narrow spaces within which women should operate and how these cultural or traditional practices endorse the demonizing of women, even in contexts of HIV and AIDS.

5.8 Operation Murambatsvina and Bad Governance

Tagwira joins the category of courageous artists who have tackled the theme of Operation Murambatsvina, (operation clean up). Vambe (2008) has explored the rehearsals of Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwean literature and popular songs. His central point is that women are arrested on trumped up charges that they are prostitutes. Vambe suggests that this is a dangerous assumption that amounts to saying women are the only prostitutes and that they are originators of HIV. This causes selective application of the law that leaves men scot free. Operation Murambatsvina confirmed the wide gap that exists between the ruling elite and the poor urban dwellers. In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, the reader comes face to face with the viciousness that characterised the operation. In the first instance, one gets to understand that Operation Murambatsvina was an assault on the poor. By focusing on the desperation that wrapped up house owners and their lodgers, Tagwira brings out the unfair nature of the operation.

Tagwira is merciless in her critique of the government for its violence. The lack of sympathy on the part of those who have power is quite deplorable. The encounter between Katy and the police officer vividly brings this to the fore. When Katy asks him where all the people whose shelters have been destroyed will go, he looks totally unconcerned and answers, "They can go wherever they came from…" (138). To destroy people's accommodation without having built alternative shelter shows a totally unconcerned leadership. Potts has exposed the limitations of the notion that everyone can return to wherever they came from. While admitting that some people have retained links with the rural areas, Potts maintains:

However, to characterise all the urban poor as having such links is quite wrong. As each successive new generation is born in towns, the portion of the total population who can 'return' to rural 'homes' reduces. Gender, nationality and land availability are other important factors influencing rural linkages. (Potts 2008: 63).

Tagwira questions the official version that Operation Murambatsvina had 'swept away dirt' and restored 'the sunshine city' to its original state. Rather she contends that it was responsible for death and loss of livelihoods. Murambatsvina caused trauma and uncertainty to many families. It was responsible for the death of Hondo, a war veteran who feels abused. Having contributed to the liberation of Zimbabwe, he feels unwanted when young police officers humiliate him. There are three other funerals in Jo'burg Lines. Families seek refuge in the open Tsiga Grounds amidst the turmoil. One woman is found dead in a ditch, as revealed by Tagwira:

Another woman had committed suicide by taking rat poison, when both her tuck-shop and her shack were demolished within a few hours of each other. With no home and no means to look after her six children, life had ceased to hold any meaning. As the story was told, death had been almost a quick and easy escape. Her children, including a one-year-old toddler, joined the homeless throngs on Tsiga Grounds. A lot of children stopped going to school because the very notion of sitting down in class to concentrate on lessons seemed pointless, when they were homeless and starving. (155).

A condemning finger is pointed at the politicians for failing to see that they have compromised the lives of the poor. Operation Murambatsvina had a negative impact on the livelihoods of the women of Mbare. By extension, their families were pushed deeper into poverty. Onai, Katy, and other women who sell fruits and vegetables at the market have their livelihood threatened by the operation. Those who supply them with fruits and vegetables are also affected negatively. Tagwira is blaming the politicians for having not done enough research to establish the impact and consequences of their policies. Some of the policies they formulate induce suffering and death for women, children and poor people in general.

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Operation Murambatsvina leaves women dangerously exposed to HIV and other social ills as their sources of income are compromised. Undeniably, survivors (or even, victims) of Murambatsvina are right in feeling that the state was waging war against women and the poor. This is brought out clearly in the interview Vambe conducted with Mai Saddy (who could be Onai, Katy, Maya or any other woman who survived through vending):

> Operation Murambatsvina actually came to destroy people's living. Authorities saw that women were carrying out initiatives on their own, boosting the standards of lives for their families. So, Operation Murambatsvina actually targeted women in order to undermine their efforts, in the process depriving people of their money, livelihood and property. (Vambe 2008: 81).

Sheila represents the terrible impact of Operation Murambatsvina on people living with HIV. Despite her failing health, she is pushed out into the cold. Her sickly baby is also exposed to the harsh weather conditions. It is not surprising to learn that she dies soon after (213). The reader soon learns that her baby was taken in by nuns at an orphanage in Epworth. As fate would have it, the police demolished the orphanage as the nuns had built it without council approval (214). The fate of Sheila and her baby summarises the struggle of people living with HIV in the face of Operation Murambatsvina.

The challenges facing women, the poor and vulnerable in *The Uncertainty of Hope* are attributable to bad governance. Politicians who have become obsessed with power no longer care about the welfare of the poor. Whereas Operation Murambatsvina has been presented in official discourse as cleansing the country of 'the crawling mass of maggots who are bent on destroying the economy', readers know the true victims. Murambatsvina unpleasantly classifies them as 'dirt.' Chimedza protests:

> This 'crawling mass of maggots' is overwhelmingly composed of the economically weakest groups of all: women, children, the unemployed and underemployed, recent migrants from the rural areas escaping droughts and hunger and hordes of former farm workers made jobless and landless and those that have resided in the towns after

migrating from countries like Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique who are referred to as '*mabhurandaya*', '*machawa*', '*mabwidi*', and so on. (Chimedza 2008: 89).

Readers already know of the many challenges that Onai, the vendor, is facing. They are familiar with the frightening odds that other market women are facing. Far from seeking to destroy the economy, these women enhance the economy and are vital for the survival of their families.

5.9 '*Tiri Varume*, We Are Men': The Portrayal of Men in *The Uncertainty of Hope*

Gender, as already underlined in this chapter, refers to the socially prescribed roles for women and men. It also represents the power relationship between women and men as social beings. The sections above have concentrated on the portrayal of women in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. The sections discussed have shown how patriarchy and other forces have worked against women and left them at the bottom of the pile. This section will focus on the portrayal of men. This will provide a more balanced picture. One of the major limitations of works that have analysed gender in Zimbabwean literature is that they have focused exclusively on the portrayal of women. This has wrongly given the impression that gender means women; in reality, gender are social roles that can be grafted on the biological identities of maleness and femaleness. These roles unfortunately have been so determined that they benefit men more than they do for women.

Men do not fare very well in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. If anything, they come in for some serious criticism. Harare (and Zimbabwe) is a difficult place to live in because of men. It is men who exercise political power and make economic decisions. Male experts have allowed the Zimbabwe dollar to become a worthless piece of paper. It is also men who are in charge of the collapsed state. The riot police officers who oversee Operation Murambatsvina are men. Macho images are quite visible in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. One does not expect anything good from the men. Tragically, little boys such as Onai's son, Fari are being brought up to aspire to be "a demolition man" (145).

The masculinity that is exhibited in *The Uncertainty of Hope* thrives on violence, subordination of women, irresponsibility and insatiable sexual desire. The masculine state sustains itself through unjustifiable cruelty. Whereas in some indigenous culture the bodies of women were

considered humanely, the post-colonial state has a different interpretation. In the name of defending the revolution, it visits violence on unarmed women from Kushinga Women's Project as they are deemed dangerous to patriarchy and the privileges that it avails to men. Tagwira charges that men are sponsors of violence. Women are at the receiving end of male-instigated violence. As indicated earlier on, this violence is also meted out in individual homes.

Gari is a tragic case. He represents all that is wrong about flawed masculinity. He is a father in name only. In actual fact, both his presence and absence at home does not appear to make a difference to his family. When he is absent, disaster strikes. This is the case at the beginning of the novel when thieves strike and get away with the television set. When he is present, there is chaos, such as when he brings his girlfriend, Gloria home. This is an act of extreme annoyance that confirms the obstinacy of wild masculinity. His death, though tragic, does not present any noticeable gap. In a sense, Gari is already 'dead' or a walking corpse from the start of the novel to its very end.

Gari is as annoying as he is pathetic. He is a victim of wrong socialisation, even as he goes ahead to act out his masculinity in painful ways. He is not even a 'traditional' man as he does not undertake chores that have been assigned to men, such as mending broken doors (58). Instead, he is violent and unreasonable at every turn. He is of no relevance to his family. If anything, he is a barrier to their progress. He has vandalised the sewing machine that Onai was using to bring food to the table. Even his children realise that he is a liability. Consider the following scene:

> Onai was ready to tell Ruva off, but Fari didn't look bothered. 'Maybe *baba* knows. I will ask him, if he comes before I go to sleep,' he said hopefully. Ruva cackled sarcastically, 'Ask who? Do we ever see him? Fari, you are so stupid! I'm really getting worried about you'. (114).

Gari represents the crisis of fatherhood (Morrell and Richter 2006). He does not invest in the well-being of his family. He lacks intimacy and would rather be feared. His irresponsibility is appalling. When he is retrenched, he prioritizes pleasing his girlfriend Gloria. Operation Murambatsvina strikes while he is having a nice time with his girlfriend. Nowhere in the

narrative does the reader encounter Gari making a positive plan. All he thinks about are his girlfriends. He has not paid for his Medical Aid and dies without having made any worthwhile investment. The only consolation is that there is a house. Gari is violent, unloving, selfish and insensitive. He is able to enjoy his biltong while Onai eats beans (90). He is a mini representation of the big men who are able to multiply houses while the people of Mbare know the real meaning of poverty. Gari is careless. He is easily moved by Gloria's sexuality and forgets his responsibilities. He wastes his limited resources on women. Gari is a striking failure. It is sad that he eventually dies, but perhaps his death enables Onai to rise to her true potential. Men such as Gari only serve to frustrate the efforts of industrious and talented women like Onai.

The concept of a 'small house' or extra marital affairs with young women features significantly in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. This concept is closely related to the idea of men having insatiable sexual appetites that require them to have a number of sexual partners. Having a 'small house' is seen as a symbol of honour and confirmation that one is a 'real man'. Even men who are struggling financially, such as Gari, strive to have a 'small house'. This is why he celebrates his relationship with Gloria. In his mind, he has confirmed his manhood. In conversations, it becomes apparent that the men in the novel have normalised the idea of having a 'small house'.

Most men in *The Uncertainty of Hope* do not understand themselves outside the context of chasing after women. As became clear in Phiri's *Desperate*, men are under the impression that their sexual urge is irresistible. This notion puts them under serious risk of HIV infection. Gari is imprisoned by Gloria's shapely back and her manipulation of it (119). Men's risk- taking seems to have no limits. Such is men's recklessness that they continue to visit Sheila for sexual purposes (66-67). They are unable to resist Gloria's charms, and are being attracted to her "like flies to cow dung" (216).

It is the social construction of men as having unlimited sexual desires and needs that leads to men's vulnerability in the framework of HIV and AIDS. The same process leads some men to regard women as sex objects. This generates violence against women and the general lack of respect for them. This failure to treat women with esteem knows no social class. Young men at the university are disrespectful towards women (77), as are the other young men in Mbare who

only regard the missing Rita as a sex object (198). Men have the mistaken view that their identities are necessarily derived from their being different from women. They believe that they are stronger and more strategic than women. When facing the reality of losing their jobs, Gari and Silas take false comfort in the fact that they are men. In this scheme, men are not easily intimidated, and face every challenge with courage, "Cheer up Silas! *Tiri varume*, we are men. We must not panic like a bunch of women. We will face the problems when they come. No use worrying now. It won't solve anything" (37). In this case, the reference made to the stereotype of "a bunch of women" who always panic, and the subsequent proclamation of one's manhood show how afraid men are. The perception of '*tiri varume*' can be dangerous to both women and men in the context of *The Uncertainty of Hope*. It entitles men to do the things that hurt women and men too.

5.10 Masculinity Under Examination in *The Uncertainty of Hope*

Although men assume that they are strong and are in charge, this perception is not always fulfilled in real life. There are a number of realities and circumstances that prevent men from acting out their masculinity in the manner that they are constructed to believe. In the first instance, the economic situation has rendered men weak. Women who operate in the informal sector are able to win more bread than the men who are formally employed. This subverts gender relations as men have been trained to imagine only themselves as bread winners. Married women earning more than their husbands are likely to be exposed to gender-based violence (Tumusiime 2010). Gari, for example, becomes more violent towards Onai when he is retrenched and financially insecure. The negative impact of the economy on masculinity has either led men to forfeit their claim to authority or has compromised their ability to put bread on the table. Earning useless millions of dollars, they are unable to provide for their families. The local culture has socialised boys and men to regard their central role as that of providing for their families. The situation is worsened by the shortage of basic commodities and an oppressive political environment. These factors have left men feeling inadequate.

Operation Murambatsvina demonstrates that the men who consider themselves to be strong and daring are in fact weaklings when they come face to face with state-sponsored violence. The men in Mbare are powerless to defend their shacks when the police order their destruction. Even

Hondo, the war veteran who demonstrated a lot of courage by taking up to fight the settler state, is powerless when confronted by young police officers. His suicide, like that of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1958) confirms that male honour can cause the downfall of men. As Okonkwo felt that the sons of Umofia had become effeminate or "women" (Teka 2008: 29-30), so does Hondo who feels that the young police officers have reduced him to a 'woman'. This is the ultimate insult and Hondo, like Okonkwo, decides that the life of a 'woman' is not worth living.

It is useful to note that the police officers who are representatives of a forceful masculinity are themselves victims of masculinity. They are being used by more powerful men. Worse still, some of them have had their own shacks destroyed by others. In particular, Nzou's case confirms that power can vanish quickly. Despite his impressive title, he is arrested and his status diminishes overnight. His dependence on Tsikamutanda for magical protection indicates the limitation of his mental abilities. Tagwira is questioning male strength, suggesting that women are more calculating and less gullible than men.

Men are also not well informed on sexual and reproductive issues, although they want to believe that they are experts in these issues. One young man asks whether the condom can be washed and re-used (339). Gari is unable to detect that Onai is using a female condom. On many occasions, he is too drunk to even make a suggestive move. This trend is also seen in Phiri's *Desperate*. This confirms that while the cultural ideology wishes men to regard themselves as efficient sex machines, in reality their prowess is nowhere to be seen. Although masculinity thrives on dominating women, not all men succeed in this ideal. In fact, some men are totally controlled by their wives. Maya's husband, Mazai, is one such man. He is completely subservient to his wife (123). He represents an abortive masculinity. Such men do not have any standing in society. 'Real men', according to retrogressive patriarchy are supposed to order their wives around, and not vice versa.

The most enlightening critique of masculinity comes from Gari's succumbing to AIDS. Once aggressive and mobile, he has been reduced to a sorry sight. As Lizzy Attree (2007) has observed, the frailty of the male body due to AIDS threatens the notion of "the strong healthy

man". It is ironic that Gari finds himself 'less of a man' now because he has always sought to become 'more of a man'. AIDS reconfigures the male body and compromises its alleged vitality. It forces men to think seriously about what it means to be a man.

5.11 Agency, Gender and Danger: *The Uncertainty of Hope*

When exposed to Gari's sexual adventures, the reader wonders whether Onai will survive HIV. As Onai reflects upon the death of Gari and her loss of the house to Toro, Gari's brother, the reader is forced to enter into her world of thoughts. The danger that is implied here is that women lose what they have worked for during their life time. Patriarchy grants men all the power, leaving women to struggle under men's control. Onai's case reveals this plainly. When her husband, Gari dies, she loses the house to her late husband's brother. However, unlike Phiri's Susan in *Desperate* who is also forced out of her matrimonial home upon the death of her husband, and goes for sex work, Onai is an empowered widow who resists patriarchal domination over women. She refuses to conform to oppressive traditions that say, "This is our custom; this is the way it was done in the olden days and this is how they must continue", (Damap 2007: 32). Onai rejects to be fatalistic and accepts the unacceptable. She puts up a noble fight and recovers her house. This is a different form of danger revealing agency and creativity. Whereas Onai exhibits positive danger, Gloria employs negative agency when she goes out with married men for a living. This is her act of out-maneuvering society in order to survive. She is marred in doing negative things. Although Gloria gets the basics she requires, prostitution is socially unacceptable. Her agency is thus flawed (Motsemme 2007). Gloria exhibits negative danger to both women and men.

The Uncertainty of Hope is a persuasive, gender-sensitive novel. Tagwira must be commended for her candid analysis of the economic and political factors that have left women, children and most men in desperate situations. Critically, she does not simply present women as wretched victims of patriarchy. Her work must be celebrated for the agency that it bestows on her women characters. As indicated earlier on, agency is critical if women are to negotiate their way around patriarchal domination and oppression. The concept is used in gender studies to draw attention to the ways and strategies that women employ in their quest to meet their own expectations against the background of oppression (Aslop, Fitzsimons and Lennon 2002: 230-232). Women do not

sit back and wait for some miraculous intervention in order for their situation to change. Women take it upon themselves to transform their situations. When they do this, they threaten the grip that patriarchy has over them. The system is ill, and, as Sontag (1988) has illustrated, HIV is now a metaphor of the decline of dominant ideologies of power and control. Women have, therefore, the capacity to liberate themselves and in the process jeopardize the interests that men enjoy.

Women's agency also suggests that when it appears logical for women to wait for theirs death, they summon courage and plan a way forward. Tagwira ensures that her female characters act to change their circumstances. A good example is Onai. Generally, one would expect Onai to die because of AIDS. However, because she has exercised her agency, she survives AIDS. Through an act of disobedience and subversion, she has negotiated with, and successfully defeated, patriarchy. Onai has insisted on Gari using condoms, sometimes taking advantage of his drunkenness. Such are acts of positive danger which should be applauded, even when the men feel threatened by their loss of control of women's bodies. The danger here is perceived from the fear that, if left on their own, women can challenge or transgress, thereby shaking the foundations of patriarchy. In the era of HIV and AIDS, men fear that if women can control their sexuality, they can use it in a way that undermines the patriarchal expectation of bride price. When women author their own stories, they now have a narrative voice. They can at this moment name their hopes in their own terms, no matter how uncertain. Onai's 'biggest failure as a wife' becomes her 'greatest success as a woman'. Tagwira states:

> Her biggest failure as a wife lay in refusing Gari his conjugal rights…unless he agreed to use condoms. In a rare moment of rebelliousness, she had told him clearly no condoms, no intimacy. She felt a twinge of guilt, then immediately forgave herself. What was a woman supposed to do with a philandering husband when the risk of HIV infection was so real? So real that everyone in a relationship was at risk? (69).

It is by defying patriarchy that this woman can survive AIDS. When women act in ways that are deemed counter-cultural, they are giving themselves a fighting chance. Had Onai been complicit in her own oppression, she would have joined the statistics of those succumbing to AIDS. She also makes use of the female condom, often taking advantage of Gari's lack of awareness.

Furthermore, Onai remains principled, "…never would she demean herself by offering sexual favours" (293). When forced into a corner and vulnerable to rape, she resorts to self-defense. Although the reader might fear for her as she undergoes the HIV test, it is clear that she has gone to great lengths to protect herself. As it is, she tests HIV negative.

Onai bears testimony to the challenges that women face in contemporary Zimbabwe. She is responsible for the welfare of her children and does everything in her power to ensure that they get food, remain in school and thrive. She is a very strong woman who sacrifices a lot for her children. She defies the stereotype that women are born depended on men and shall so die, dependend on men's favours. Through Onai, one questions the notion that women are weak and easily break down. She epitomises the resilience and creativity of women that the author wishes to acknowledge and celebrate.

Katy is another good example of a woman who exercises her agency. She remains painfully aware of her vulnerability because of John's occupation as a truck driver. In any case, John is a man and one can never swear for any man when it comes to sexual matters. As a result, she even packs condoms for John, in case he may want to engage in extra-marital sex (242). Given the cultural context, this is a revolutionary act. Katy is putting survival ahead of cultural considerations. Critics might charge that she is giving John 'the green light' to engage in promiscuous activities, but her realism is valuable. Katy undergoes an HIV test and her result is negative. She is the one who encourages Onai to go for an HIV test. Katy does not fall into the trap of celebrating her status as 'mudzimai', a decent, married woman. She is fully aware of her vulnerability and takes brave steps to minimise it.

Melody, young and ambitious, does not forget to use condoms. She regards them as a highly effective protective strategy. As she says, "there are condoms, condoms, and more condoms" (81). This is the author's own way of encouraging women to use condoms in order to reduce the risk of HIV infection. Melody survives HIV despite having pursued a very dangerous path in her relationship with Chanda. The author avoids a moralistic approach and overcomes the temptation to make Melody HIV positive. This is impressive. Faith is another inspiring young woman. She goes out of her way to establish Tom's true credentials before agreeing to get serious with their

relationship. Given his financial muscle, she might have been tempted to take him at face value. Faith also takes her gender activism seriously. She is truly troubled by the cruelty of the state and the oppression of women. She is determined to change the world. She begins by contributing to Onai's progress, thereby demonstrating that another world is possible. Faith comes across as a determined and strategic young woman, faithful to the struggle for women's empowerment.

There are other strong and admirable women in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. Onai's trip to the hospital following an assault by Gari introduces Emily, a medical doctor. Emily is willing to earn an insignificant salary because she has a passion for the profession. In a number of hospital scenes in the novel, Emily expresses anger towards patriarchy for having allowed the health delivery system in the country to collapse. Emily cares for her patients. Her involvement with the Kushinga Women's Project shows that medical doctors can also contribute to social transformation in other ways. Tagwira gives agency to Emily. By virtue of being a medical doctor, Emily now controls a vital national entity that ensures good health. In *Desperate,* women are prostitutes, but in *The Uncertainty of Hope,* Emily is strategically positioned as a doctor in order to assist other women. Medical knowledge is given to a female character and this is not accidental. As a woman possessing the medical know-how, Emily has the capacity to contribute towards the fight against HIV and AIDS. Women become active participants against the pandemic. This redeems the image of women as carriers of disease. The market women are also equally a force to reckon with. They are industrious and seek the best for their families. Overall, the novel is feminist in orientation. It focuses on the experiences of women and proposes that women must become agents of change. It is these different forms of change that women can adopt to transform their lives that are labeled 'dangerous' acts by a selfish ideology supported by Zimbabwe's patriarchy.

5.12 Naming of Characters in *The Uncertainty of Hope*

Tagwira must be commended on how she names her characters. Academics such as Pfukwa (2007) have drawn attention to the importance of nomenclature. Names are not mere labels in Shona (or any other African) culture. Onai (See/ Witness) is a plea to society to 'see' the plight of women and the poor. Too often, policy makers and those who have the power to change things just do not 'see'. They look but do not see. They have left oppressive systems intact

without considering how these systems stifle women's health. Onai's name draws attention to her struggles and the injustice that she faces. 'Onai' is a protest, challenging men to consider the harm they cause to women. The name calls upon men such as Gari, the badly- behaved husband, Boora the rapist, riot policemen and others to be more sensitive in their dealings with women. The name Gari is usually the short form for 'Garikai'- a name that longs for comfort, progress and peace of mind. Gari paradoxically achieves the exact opposite of what his name should imply. Tagwira uses the name Gari to highlight the irony, the chaos and disharmony Gari causes whenever he is at home. Fathers must ensure that their families enjoy peace of mind. When Gari arrives home, peace flies through the window. Wives must yearn for their husbands, but Onai enjoys being in hospital as this takes her away from Gari. The author utilises irony to make an important point regarding women's expectations in life. It is depressing when men such as Gari frustrate women's longing for happiness.

Faith embodies the author's high hopes for the transformation of the status of women in Zimbabwe. As argued above, Faith is depicted as the ideal women. She is intelligent, sensitive, focused and does not give up on the struggle for social change. *The Uncertainty of Hope* promotes faith in the possibility of women overcoming the odds. Women must have faith that there will be change and their lives will become better. Although Onai has been exposed to HIV and gender-based violence, the story ends with her life promising to be better. Women must keep the faith and refuse to accept what society tells them. It is from this rejection of previously ascribed roles as second class citizens that women can be elevated to assume new forms of being-in-the-world that pose a danger to oppressive systems that allow colonialism, patriarchy and neocolonial unequal relations between women and men to thrive.

Other characters are also aptly named. These include Mawaya. The trend is to associate people who are mentally challenged as having many loose wires. Maya is a colloquial term for 'nothing', and she does not offer much. 'Nzou' is a Shona term for an elephant. However, in her application of the name, the author suggests that this particular 'elephant' lacks its wisdom, just like the susceptible elephant in the famous traditional folktale, 'Hare and his pumpkin field'. Elephant is lazy to plant his own crops, and waits to steal from hare's pumpkin field, but dies in the end because of hare's trickery. 'Tom' is a name befitting a smooth young urbanite. The war

veteran is also rightly named Hondo (war), while the evangelist is named Paul. The author has ensured that the names contribute towards the advancement of the plot.

5.13 Conclusion: A Critical Appreciation of *The Uncertainty of Hope*

The Uncertainty of Hope is a remarkable novel that demonstrates a keen awareness of the struggles of poor women in contemporary Zimbabwe. The author has been praised for placing emphasis on the agency of her female characters. Nonetheless, this might create the wrong impression that all that women need to do is to try harder and their situation becomes better. This reminds one of Boxer in *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1945). There is always the need to acknowledge the overall cultural, economic and political context in which women are supposed to make choices. Many women find themselves in the shoes of Sheila and Gloria (Tagwira 2006), as well as in the same predicament with Sarai's mother and Mainini Grace (Tagwira, 2008). These women are no worse than having been condemned to early deaths because of oppressive situations. The status of Mawaya, (later known to be the Mr. Jongwe in the novel), and his association with Onai towards the end of the novel is rather problematic. It puts forward the concept that women need men to save them, or for them to succeed in life. It would have been more convincing to have, for example, Katy, Faith and Emily acting in solidarity with Onai and ensuring that her situation improves, instead of surrendering everything to the 'Jongwes' of this world. As the story stands, Onai owes her 'hope' to a man – Mr. Jongwe. The plot also suggests the possibility of a romance between the two, thereby perpetuating the idea that a woman is incomplete by herself.

It has previously been noted that men do not fare very well in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. In fact, it is difficult to find a good man in the book. Mawaya/ Mr. Jongwe seems to be the ideal soft and progressive masculinity. However, a closer look into his character suggests patronizing tendencies. John, Katy's husband is quite a likeable man, but he does not hesitate to traffic girls to South Africa. Tom is sensitive in his interaction with Faith, but is too money-conscious. The rest of the men are either useless husbands such as Gari or rapists such as Boora. Tagwira clearly believes that men lack the necessary leadership skills to benefit their homes and country. However, such a militant attitude runs the risk of pushing away men who may want to promote

equality with women. This is contrary to the womanist agenda that seeks to promote a harmonious and reciprocal co-existence of women and men.

One can however understand that the author tries to balance her presentation of women and men by showing that some women can also be counterproductive. Maya is a good example to illustrate this. She is given to gossiping and causes friction among other women. However, Tagwira might have succumbed to the patriarchal image of women as promoting gossiping. By questioning Maya's control of her husband, Mazai, she is also endorsing the patriarchal model. The marriage of these two is more of a caricature than a meaningful relationship that shows maturity. However, although this model may not be the ideal one, it might be a mould that can allow more space for women. The choice of Mbare as the setting can also be contested. As noted in the introduction, there is a trend to regard this suburb as the centre of urban decadence. The story opens with a theft, reinforcing the stereotype of Mbare as a dangerous place. However, the author could have focused on those who steal at a grand scale, and leaving a dent on the economy. Furthermore, Onai's 'salvation' is linked with movement *from* Mbare to Borrowdale. This hints that it is not possible to redeem Mbare. Such an interpretation can be quite problematic.

Finally, the author is too opposed to the land reform to even begin to consider its possible positive effects. Tagwira makes it crucial for Tom to have bought the farm, as if to imply one's criminal identity can be derived from having had a farm allocated to them. Such an alternative view is found in the Shona publication, *Sekai, Minda Tave Nayo* (Sekai, we now have the land), (Mutasa 2008). With uncertainty, comes hope. Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* catalogues the challenges that women face in society, and shows how these women overcome them. Among other forms of uncertainty, the vagueness about the future of Zimbabwean women in the face of HIV and AIDS is evident as most of the characters seem to hover between uncertainty and hope. Married women such as Katy Nguni and Onai feel vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. They employ strategies such as condom use to mitigate the spread of HIV. HIV and AIDS are a reality in their society, where many have lost their loved ones. Much as they face uncertain futures, hope keeps these characters in *The Uncertainty of Hope* going. There is a window of hope in that if women

can continue to work together towards a common objective, they can bring desirable changes in patriarchal societies which put men's interests before those of women and children.

Through Onai, Katy, Emily, Faith, Melody, Sheila, Gloria and other women, *The Uncertainty of Hope* brings the reader closer to women's struggles in Zimbabwe. Against the backdrop of the brutal Operation Murambatsvina, and within a Mbare stretched to the limit, these women seek to resist death and strive to live. Unfortunately, some, such as Sheila, succumb to AIDS and leave babies whose fate we will never know. Others such as Gloria, are on a count down towards a sure but painful death. Yet others like Onai are authoring 'uncertain hope'.

Women in *The Uncertainty of Hope* have agency. They are living beings who try to direct their lives despite the dreadful experiences that they encounter. To this end, Tagwira has gone a long way in trying to meet the expectations of theorists such as McFadden, Spivak and Saadawi. She has authored characters that refuse to succumb, even as they encounter highly problematic situations. However, one also notices that there is too much idealism in her novel. The happy ending might not reflect the harsh reality that women in Mbare have to confront daily. Nonetheless that happy ending is qualified by the title of the novel for which the condition of possibility of hope is that it stays in a permanent state of uncertainty. Such a conclusion implies that Tagwira's novel is open to new forms of change and development for women, however, contradictory these may be. The next chapter is on Westerhof's *Unlucky in Love.* It is expected that the chapter on Westerhof will expand the discussion on women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS, their effort to redefine themselves, and expose the survival strategies they map out for themselves.

CHAPTER 6

WOMEN RE-DEFINING THEMSELVES IN THE CONTEXT OF HIV AND AIDS: INSIGHTS FROM TENDAYI WESTERHOF'S *UNLUCKY IN LOVE*

6.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter discussed *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006) by Tagwira. Central to the chapter was the need to understand how a particular Zimbabwean female writer, Tagwira, depicts the roles that women and men play in the era of HIV and AIDS. The discussion highlighted that the novel, *The Uncertainty of Hope,* is a representation of the relationships between Zimbabwean women and men in contexts of HIV and AIDS. The chapter also looked at how the different female characters in the story re-define gender and danger. While Tagwira has succeeded in bringing the reader closer to women's struggles in Zimbabwe, her novel fails to portray her female characters who are living with HIV in a more liberating perspective. They are doomed to die because of lack of support systems. Even her depiction of those female characters who are HIV negative is limited. It perpetuates the notion that women need men to ascertain their welfare and success in life.

This chapter focuses on Westarhof's *Unlucky in Love. Unlucky in Love* is a novel about a woman who marries and divorces. Rumbidzai (Rumbi for short) is a mother of four. She is HIV positive and strives to make her life meaningful in an environment that is characterized by oppressive masculinities. The chapter will attempt to resolve what has been left hanging by Tagwira as regards women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS, their survival strategies, as well as their attempt to reconstruct positive identities. Theoretically, the chapter is informed by the critical works of African womanists and feminists Grace, Saadawi, Gaidzanwa and Moyana.

Saadawi's insists that women must refuse to succumb to patriarchal dictates. In a recent chapter on Saadawi, Zucker (2010) has brought out Saadawi's determination to empower women. Firdaus, a key personality in Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, murders a man and recovers control of her destiny. Zucker comments on the novel:

In *Woman at Point Zero*, El Saadawi shows us what a human being will do in spite of cultural sufferings to feel some degree of personal power and freedom. She has woven a multi-generic tale of a woman whose life embodies an inter-gendered outlook; Firdausi has suffered as women do in her culture and has gradually assumed aspects of masculine power generally off-limits to Egyptian women. Indeed, her coming to power results from her re-authoring her life against the gendered constraints of her society. Firdaus earns her own money and decides how to publicly spend it. She selects the job that avails her of a better lifestyle and chooses with whom she will or will not have sex. And finally, she acts out her rage at the appropriate target. (Zucker 2010: 248-249).

This powerful passage demonstrates that, when cornered, women are willing to 'murder' patriarchy in order to redefine themselves and recover their agency. Gaidzanwa (1985: 14) questions male authority that only feels that "Motherhood is respectable and held in high esteem as long as it goes with or is preceded by socially approved wifehood." How men prescribe inferior roles that women have to play in society is also underscored by Moyana (2006) whose analysis of the portrayal of women in some of Mungoshi's short stories shows that women are supposed to be underlings in society. Moyana goes on to show that against this male-centric logic, some female characters are determined to defy patriarchy and that it is these assertive women who create the basis from which it is conceivable to imagine that women can challenge the multiple sources of their oppressions. Ngoshi and Pasi (2007) add that the agency of people affected by HIV and AIDS must be framed as subjects, not objects. These perspectives on women struggling to realize their freedoms in a context of HIV and AIDS and the male-induced stigma are used in this chapter to unravel how black women fight for their voice and to be heard in a predominantly patriarchal and capitalist society.

6.2 The Author and Autobiographical Mode

Westerhof (nee Kateketa) has emerged as one of Zimbabwe's leading women HIV and AIDS activists. She is also an author, charity worker, motivational speaker and a former model. As well as writing *Unlucky in Love*, she has written *Dear Cousin* (Kateketa-Westerhof, 2009). In this chapter, I mainly pay attention to the former, although I will make some references to the latter. Having publicly declared her HIV positive status, she formed the Public Personalities Against

AIDS Trust (PPAAT) in 2003. Born on 22 June 1966 in Kwekwe, Zimbabwe, she has qualifications in Secretarial Studies and a Diploma in Modelling. Westerhof remains one of the very few public personalities to have openly declared their HIV positive status in Zimbabwe. As the chapter on Mukonoweshuro's *Days of Silence* demonstrated, stigma remains rife. Westerhof correctly notes:

> Many public personalities in Zimbabwe find it difficult to disclose their status if they are HIV positive, largely because of stigma. People are often afraid to lose their popularity. Even when they die, their death is attributed to either a short or long illness but never AIDS. It is time we face the reality of AIDS and start being open about it. Although disclosure is optional, openness, however, contributes towards fighting stigma. (Kateketa-Westerhof 2009: 51).

Westerhof can be classified as a gender activist. She has challenged women to refuse to bow down to patriarchal oppression. She has been active in the battle against stigma and discrimination in the time of HIV and AIDS. Westerhof acknowledges the danger of self-stigma that many women living with HIV and AIDS live through. According to her, there has been a price to pay for her openness and activism. Many men have tried to exploit her perceived vulnerability. However, Westerhof is clear on the challenges at hand when she observes:

> I notice that certain sections of people saw me as a controversial person because of the disclosure of my status and I was therefore seen as being "different" even among other persons or people living with HIV. My status as a single mother also contributed to people attempting to take advantage of my situation and even led to feelings of resentment among people who believed that I was too proud and outspoken. I also faced the stigma of being divorced. (Kateketa-Westerhof 2009: 19).

Westerhof's leadership of PPAAT has increased her exposure to global discourses on gender, women's vulnerability to HIV and the call for women's agency. She has spoken at many International AIDS Conferences in different parts of the world. Through her activism, there is greater awareness that models are not "prostitutes" who are a danger to society. Westerhof has

also collaborated with churches to address stigma that is fuelled by religious beliefs that equate HIV infection with sin. She has challenged Pentecostal churches to become safe havens for people living with HIV. These autobiographical details are given a literary form in order to come up with *Unlucky in Love*, a book that explores the struggles in liberating one's consciousness in the face of HIV and AIDS.

The foreword for *Unlucky in Love* states that although the book is written in fiction, it is based on a true story. In other words, the personal informs the fictional/autobiographical. Westerhof's personal experiences inform *Unlucky in Love*. Given that Westerhof is a gender activist living with HIV, one can suggest that *Unlucky in Love* echoes her own life experiences. The process of writing about the self is important in reconfiguring notions of identity. Gikandi argues persuasively when he contends that to:

> write is to claim a text of one's own; textuality is an instrument of territorial repossession; because the other confers on us an identity that alienates us from ourselves, narrative is crucial to the discovery of our selfhood. The text is the mirror in which the [female] subject will see itself reflected. (Gikandi 1992: 384).

However, according to Madongonda (2009: 56), in narrating the self through the autobiography, "the writer may choose to exclude incidents that may not be so important in the thrust of the story. The writer has the license to choose to omit, alter or even falsify information to suit the movement of the story". It is then left up to the readers to be critical in their reading and interpretation of fictional autobiography. Therefore, this chapter seeks to find out whether the mere fact that women write about their experiences necessarily means that they have access to their different identities, the personal and national all manifested through the fortunes of the fictional "I" of the autobiographical form.

Westerhof has utilised her HIV positive status and gender activism to come up with *Unlucky in Love*. The narrative is an affirmation of her desire for women's emancipation. One may insist that Rumbi in *Unlucky in Love* is Westerhof in real life. What Westerhof might strive to attain in her actual life experiences, Rumbi is able to accomplish in the imaginative narrative. Through

the act of writing and commitment to the practical issues of HIV and AIDS, Westerhof advocates the liberation of women in a patriarchal society. She challenges society to desist from defining women in stereotypical terms. Patriarchy has very little to offer to women. Consequently, women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS emanates from a system that privileges men.

6.3 Women's Struggles in *Unlucky in Love*

As has been noted above*, Unlucky in Love* is an autobiographical account in which a young woman, Rumbi, narrates how she has journeyed from rejection by men to self-acceptance. This journey is quite eventful and painful. Rumbi has been socialised to imagine that her worth as a woman depends on finding the right man to marry her. Unfortunately, this quest results in three broken marriages. Rumbi is forced to look after her children as the men typically forget their responsibilities. To be an unmarried woman among the Shona results in a lot of stigma. The situation gets worse for a divorced woman or one who has children out of wedlock. A woman who has four children out of wedlock is stigmatised heavily. She is labelled as *nzenza* (a woman with loose morals). She is also openly living with HIV. *Unlucky in Love* (Westerhof 2005) is a book that brings to the fore the experiences of a young woman who undergoes two separations, a divorce and contracts HIV. It is a gripping tale about how the quest to find respectability as "Mrs. Somebody" (3) leaves the young woman vulnerable to HIV. However, *Unlucky in Love* is also about women's agency. Rumbi does not sit and wait to die. She strives, defies and is courageous. She publicly discloses her HIV positive status and decides to live where many choose to die. So empowered is Rumbi that she dares to declare: "Today I truly see HIV as the best thing that has ever happened to me" (103).

Westerhof demonstrates that whereas women who divorce generally face heavy odds, they can also recover their agency. In this chapter, focus is on the story of a young woman who marries, divorces and has children out of wedlock. Westerhof illustrates how empowered women put patriarchal privileges at risk . Critically, she shows that patriarchy runs across race and colour. Among Rumbi's former husbands is a white man who is as brutal (perhaps even more) as her other black partners. However, like Firdaus in Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, Rumbi challenges negative masculinity. She is ready to start a new life and she bursts out:

Who do you think you are Horst, to think you can disappear and come back into our lives just as you please? Go back to Juliet or to one of your other girlfriends. You are a piece of shit and I don't need you in my life. (105).

You told lies about me and cheated on me but I never cheated on you Horst. Never. You drove past me in the rain and wouldn't even give me a lift. Why you refused to even buy me a carton of yoghurt! Get lost! Get out of my life and don't ever come back! We don't need you! Go hang yourself! (105).

Rumbi 'removes the veil from her face' and liberates herself by exorcising Horst from her life. *Unlucky in Love* shows the heavy odds that a woman faces. In particular, it centres on the stigma and discrimination that emerges from being a woman raising four children from three different fathers. In the eyes of society, such a woman can only be a failure. Both Christianity and African culture tend to place the burden of sustaining marriages on women. Even when a marriage is characterised by violence, the woman is encouraged to "*gomera uripo*" or (persevere and remain stoical). In her analysis of the gospel music by Fungisayi Zvakavapano-Mashavave, Magosvongwe (2008: 82-83) notes that there is emphasis on "the diligent work of a virtuous woman, while lampooning the disgrace that befalls a lazy woman..." Unfortunately, Magosvongwe takes the two categories "virtuous" and "lazy" at face value. These are patriarchally-derived concepts that are used to keep women subordinate. It is patriarchy that determines when a woman is "virtuous" and when she is "lazy." Each of these male definitions of womanhood are dangerous because through them men police and circumscribe what women can and ought to be in society. According to Moyana (2006) women are generally depicted in negative terms. She insists:

Women are depicted either as people who abandon their hearth and their families, prostitutes, witches, loud-mouthed, and generally, as people who are lazy and, therefore, who are always harassed. Most of these women are victims of their male counterparts in one way or another, while the men themselves champion negative patriarchal values. (Moyana 2006: 152).

Moyana's argument above demonstrates how men use stereotypes of womanhood that men have constructed in order for them to control women. This, however, works for patriarchy in cases where they deal with women who "are simply just hopeless" (Moyana 2006: 152). In other instances, "some of these women respond to these untenable patriarchal values with drastic measures, either through some kind of protests or what we have called *passive resistance*" (ibid). These women refuse to bow down to patriarchy so that they continue to lead normal lives.

Westerhof is herself painfully aware of the multiple challenges that women in her culture face. She situates herself firmly within this setting. As she sees it, from the onset women have to contend with multiple burdens. They are constructed as minors who need the guidance of men. In addition, they are not equipped to be aware of their own intrinsic value. Hence, Rumbi makes a powerful observation, "Girls like me grow up with so little sense of our own value" (46). This is a sharp indictment of the socialisation process that does not empower young girls to appreciate themselves. Rumbi describes the overall environment within which young girls grow up. She explains:

> In my culture I often think women are denied any real identity. When a Shona woman marries, she takes on her husband's name – just like European tradition, but when she has a child, she immediately loses even her own first name and is instead referred to like my own mother, for example, as *amai Farai* (Farai's mother). Of course, boy children give a woman more status than girls and a woman without a child is not considered a real adult – there should be a man who can make decisions for her. Even in Rhodesia, a woman (white or black) was considered a legal minor all her life – either her husband or her father had to sign legal documents on her behalf. So my life as a single mother was always an uphill struggle, not just in terms of financing my children's upbringing, but in being accepted by the society I was part of. (3).

The paragraph above clearly shows that women are forced to lose personal identities when they transfer their surnames at marriage; women are also discriminated against when boys are given more status than women and girls. And finally, women who are divorced are stigmatized by both women and men through whom patriarchal ideology operates. These are all the multiple

challenges that women have to put up with. It appears as if women do not have autonomous spaces where they can express themselves. Women need men to gain an identity.

The emphasis on women to bear children, sometimes prevents women from achieving full personhood. The "uphill struggle" that faces single mothers must also be taken note of. Society is biased against women. Women must bear with negative labels when they find themselves unmarried or childless. In this paragraph, Westerhof shows that the boy child occupies a privileged position among the Shona. Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) deals with this theme. This is also the case among the Baganda of Uganda, as summarised by Kiyimba:

> When a Muganda man marries, one of his principal expectations is that he is going to get a son to perpetuate the lineage of his forefathers. It is therefore not surprising that a lot of pressure is put on women to bring forth baby boys. If a woman should have only baby girls, both the male and female relatives of the man and other members of society, hold the woman responsible for 'not giving the man an heir.' The woman and her family are so anxious to produce a baby boy so as to secure their positions in the man's family. (Kiyimba 2010: 36).

Unlucky in Love brings out the prejudices that women have to negotiate in a patriarchal society. They are unfairly labelled as carriers of HIV and AIDS. This comes out clearly when Rumbi's husband, Horst, accuses her of infecting him with HIV. Although Horst comes from a different cultural and racial context, he retains the patriarchal mindset. Horst's accusations confirm the misconception that it is women who are responsible for spreading diseases. McFadden exposes this view when she stresses that:

> There is a widespread belief that women are inherently sexually unclean and that therefore sexually transmitted diseases are caused by women. Even men with high educational standards do articulate such erroneous myths. The sex worker is the most obvious scapegoat of such superstition. (McFadden 1992: 160).

This point comes out powerfully when Horst says, "It's all your fault you bitch. They tested me for HIV and I'm positive. I must have got it from you. You have destroyed everything for me" (8). These few lines are laden with assumptions and pointing of fingers at each other. Horst presumes that it is a woman, Rumbi, who carries disease. He does not pause to reflect that he might be the one who infected her, not the other way round. Also, racial dynamics are at play. These date back to the colonial period. Africans were viewed by the whites as dirt and as sources of infection. According to (Burke 1996: 20) "for most whites living or travelling in Zimbabwe after 1890, the African world was a world of universal dirt and filth, while their own social world was its opposite, cleansed and pure". The black woman's body is seen as a destabilizing factor in the colonial order. Such racist attitudes saw the continued marginalization of the black woman.

Colonialism sought to 'protect' the whites from presumed dirt and disease posed by blacks. "In colonial Zimbabwe, fears of dirtying of the pure were often attached to fears of venereal diseases" (Harris 2008: 42). White administrators for example, feared the 'moral dirt' of the colonized blacks. Infection was associated with the racialised black body. The concept of racial dirt is therefore one of exclusion. In colonial discourse, black refers to the other. It is linked to dirt, disease, danger or peril. The black woman's body is, therefore, viewed as diseased. "This racialised binary of cleanliness/dirt perpetuated racist ideology" (Harris 2008: 41). In *Unlucky in Love*, the same colonial superiority assumptions inform Horst's behaviour towards Rumbi. This racist dogma of white purity and black impurity encourages the perception that Horst, a white man, can only be infected by a black woman. It promotes the exclusion of black women. Sontag makes reference to words such as pestilence to describe AIDS as a metaphor (1988). Pestilence comes from the word pest. Pests are usually a nuisance and must be killed. If biased perceptions on AIDS view it as the black woman's disease, what then are the implications of terms such as pestilence? Don't they encourage the exclusion of women? The attempt to represent AIDS leads to a number of complications. Whereas artists conceptualise AIDS in their minds, in real life AIDS is lodged in peoples' bodies. AIDS is real and not a metaphor. The way the body is being eaten represents the way society is being eroded.

When Horst charges that the people in the United Arab Emirates "think all Africans are infected" (7), he implicates Rumbi to be the source of the infection. In his mind, a black woman carries all

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the markers of an HIV positive person. It would appear coming from Africa and being a woman automatically suggests one is HIV positive. According to Dube, an HIV and gender activist:

> Being a black African, in particular, means being associated with economic poverty, illness and backwardness. Such is the image depicted in movies such as "Out of Africa", "Far Away Places, and "The Gods Must be Crazy. In these days, one is seen to wear the "badge" of HIV and AIDS by virtue of geographical and racial identity. (2004: 9).

Second, Horst's outburst should be reflected upon in the context of racial dynamics. HIV and AIDS has been projected as a "black person's disease." In fact, the preoccupation with blackness in discourses on HIV and AIDS suggests that other racial groups are not as vulnerable to the pandemic. As Dube (2009: 216) observes, the category of race needs to be problematised in responses to HIV and AIDS. The suggestion that black people "own" HIV is misleading. In *Unlucky in Love,* Horst, a white man, in fact has infected Rumbi, a black woman. However, because of the stereotypes, Rumbi will find it difficult to convince the world that this is how the infection occurred. Horst is not being "unreasonable": he is simply verbalising what global media networks have circulated regarding HIV. According to these images, it is a disease of black people. Miranda Pillay (2009) has underscored the gendered nature of discourses on HIV and AIDS and how they stereotype women.

Reading *Unlucky in Love,* one realises that men have constructed women as "dangerous." Men appear vigilant to guard against women's (imagined) desires whether these are sexual or materialistic. There is in fact no contradiction for women to aspire for both. But in *Unlucky in Love*, Rumbi's husbands do not regard her as an equal partner, but a devious individual who uses her beauty to ensnare them. In particular, Horst seems convinced that Rumbi's greatest motivation is his wealth. He says, "The only reason you married me was for my money and so that you could spoil my fun, you stupid stick-in-the-mud" (32). This statement by Horst cries out for deconstruction. It is critical to note that as a man, Horst declares Rumbi, a woman, a non-being. In this regard, Horst is simply perpetuating the patriarchal trend of not recognizing the full humanity of women. Such masculine preoccupation with control and authority dates back into

history. In *Roman Homosexuality*, Williams (2010) has demonstrated how a "real man" in the Roman Empire had to demonstrate control and authority over women.

Horst's description of Rumbi as "stupid" perpetuates the racial stereotype of black women as lacking morals and intellectual prowess. It is this patronizing attitude that allows him to ill-treat her on many occasions. Unfortunately, he is convinced that she does not have the intellectual capacity to challenge him. He even imagines that she is unable to seek legal advice during the divorce and over the paternity dispute. Horst thinks that he is racially superior to Rumbi. However, Rumbi negotiates the racial minefield with a lot of maturity and sophistication. When Horst suggests that she infected him, Rumbi seeks to guide the conversation along a more useful path. The writer informs us:

> Suddenly, the atmosphere in the room had changed. I felt myself grow hot in spite of the air conditioning and a great gulf had suddenly opened between me and the man I loved. He was blaming me for this test that they wanted him to have. He was saying that if he had HIV then he must have got it from me because I was African. I decided to say nothing. It's better not to stir up some of these things…(7).

In the passage above, Rumbi initially appears to show some degree of naivety. Did the "great gulf" open up "suddenly"? Could it be that there was "a great gulf" between her and Horst from the very beginning? Horst is a white man from Germany, with considerable financial resources. On the other hand, Rumbi has a humble background; "the vegetable girl from Ndarama Mine settlement" (18). Horst is convinced that this imbalance suggests only one thing: "You're only marrying me for my money – you showy cow. That's all you've ever wanted from me – money, money, money" (19). That Horst makes this a constant refrain suggests that he is sure that she is not actually in love with him but with his pocket. This accusation from Horst also ironically reveals the economic vulnerability that women have to contend with if their dream to be free from men is to be realized. In *Unlucky in Love*, this dream for freedom is complicated by the fact of HIVS and AIDS that tends to place unwarranted burdens on women and children more than on men. Women also have to contend with the potential rejection from their communities that have not been taught to rise above stigmatizing anyone living with HIV.

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Tendai Chari's essay on the representation of women in male-produced "urban grooves" music in Zimbabwe confirms this bias when he says, "Women are also presented as parasitic beings with an obsession for material things. The desire for material things forces women to get into sexual relationships for money rather than genuine love" (Chari 2008: 100). The patriarchal construction of women as "dangerous" to men's economic health is seen in different contexts. There is a general assumption that women are "gold diggers" who will stop at nothing to drain cash out of men. What is precarious in describing a woman as a gold digger is that the woman consequently becomes a threat to men as she is understood to drain or milk their pockets. Patriarchy is, however, not aware of the limitations associated with negative representations of women.

Men are presented as unaware of women's potential which society could harness to its advantage. This dimension comes out in Mungoshi's short story, *The Hare* (1997). When the story's protagonist, Nhongo loses his job at the textile industry, his wife Sara takes over as the bread winner. She brings money home through cross-border trade and we are told:

> More importantly, Sara is now the partner who goes outside the home in order to make money, while Nhongo remains jobless and home-bound. The wife has, perversely, taken on a key component of masculine identity, leaving Nhongo with a feeling of being emasculated" (Primorac 2006: 126).

Sara's new identity is a threat to society. She exceeds beyond societal expectations. She is then inhibited and prohibited by patriarchy. Her father-in-law, VaJumo does not understand why women now go to Johannesburg when it used to be a men's avenue. To make it worse, Sara's mother-in-law, VaMangai, a victim of patriarchy, joins with patriarchy against the liberated woman. Instead of appreciating Sara's effort to fend for the family, she views her as treacherous. She has to be controlled. Unfortunately, by restraining Sara, the community is disadvantaged in the process. Inhibiting and prohibiting the woman in this case means that the family will struggle, yet Sara's endeavours have already proved quite promising. Her society does not appreciate it when women exceed what it expects from them.

Patriarchy is willing to co-opt women against other women. It, thus, extends its influence using the victim to fight another victim. It is the same notion of victims used on other victims that Mbembe (2001: 119) comments on when he writes about the loss of limits or sense of proportion in postcolonial Africa. He writes, "In this culture, presidents will eat their suppers while watching gory scenes of their people being massacred by those who are employed to be angry on behalf of the president". In other words, the common people employ violence which their leaders have asked them to use to conquer their fellow common people. These are victims being used on other victims.

Since the notion of gender has to be defined by the roles that women and men play in society, it cannot be reduced only to destructive politics. One can argue that danger can be a form of rebirth. As already discussed in *The Hare*, women characters become assertive, repossess their freedom and create new and positive ways of life in forms that contribute to the positive aspects in society. The same positive agency exhibited by Sara is reflected in *Unlucky in Lucky* when Rumbi "exorcises" Horst from her life and that of her children. In her "awakening," Rumbi adopts a proactive posture and realises that she does not need a man in order to find her way through life. Such a stance threatens patriarchy as women become aware of their potential and capacity to thrive without submitting to patriarchal authority.

Chitauro *et al* (1994) write about the male nationalist discourses and their perception of single or divorced women as dangerous. They differentiate the dangerous woman who is out to destroy in an irresponsible manner, and the dangerous woman who destroys in order to reconstruct a new meaning of existence: Chitauro *et al* (1994) argue that these women were regarded as dangerous because men feared that:

> they might influence other women to follow their lifestyles as they were often single or divorced women. The sense of danger was also connected with a sense of their ability to re-vision; through their expressive art. They could both reshape and control in a way that was otherwise not possible. This notion of power relates to the acceptance in many African societies of licence, in some situations, within song and poetry-that singers may

tell terrible things in song and poetry, set out what is not usually heard and survive with impunity. (Chitauro, Gunner and Dube 1994: 118).

Madongonda (2009) calls for sisterhood to counter patriarchy. The call for sisterhood creates a broader knowledge base for women. McFadden (1992) emphasizes the importance of educating women on matters of their sexuality. Equipping them with such knowledge empowers them in the era of HIV and AIDS. Westerhof demonstrates her willingness to equip other women by sharing the knowledge and awareness she has acquired. There is need for that consciousness if women are to lead meaningful lives in a patriarchal society, where HIV also thrives.

Writing on the male struggle against the mini-skirt in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Andrew M. Ivaska (2004) shows how different categories of women all ended up being classified as "prostitutes." It was assumed that any woman who wears a mini-skirt was out to snare men and to access their pockets. Ivaska says:

> Thus the office worker, the female undergraduate, and the girlfriend of the 'sugar daddy,' figures conjured up in public discourse by the sign of banned fashion, were all consistently conflated with the figure of the prostitute. All were represented as being in positions particularly ripe with possibilities for gaining access to men and their money through sex. (Ivaska 2004: 115).

Rumbi's decision to openly declare her HIV positive status is a mark of courage. In an environment that stigmatizes women, Rumbi eventually decides to take a major risk and announce her HIV positive status. The negative reactions are almost predictable. The male-dominated press does not pause to reflect on her vulnerability. In fact, they are viciously biased against her. Accusations of "gold-digging" are thrown at her. Rumbi is labelled a rebellious woman who will not accept the authority of her husband. She is mocked and ridiculed. Her profession as a model does not help matters. That models generally have a relaxed dress code gives her opponents the missiles to allege that they are "prostitutes." Dress becomes a site of struggle. In particular, men believe they have the authority to regulate women's dressing and general way of life. The response of one Nigerian man is quite significant: "Women shouldn't

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look like men. Our fathers never heard of that, and it isn't in the Bible." (Bastian 1996: 108). This appeal to ancestral traditions and sacred scriptures is an ideological posture employed by men to control women. Women such as Rumbi, who dare to challenge dress codes, question their husbands and insist on having their opinions heard are a threat to patriarchy.

6.4 Women's Agency in *Unlucky in Love*

The section above analyzed the various struggles that women endure in the patriarchal society of *Unlucky in Love*. The emphasis was an analysis of the depraved images of danger linked to women, but constructed by men for the benefit of men who want to oppress women. However, to focus only on the disempowerment of women creates the wrong impression. Women have not given up. They continue to identify faults within patriarchy. They exploit these cracks to negotiate their existence. Oppressive systems still have weaknesses and leave windows of opportunity open. Grace (2004) illustrates this in her discussion of the complexity of the veil:

> Veiling may be argued to protect the woman from becoming the object of the man's desire, or to protect the man from the strong sexual impulses of the woman. The veil is a 'double shield', protecting women against society and protecting society against the 'inherent evil' of woman. (2004: 21).

Grace's (2004) illuminating study on women questions the simplistic conclusions that are drawn by (mainly Western) critics that women are oppressed when they put on the veil. Instead, she suggests that we must employ a more complex reading of veiling. Grace brings this out clearly in her conclusion when she says:

> The veil acts to cover and protect, to hide and disguise, to limit agency, to obscure women's participation in society, yet make visible and tangible women's status with regard to freedom and human rights. Through its translucency (as muslin) it simultaneously conceals and reveals. This paradox is at the root of its problematic and ambiguous and ambivalent status in women's lives and in literary representation. (Grace 2004: 217).

In other words, the veil deploys many meanings. The possibility of multiple meanings attached to the veil can also be interpreted as a sign of multiple agency that the works of female creative writers can command.

Rumbi demonstrates her refusal to submit to patriarchal dictates. Having been socialised to regard marriage as the "salvation," she is initially paralysed by her failure to get a husband who is committed. The situation is complicated further when Horst denies paternity to her fourth child. However, she refuses to fold her arms and wait for fate to take its course. She reclaims her agency and seeks to take charge of her life. She engages in introspection and realises that she has, indeed, made some wrong choices in matters of the heart. She seeks to redress the situation by concentrating on improving herself professionally. Whereas Horst refuses to face his HIV positive status, she equips herself with information. Madongonda (2009) offers a penetrating analysis of Rumbi's choice to live in the face of death. Madongonda mentions that:

> Through her call for sisterhood of all women to fight the oppressive and insensitive patriarchal system, her insistence to display autonomy starts with her empowering the self: getting a job, ridding herself of a discordant relationship with her husband, and then claiming maintenance for her children from the responsible fathers. She starts with Joe, then in real life Clemens, both of whom do not conform to this role readily. Here the metaphor of the hunter and the hunted are reversed. Rumbidzai emerges from the hunted doe to assert her presence by making the fathers of her children realise they have responsibilities. She refuses to be intimidated by merciless reports in the press and the power of her former husband, but goes out to set the record straight (Madongonda 2009: 65).

Madongonda shows that Rumbi does not allow her status as a single mother living with HIV to constrain her vision. Despite the inconsistency of the men she has had relationships with and the negative attitudes towards single mothers in her society, Rumbi is determined to forge ahead. It is striking that she has a more realistic attitude towards HIV than Horst. Whereas Horst is caught up in denial, she has embraced her status. Realising that an HIV positive result did not imply instant death, she suggests to Horst that they use condoms. He refuses (62). Rumbi, like Onai in

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The Uncertainty of Hope and Linga in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, appreciates the protective role of the condom. Whereas society constructs women as weak and unreasonable, Rumbi emerges as strong and sensible. She is determined to defeat the virus. She seeks to acquire life-saving knowledge and medication.

Moyana (2006) argues that the agency of women who utilise passive resistance and those who are outspoken pose danger to patriarchy. Rumbi's insistence on condoms shows her agency and sense of responsibility. While the use of condoms does not provide maximum defense against HIV, making use of them is strategic in negotiating re-infection and pregnancy. Rumbi realises that she must not repeat the mistakes of her youth. She needs to take charge of her life. However, as Maane makes clear in *Umzala: A Woman's Story of Living with HIV*, negotiating condom use is a major challenge for women living with HIV. She suggests (2009: 121) that most men suffer from "*condom phobia.*" Rumbi encourages Horst to overcome this dangerous phobia in order to enable their marriage to thrive. However, Horst stubbornly refuses to co-operate. McFadden (1992) emphasizes the importance of sex education for women as a strategy for empowerment in contexts of HIV and AIDS.

In their analysis of children's literature and HIV in Zimbabwe, Ngoshi and Pasi (2007: 248) write, "We need to see the agency of those affected by HIV and AIDS." These literary critics are correct to maintain that negative images of people living with HIV do not help in the fight against the pandemic. Readers are empowered when characters living with HIV do not wait to die. We see Rumbi being proactive and taking her anti-retroviral drugs. She also takes concrete steps to ensure that her baby is not infected. By doing so, Rumbi challenges the negative portrayal of people living with HIV as, "ravaged, disfigured, and debilitated by the syndrome; they are generally alone, desperate, but resigned to their 'inevitable' deaths" (Crimp 1992: 118). Westerhof's writing destabilises "the lethal global presupposition (which is unconscious) in the dominant discourse that women of color or black women generally are incapable of describing, much less analyzing the world, themselves, or their place within the world" (Wallace 1992: 661).

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Rumbi is in control of her life. She takes practical steps to safeguard her unborn child. In *Dear Cousin* (2009), Westerhof explains that she realised that there are people with life threatening conditions such as cancer, high blood pressure and diabetes. She vows:

> With this in mind, I made a decision to regain control of my life and live it to the fullest, regardless of the virus in my body. My life has been enhanced, to some extent, because of that decision and commitment. HIV will not rob me of the right to a long and fulfilling life. (Kateketa-Westerhof 2009: 15).

Rumbi's courage to openly declare her HIV positive status confirms her agency. She has made a conscious decision not to live a lie. She believes that declaring her HIV positive status is a liberating step. It represents a refusal to let HIV gain an upper hand. In a way, disclosure is unveiling. It metaphorically exposes the virus. For a virus that thrives on secrecy and shame, disclosure is dangerous. Disclosure weakens the virus as its mysterious nature is undermined when living human beings come out openly. Rumbi's openness regarding her status indicates her capacity to control the situation. It shows that she can direct the course of events in her life. She has not allowed the virus to hold her captive.

Women's solidarity is key to their success in overcoming patriarchal domination. Friendship enables women to persevere in the face of unfair beliefs and practices. In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Onai is able to negotiate massive challenges because of her friend, Katy. In *Unlucky in Love*, Rumbi has a true and reliable friend, Jean to lean on. Women can overcome trying times in life if they come to each other's rescue: "Women get strength through supporting one another, through praying for one another, through crying together and feeding one another's family when you are down and out" (Maane 2009: 186). Rumbi realises that one of the strategic bodies in society, the church, has a predominantly negative attitude towards HIV and AIDS. Her encounter with a "foolish man" strengthened her resolve to mobilise the church to become a healing community. The preacher Rumbi comes across is in no mood to preach acceptance and tolerance. He seeks to frighten his captive audience by presenting HIV and AIDS as a (or the) signifier of sin. He preaches:

Those amongst us who are suffering from HIV and AIDS are receiving God's punishment for their sins! AIDS was here even when Jesus walked on this earth. During Christ's time he healed a man with a dreaded skin disease – he told the man to go and be cleansed and make an offering. It's the same today, with the AIDS we see amongst us. AIDS sufferers are sinners, they are paying for their sins! They must repent. Only then can they be forgiven! (91).

When Rumbi decides that she has been abused enough and walks out of the church building, she demonstrates her independence and sense of worth. Westerhof is challenging women to refuse to allow "men of God" to abuse people living with HIV. It is striking that it is her friend, Jean, who is able to demonstrate compassion. The pastor who is supposed to do this fails miserably. Westerhof is encouraging ordinary believers to subvert their church leaders' hopeless pronouncements. Jean comes across as a real Christian who is interested in the welfare of her friend. In pursuit of her vision of transforming the church from a stigmatising to an accepting community, in real life Westerhof has worked with faith-based organisations. In chapter four of *Dear Cousin* by Westerhof, the narrative voice outlines how she has succeeded in recruiting pastors to preach love, forgiveness and acceptance in the context of HIV. The church must come out of its imprisonment to the idea that HIV is a result of sin and become an agent of change. On this point, Maane is quite dynamic in her poem, "What is this sin?"

> …
> *Who then is sin-free?*
> *Aren't we all at fault with one thing or the other?*
> *So what if it was contracted having premarital*
>   *sex?*
>
> *So what*
> *Will you judge us, for that?*
> *What then does your house of worship serve?*
> *What is its purpose?*
> *If not to comfort the hurting*
> *To comfort the heartbroken*

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What then is the purpose? (Maane 2009: 187. Italics original).

Rumbi's journey from a naïve young woman who expects salvation in marriage to an assertive woman living with HIV is an enlightening one. Despite her financial situation, she succeeds in driving Horst out of her life and that of her children. If Horst thought that Rumbi had no life beyond him, he was then mistaken. Rumbi tells Horst off. Horst has denied being father to Takunda. He has treated her like trash. She "removes the veil" from her eyes and comes to an important awakening. She realises that her life will not be determined by anybody else other than herself. Her life ceases to be shaped by the type of men she is in relationships with. She becomes alive to the fact that while she cannot change who she has been, she can shape who she can and will become.

6.5 The Portrayal of Men in *Unlucky in Love*

Gender implies socially constructed relationships between women and men in a given society. Having examined the construction of women in *Unlucky in Love* in the previous sections, in this section I focus on the portrayal of men in the same creative work. This exercise is necessary as it enables us to understand how women and men relate in the society under investigation. Horne's comments on issues of manhood, masculinity and hegemony in Aidoo Ama's play, *Anowa*, inform this section. Horne says of the creative artist:

> Thus, she impresses upon us the symbiotic nature of the relationship between femininity and masculinity and womanhood and manhood –femaleness and maleness corresponding to each other like the feet, the left foot following the right foot instinctively in a well-choreographed dance. Ultimately, Aidoo makes us realise that an exploration of the male protagonist as a gendered subject is necessary if we are to fully understand the gender issues undergirding her play. (Horne 2010: 178).

Horne suggests that women and men should complement each other in her imagery of the left foot following the right foot. In *Unlucky in Love*, however, one does not find such an ideal state. Men are constantly abusing women. They refuse to honour their obligations. They seduce them and disappear. Men are callous and vindictive. Horst, the leading male protagonist, represents all

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that is wrong with men. He does not respect Rumbi. He is a serial womaniser. He hangs around with equally immoral friends who appear to live for drink and sex. These young men are not constructive. They only serve to lead Horst astray and he ends up deserting his family.

The men in *Unlucky in Love* have been socialised to dominate women. They are comfortable with women who do not question their actions. When women demonstrate a sense of autonomy, they feel challenged. In such situations, they move on and seek to conquer less assertive women. Westerhof makes it clear that society has licensed men to do as they please. Social values and norms have been constructed in favour of men. Westerhof explains:

> Our society allows men so much lee-way. They don't have to make a real commitment to a woman, even if she is the mother of their children. 'Small houses' are an acceptable part of the urban culture now and polygamous relationships are still common in the rural areas – just some of the reasons why my finding myself HIV positive was hardly a surprise. (2).

Although the focus is on "our society," Horst's behaviour confirms that patriarchal dominance goes beyond specific cultures. Horst does not regard women as equals. His behaviour confirms Rumbi's naivety when she anticipated having "a wealthy, handsome, white husband"(18). Horst is not better than Emmanuel and Joe, the black Zimbabwean men with whom she has had children. All three men are selfish and irresponsible. They do not reflect on the need to look after their children. They are not mature enough to accept the consequences of their actions. They want to continue to act like teenage boys when their ages require them to be more responsible.

Horst comes out as a racist and insensitive man. He rapes Rumbi: "You are my wife and I will show you who is the boss now. Dirty bitch with AIDS"(70). Moyana's discussion of women and men in Mungoshi's short story, *Some Kinds of Wounds* (1980), also highlights how men are portrayed as violent and insensitive beings who force women into sexual relationships. Kute womanizes and abuses women. Horst in *Unlucky in Love* is caught up in the same patriarchal mindset that tells men that they have unlimited and permanent access to women. Calling Rumbi, a "dirty bitch with AIDS" confirms his imagined superiority. Ironically, Horst himself is also

HIV positive. He does not realize that by dehumanising Rumbi, he also dehumanises himself in the process. His failure to reflect on his HIV positive status is also seen when he says, "That baby is not mine. I cannot have a child with AIDS" (96). This statement clearly displays the level of his self-stigma and lack of critical consciousness. This is in sharp contrast with Rumbi's high levels of awareness.

Men in *Unlucky in Love* come across as "dangerous" in relation to upholding women's sexual and reproductive health rights. They refuse to use condoms, are opposed to birth control pills and have many sexual partners. The licence that society gives them becomes a danger to women and to the men as well. Furthermore, they are not willing to discuss these issues rationally. They are quick to resort to violence. In *Dear Cousin*, it becomes clear that women find it difficult to negotiate sexual and reproductive health issues with their partners. This fuels the spread of HIV as Rumbi bemoans:

> This made it difficult for me to negotiate for safer sex such as the use of condoms or ask why my husband had other girlfriends outside the marriage. I had to accept "*baba*" when he came home and most women are silently enduring such kind of an experience like mine. (Kateketeka-Westerhof 2009: 68).

The passage above shows that men enjoy the authority bestowed by the "*baba*" title (Muchemwa and Muponde 2007; Richter and Morrell 2006). Although traditionally the term described one who provided security and leadership, men have abused the term to insist on the privileges it brings. Horst, coming from a different cultural context (which is also patriarchal) rides on the title to escape his responsibilities. A real father is supposed to be supportive and caring. Men in *Unlucky in Love* have to be dragged to court in order for them to accept this reality.

Due to the advantages that they enjoy, men abuse their wealth and status. They use these to entice desperate or unsuspecting young women. Rumbi's being "unlucky in love" is essentially tied to her falling for scheming men who are only after her body. While she is looking for love and permanent relationships, the men she interacts with are attracted by only her beauty.

Westerhof constructs men as selfish and driven purely by biological instincts. Apart from her grandfather, with whom she stayed while growing up, no other man comes out as inspiring.

6.6 Conclusion

The theories informing this chapter highlighted that while patriarchy seeks to continue to dominate women, these women are not docile. They employ various forms of agency to challenge the different sources of their suppression. They defy patriarchy in order to recover and redefine themselves. These perspectives on women fighting to realize their liberation, particularly in a context of HIV and AIDS, have been utilized in this chapter to interrogate how black women fight to be heard in a patriarchal setting.

The autobiographical style of writing adopted by Westerhof is of significance in a literary work whose focus is on agency. The strengths of the autobiographical character of *Unlucky in Love* have been appreciated by Madongonda (2009) as well as by Ngoshi and Pasi (2007). The art of writing the self empowers the subject and is therapeutic. In the face of negative publicity, *Unlucky in Love* enables Westerhof to tell her side of the story. She takes the opportunity to narrate her struggles and new vision. She engages her readers and leads them to see the heavy odds that she has had to overcome. She writes with confidence. She makes it clear that despite being HIV positive, she would rather live with it than die from AIDS.

Westerhof resists the linear narrative or simple sequence of events. She makes use of flashback. This enhances the value of her work. The reader meets Rumbi when she is struggling to come to terms with her HIV positive status. The story of her childhood and youth comes later. Stylistically, this is an effective strategy as the historical section seeks to guide the reader to understand her present predicament. This lends authenticity to Westerhof's narrative. The uncensored and unfriendly words give the narrative greater authenticity. One would not expect a couple faced with HIV and AIDS to be using polite terms with each other, particularly when they are pointing fingers at each other.

Unlucky in Love is a fearless account. Westerhof does not hesitate to acknowledge that she has made mistakes in life. Clearly, she has not been vigilant in her interaction with men. She has

been rather easily attracted to material possessions such as flashy cars or promises of owning a flat. Having been taken advantage of in her first serious relationship, she should have become more calculating. Westerhof does not gloss over these mistakes. She admits that she should have become wiser. Her vulnerability co-opts the reader to view reality from her perspective.

However, *Unlucky in Love*, like all autobiographies, suffers from the need by the narrator to justify herself. In the process, Horst and all the other men are demonised. Horst is projected as an abusive and insensitive husband who is keen to pursue other women. On the other hand, Rumbi is the virtuous wife. Horst is entirely to blame for the failure of the marriage. He is also the source of the HIV infection. Rumbi recalls how he had been admitted to hospital earlier on in the marriage. He is also promiscuous. On the other hand, Rumbi can "count the number of sexual partners she has had on the fingers of one hand," and three of them have been fathers to her children (2). The genre employed is, therefore, susceptible to the challenge to score points and justify oneself. Autobiographical writing implies conscious selection and ordering of facts so that sometimes what is not revealed in this process is far more important or equally important to what the reader is made to read. In other words, as with all modes of self writing, Westerhof's book is incomplete in its completeness or complete in its incompleteness.

The drama in *Unlucky in Love* appears to take place in a social, economic and political vacuum. This is a major weakness. While there are a few references to cultural issues and poverty, it would have been helpful to accord them greater coverage. *Unlucky in Love* appears to suggest that, with a little more luck, Rumbi's Cindrella's story (19) would have been actualised. This is unrealistic. Westerhof, therefore, needed to have interrogated how the economic and political setting implies that Rumbi was always going to struggle. It is not a simple matter of being lucky, or unlucky in love. Serious economic and political issues also contribute to Rumbi's struggles.

Despite the literary shortcomings, *Unlucky in Love* must be acknowledged as one of the first novels written by a woman writer living with HIV that explores the pandemic in detail. Westerhof succeeds in covering significant ground in her effort to undermine stigma and restore women's agency. Westerhof challenges society to deal justly with women. She insists on having her views heard. Gaidzanwa writes about the negative images and inferior roles men prescribe to

women. This interpretation is confirmed in *Unlucky in Love*, where women are shown as victims of men. However, gender ceases to be danger for women when Rumbi defies patriarchy. She asserts herself and challenges fathers to provide for their children, even if it means dragging them to court.

Rumbi awakens to the fact that a woman's life is not defined by her marital status. Like Firdaus in Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (Zucker 2010)*,* Rumbi takes charge of her own life. Saadawi introduces positive danger that embraces other active dimensions that liberate the woman. We see Rumbi reaching a similar stance in *Unlucky in Love*. However, for the men who are dragged to court by Rumbi, gender becomes destructive. All this demonstrates the dialectical nature of the discourse on gender and danger. The notion of gender and danger is double- edged. In its negative form, it excludes women, while in its positive character, women expand their horizon and participate meaningfully in society.

By giving agency to Rumbi, *Unlucky in Love* refuses to portray gender at the level of danger as dictated by men. Its way of transgressing is to show how women transcend socially defined categories meant for them by men. It is here that the roles that women play acquire a meaning associated with a kind of danger that is liberating to them. *Unlucky in Love* upholds feminist principles. Where society had put a veil on her face, Rumbi unveils and finds some forms of positive agency and freedom (Grace 2004). Where others in her situation would have chosen death, Rumbi chooses life. Only an empowered and confident woman, who is aware of her HIV positive status and its implications, can declare as she does: "I choose to live fully and independently as a single woman with HIV" (105).

This chapter lays the foundation for the next chapter which is on Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. *Unlucky in Love* has moved from somewhat distant discussions of women and HIV (as in *Desperate, Days of Silence* and *The Uncertainty of Hope*), by focusing on the experiences of a woman living with HIV. However, Westerhof does not convincingly expose the economic factors that increase women's vulnerability. The following chapter is going to take us a step further by highlighting such factors, as well as concentrating on the survival strategies of women living with HIV. It is anticipated that the chapter will build on the themes identified in this

chapter and outline the negative impact of stigma and discrimination on women living with HIV. It will also explore issues relating to women's vulnerability and the strategies they employ to mitigate their susceptibility.

CHAPTER 7

PERSONALIZED NARRATIVE: STRATEGIES OF SURVIVING HIV AND AIDS AS DEPICTED IN LUTANGA SHABA'S *SECRETS OF A WOMAN'S SOUL*

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on Westerhof's *Unlucky in Love*. Central to this chapter was the discussion of the concept of agency. The chapter argued that Rumbi, the main character in *Unlucky in Love* emerges to be an empowered and assertive woman. She is assertive and redefines herself in the face of HIV and AIDS and patriarchy. While Westerhof succeeds in portraying Rumbi as a self-assured woman, her narrative has limited options for the woman. Westerhof's major weakness is that her empowerment strategy for women appears to be reduced to mere awareness of the problem. Perhaps, the author meant to suggest that with the new awareness that she now possess women like Rumbi would use it to effect changes in the cultural and political sphere. Unfortunately, the necessity to strengthen economic power has not been sufficiently elaborated. Consequently, it has been implied that Rumbi and her children are still dependent on men and that they cannot sustain themselves in the absence of a husband and a father respectively.

This current chapter concentrates on women's different and differentiated responses to HIV and AIDS. The centre of attention for this chapter is on Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* (2006). This chapter, thus, simultaneously marks a discontinuity as well as an extension of the different manner in which themes of agency have been discussed in the previous chapter. The current chapter examines the themes of agency, gender and danger in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. I argue that women are not passive victims of patriarchy. They possess and can further generate a variety of skills and strategies that they employ in order to survive and thrive. As women characters in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* demonstrate, 'gender' is not a remote theoretical construct; it is implicated in the roles (whether positive or negative) that women and men play out in socially, and politically determined contexts. It is these contexts from which women are able to re-situate their discourses and reflect on their previous conditions and then effect changes of an

empowering nature to their kind. As Mugambi (2007: 293) observes, for the grassroots African woman, "the gender battle is almost literally a matter of life and death".

The focus of discussion for this chapter is agency. Therefore, I will briefly discuss some theorists who have made important statements on how and what strategies of surviving patriarchy evolved. Toril Moi has brought out the male fear of femininity. According to her, while men are keen to celebrate the angel in women, they are scared of the monster. "The monster woman," she writes, "is the woman who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, who has a story to tell – in short, a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her" (Moi 1985: 58). The chapter will examine how key characters in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* reject the subservient role that patriarchy has preserved for them. Similarly, McFadden has drawn attention to the persistent challenge of representing women as victims. She acknowledges that one remains compelled to highlight women's vulnerabilities, although there is need to remember that "some women have resisted the patriarchy ever since its emergence in all human societies" (McFadden 1992: 164). The chapter focuses on how women in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* negotiate patriarchy in oppressive situations. Gaidzanwa makes a similar point, observing that, "Accepting a victim status may lead women to overestimate the power of the system against them thus underestimating their potential for struggle to change and liberate themselves and their society" (Gaidzanwa 1985: 99). Cognisant of the emerging interest on masculinities in African literature (Mugambi and Allan 2010), the chapter will also focus on the portrayal of male characters in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul.*

7.2 Emplotting HIV and AIDS in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*

Secrets of a Woman's Soul is an agonizing and direct interrogation of women's survival in the face of HIV and AIDS. The novel mainly focuses on how a mother (Beata) and her daughter (Linga) act differently in their responses to HIV and AIDS. In the story, Beata succumbs to HIV and AIDS while Linga rises above and claims control of her life in the context of HIV. The notion of agency will thus be discussed, highlighting how women characters such as Linga exploit patriarchy to their advantage. Shaba, the author of the novel, probes the vulnerability of women to HIV in an urban context. She traces how one woman, Beata and her daughter, Lingalireni (shortened as Linga), undergo similar experiences. Yet, their life stories follow

different trajectories. Whereas the daughter, having had access to education and empowerment, manages to live positively with HIV, Beata is not so fortunate. She is unable to deal with the stigma and dies of AIDS. She conceals her sexually transmitted infection (STI) for many years. This has the effect of speeding up the decline of her health. Here, one sees the negative effect of the stigma that I discussed in *Days of Silence*.

Secrets of a Woman's Soul revolves around the story of Beata, a mother who, under very challenging patriarchal settings, struggles to guarantee a bright future for her daughter Linga and her siblings. Resolute to earn adequate money to further the education of her daughter, Beata finds herself forced to engage in sex so as to get a job. In the end, she contracts HIV. Beata dies eventually of an AIDS-related illness. Her demise reminds readers that women's vulnerability to HIV is real. It is a matter of life and death. This is depicted in the condition of Beata, who has to pay the ultimate price.

The story has an autobiographical slant as it is based on actual events during the colonial period in then Salisbury, which is now Harare. The title page makes an assertion that the novel is "is based on a true story." However, it is vital to remember that every story is "true" and represents the author's perception of both reality and possibilities. Artistic truth is created by how an author understands laws governing society and how these laws are re-presented through characters. Given that Shaba dedicates it to the memory of her mother, one can infer that the novel resonates with her own experiences in life. The need by women to write their own texts in which they reconstruct their own lived experiences comes from the understanding that "narrative is crucial to the discovery of our selfhood" (Gikandi 1992: 384). *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* employs flashbacks as Linga, who is getting ready to bury her mother, remembers her childhood and all the difficult choices their mother made for their own good. In this touching story, Shaba explores women's vulnerability and how they try to negotiate their way out of desperate situations caused by very oppressive socio-economic realities.

Linga, the protagonist, faces difficult experiences in her life. Her mother struggles to raise school fees for her and her siblings after she is divorced by Daudi. Beata is forced to establish a sexual relationship with a manager working for the City Council in order to secure a job for herself as a

general hand, as well as employment for her daughter. The tragedy is that the same man is also having a romantic relationship with her daughter, Linga. This man proceeds to pass on sexually transmitted infection (STI) to both women; mother and daughter. He takes advantage of his position of authority to perpetrate such an act of ruthlessness. In the novel the immorality of masculine authority is unmasked when it is revealed that Daudi as not even concerned that he was dating both mother and daughter.

Secrets of a Woman's Soul also offers some snippets into the lives of Beata's other children. Linga is the third child of Beata and Daudi Muwekwa. She has two older brothers, Zondwayo and Mayola, as well as a younger brother, Lamulo and a younger sister, Chidepa (21). Through the interactions and battles within the Muwekwa family, the narrative conflicts are unravelled. The reader is made aware of the tension between Beata and Daudi and how this disrupts harmony in the household. However, they do have their moments of happiness, as expressed by the author:

> The foursome that included Daudi her husband, had apparently been quite an item. They would go to watch movies and revel in going to sit in the white-only areas and create havoc as the whites scrambled to create distance. They would go for drives in Lancelot's convertible wearing scarves over their heads and feeling like film stars. They would have parties at Bridget's house and drink themselves into a small choir… If the party was at Beata's house, Linga would be asked to showcase her dancing skills… (39).

The author further underscores stubbornness and the desire to live and reproduce amidst HIV when she writes that sometimes Beata and her family "had eggs and sausages for breakfast on Sundays. They ate corn flakes and ate vegetables like carrots and green beans in an era when the staple vegetable for Africans was the leafy Covo and Rape" (38). This reference to a balanced diet can be used to illustrate two aspects. On the one hand, it is depicted in a manner that contrasts the 'poor' standards of people from the lower class, with those of the emerging middle class women such as Linga. The reflection on life gone by in which there was some semblance of good life is meant to provide a contrast of the life Beata and her children later led as a result of

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the divorce. Beata is not empowered economically. Therefore, when Daudi, the breadwinner divorces her, and later on dies, Beata is left with very few choices to make. The desire to provide for her children results in a disaster for both mother and daughter when they are infected with HIV.

At the same time, reference to issues of a balanced diet among infected Africans can also be viewed as Shaba's technique to reflect Linga's new consciousness after she tests HIV positive. Linga now has to know the right food to eat. Eggs, sausages and vegetables are types of food that are very much needed by any one with HIV to boost immunity. Also at stake here is the class differentiation of how HIV is experienced, between the rich and the poor. Shaba's novel reveals that in an era of HIV and AIDS, the poor lose out when they do not only have a balanced diet, and significantly when they virtually have no access to either protection in the form of condoms or medication in the form anti-ritroviral tablets.

In *Secrets of A Woman's Soul*, Linga struggles to come to terms with both her infection and her mother's. Ultimately, her marriage collapses as she tests HIV positive while her husband tests HIV negative. This depiction runs the risking of confirming the patriarchal myth that says women are a danger to society and that they prey on unsuspecting men who are then depicted as innocent. When Daudi decides to terminate their marriage, Linga also tries her level best to ensure that her mother gets access to life-saving medication. Although, the economic situation is hostile, she struggles to continue to buy the anti-retroviral drugs that could sustain her mother. Theirs is a harrowing narrative of two strong willed women trying to defy death in a cruel world. Their experience reminds readers of the struggles around accessing anti-retroviral therapy (ART). In the words of Mogensen:

> We have to confront the dilemmas of AIDS and of ART by dealing with the nexus of family, social support, cost and complex issues of adherence to medicine in general. We have to understand how people navigate in a sea of uncertainties and potentialities, and of social relations and power relations, none of which are transparent, and become even less

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so when life and death are at stake and people are struggling to find ways of getting access to life-saving medicine. (2009: 180).

Secrets of a Woman's Soul also deals with the secrets that women have been forced to carry inside their souls as they struggle to survive. Both silence and secrecy leave women in a state of paralysis. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* suggests that women need to express their struggles to other women so that they could jointly work out solutions. Beata keeps her sexually transmitted infection secret. This prevents her daughter Linga from effectively helping her. Early treatment of sexually transmitted infections is a proven strategy in delaying the progression of HIV to AIDS. However, cultural reasons informed by patriarchal bias that Beata has been socialized into force her to conceal her HIV status for fear of stigma. According to Pillay (2009: 41), "the high HIV prevalence rates among women often results in women being branded the "carriers" of the virus… Women are stigmatized as the ones responsible for the trans-generational nature of the disease". It is this fear of being stigmatized that drives Beata into silence when she becomes aware of her HIV positive status.

Secrets of a Woman's Soul also draws attention to the effects of the migrant labour system in Southern Africa. The drama is played out between Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Nyasaland (Malawi). Perhaps the Muwekwa family was destined to struggle as it expanded far away from its spiritual home, Malawi. There were very few close relatives to provide support systems to the fledging family. The reader learns that:

> Beata and Daudi were immigrants from Malawi, having joined in the trek during the 1960s to Salisbury, which was the capital of the Federation of Nyasaland, Northern and Southern Rhodesia. They were among many such labour migrants who freely crossed the borders in search of better employment opportunities in the federal capital, which the settler government developed better than any of the other cities of the federation. (21).

Apart from having to negotiate a hostile urban environment, migrants from Malawi had to contend with xenophobia and negative attitudes from the local people. Many Shona people in

Zimbabwe had a superiority complex and regarded migrant labourers as 'mabhurandaya', 'machawa' or 'mabwidi' (Chimedza 2008: 89). These were negative labels that suggested that migrant labourers were less important and less human to the other ethnic groups in Rhodesia and later post independence Zimbabwe. To worsen the situation, migrant laborers were exploited by their white employers and we are notified:

> Most of the Malawians found a niche for themselves in the farms and mines, where they were considered dependable labour by the white farmers, their homes being too far for them to commute regularly, and, therefore, they took less time off from work. It was also claimed that they had a more docile temperament and, therefore, were 'easier to handle' and they did not leave seasonally to go home to the rural areas to till the land as the local Shonas of Southern Rhodesia did. Others went as far as the gold mines of South Africa, having been lured by the promises of quick riches in the City of Gold, Johannesburg. (21).

This peripatetic lifestyle or a life of wandering often posed risks to both sexes. When the husband, for example, left the home to seek employment in the neighbouring country, the wife is often left behind with the children. Distance is created. The man sometimes fails to constantly support the family in terms of material needs. The woman is left to fend for the family all by herself, sometimes by any possible means, good or bad. Either part may engage in immoral behaviour because of the void created by distance. Daudi falls in this trap. He indulges in promiscuous behaviour, cohabiting with one woman after the other when Beata is in Malawi. Such conditions are conducive to and further promote the prevalence of HIV and AIDS.

7.3 Women's Vulnerability to HIV and AIDS

Presented from Linga's perspective, *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* is a portrayal of the lives of Beata and Linga. The author examines the struggle for the continued existence of a mother who is very much tied to her daughter. Both the mother and the daughter engage in secret sexual acts that they are ashamed to share, but remain bound together. It turns out that they contract HIV from the same man. This is an indictment of men in the face of HIV. The novel makes it clear

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that women's vulnerability to HIV is complicated by economic and cultural factors that leave women with limited room to operate from. Concerning options open to most married women, Shaba comments:

> Abstinence was a luxury most poor women could not afford, and marital status was not even a factor. Most had very narrow choices: to 'open up' or 'pack up', presented with a choice of two stigmas, HIV within their marriage or divorce as the only way to stay healthy. Urban legends abounded of young girls at colleges being pimped in a racket operating from the local hostels in a bid to finance their college schooling. As for the sex workers, they would tell you that both poverty and HIV were slow deaths. (91).

Shaba shows how limited the choices for these poor women are, to 'open up' or 'pack up'. It is important to draw attention to the possibility of a double meaning embedded in the two phrases 'open up' and 'pack up'. From one angle, 'open up' may mean the literal opening up one's legs, yielding to the sexual demands from men, whether it is safe or not. Linga does this in her first sexual encounters with the councillor. She is desperate for school fees and gives in to her benefactor's sexual demands. 'Pack up', in another context may denote the literal packing of one's bags and leaving the man or home. This happens when women challenge patriarchy and fail to give in. Beata packs up her bags on different occasions when she disagrees with Daudi. Beata does not hold onto their matrimonial home which is now characterized by bruises from an abusive husband. She leaves home and goes to settle in Malawi. She only comes back to occupy their matrimonial home when Daudi dies. This capacity to stand up to men by removing oneself from the space controlled by men can be liberating. Conversely, in *Secrets of a Women's Soul*, this potential has been compromised by the fact that Beata has been forced by socially constructed ideologies to think that life without a man denies women their identities. A form of agency could have sufficiently differentiated the responses of Beata to Daudi as not simply characterised by passivity that results in early death.

Nevertheless, Shaba suggests that 'opening up' and 'packing up' does carry some creative meanings associated with tough-willed women. In the novel to 'open up' also means to be

assertive and to accept direct consequences manifested in acts that challenge patriarchy. This is shown by Linga later in her life. She becomes the one to dictate terms for safer sexual relationships. Linga has developed in consciousness. She no longer 'opens up' her legs to men in the literal sense, particularly when she deems it unsafe. Her life is more of a journey, where she moves from a lower to a higher level of consciousness. 'Opening up' in this case threatens certain privileged positions in society. Where patriarchy has often enjoyed dictating terms for sexual relationships, Linga takes that initiative. This undermines the initial narrative in which women suffering from HIV were portrayed as deserving of pity and sometimes outright contempt from men such as Daudi.

In complicating her narratives of HIV and AIDS, Shaba shows that women can be a danger to patriarchy when the women begin to dictate terms by which they want to be considered in a sexual relationship. This kind of 'danger' in the new roles that women such as Linga take on can be described as positive because it effects a reversal of roles enacted by women and men in society. But, to 'pack up' as referenced in the novel also means to keep quiet and subscribe to the status quo. 'Packing up' in this case becomes a risk. It denotes passivity that destroys the individual who chooses not to question patriarchy. It is a 'danger' to society when women remain silent and play out their inferior but ascribed roles. This happens to Beata who is portrayed as a woman who is conscious of a patriarchal environment that threatens her existence, and she is unwilling to confront it. She does not cry when Daudi is violent to her. Although she also challenges her sons when they want to give her orders, it is, however, sad to read how, later in the novel, she gives in to patriarchal demands by engaging in unprotected sexual activities in order to raise school fees for her daughter. Beata has limited resources to ensure the welfare of her children. She consequently falls prey to the councillor who, in turn, provides school fees for Linga. Shaba presents the councillor as heartless when he goes on to abuse Linga for the same reasons he is having a relationship with her mother, Beata. In this case, 'packing up' undermines the consciousness and agency Beata initially had. Poverty forces her to 'pack up' so that she gets the immediate benefit. This destroys her in the end when she dies of an AIDS- related disease.

It is significant to underline the achievement of Shaba in depicting Beata as having contradictory identities; she is pulled by the centripetal forces of partriachy to do its bidding. At the same time,

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there are latent centrifugal spiritual resources within her that unevenly manifest themselves at those moments when she defies Daudi. Shaba's success here is evident when she does not romanticize women's struggles, portraying the women as always scoring and registering positive results in their struggles against men. At the same time, Beata is realistically depicted as a woman who is also prone to dejection and this is what kills her. Therefore, Shaba can be said to be effecting a critical dialogue with other female writers who either depicted women in binary terms of either passive or active, positive or negative.

In order to determine women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS further, there is need to undertake an examination of the cultural factors that worsen the lives of women in situations of HIV and AIDS. In *Secret of a Woman's Soul,* Beata and Linga are Chewa, a matrilineal culture. In theory, one would expect women from a matrilineal culture to fair better than women from patrilineal cultures. In real life, however, it does not work out as neatly as one would assume. Patriarchy remains active, even in matrilineal cultures. Colonialism, Christianity and African traditional practices have undermined the status of women in matrilineal cultures. According to Phiri:

> The Chewa woman was looked upon as the root of the lineage (tsinde) as well as a dependent (mbumba).These two perspectives show that although a matrilineal society gave a woman high status and a certain amount of freedom which was not there in a patrilineal society, she was also heavily dependent upon, as well as controlled by her uncle and brother who had total power over her, whether single or married. Her family power did not mean matriarchy. The Chewa woman was not spared from the evils of ritual intercourse during initiation, early marriages, mental torture to barren and single women, polygamy, levirate marriages and abusive widowhood rites. Thus Chewa matrilineal society was also patriarchal. (1997: 35).

The citation above clearly demonstrates that even in a matrilineal culture, such as the Chewa, women have not enjoyed power and authority. Women continue to suffer under the dictates and control of patriarchy and its harmful cultural practices.

It is also a fact that culture is a significant factor in women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. In the first instance, it is culture (or perhaps its negative interpretation) that allows Daudi to treat Beata with contempt. While it is true that there are positive cultural practices that promote harmonious relations between husbands and wives, the dominant model does not derive inspiration from such practices. The dominant representation empowers men and condemns women to subservience. As a result, Daudi feels it is well within his rights to banish Beata and the other children to Malawi. In the meantime, he has been moving from one girlfriend to another. It is this absence of safeguard in marriage that leaves Beata vulnerable to HIV later in her life.

How Beata ends up in an unfulfilling marriage needs to be interrogated. It is likely that the failure to promote an open approach to issues of sexuality has left the young woman vulnerable. Although traditional Chewa culture was quite empowering by offering sex education to girls and young women through the initiation ceremony, Christianity disrupted such avenues. As a result, Beata gets impregnated by a young taxi driver and fails to complete her training as a nurse (32). Here, one gets disturbed by patriarchal systems that are portrayed as very harsh with young women who fall pregnant out of wedlock. The expulsion of pregnant girls and young women from school and training institutions bears testimony to the impact of patriarchy. Instead of allowing these young women to continue with their education, they are banished and made even more vulnerable. Here women are viewed as a 'danger' to the school community and that they can influence other women in negative ways. However, the men with whom women cohabit are not entirely to blame but society looks the other way and does not severely punish these men. Instead, the emphasis on the father receiving the bride price plays a major role in the construction of the image of a woman as negative danger when she transgresses and does the socially unsanctioned way of getting pregnant out of wedlock. These biased forms of signifying women in the era of HIV and AIDS allow men to create, enforce and then implement insensitive cultural policies that result in the discrimination of women at school and at work.

Low socio-economic status resulting from limited educational opportunities also increases women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. Linga is forced to lose her virginity to the councillor.

Both Linga and her mother are infected with HIV by the same man. He has power over them. As gender theorists such as Gaidzanwa (1985) and McFadden (1992) have noted, poverty leads many girls and young women to engage in unprotected sex. Women are forced into sex work or transactional sex because of the need to survive. Beata and Linga, therefore, join the long list of women who have had to use their bodies in order to survive. In some instances, the lack of workable alternatives forces women to endure relationships that are characterised by the absence of mutual love. Beata groans in her marriage to Daudi, hoping that her children can have a sound education and achieve better things in life. Beata sacrifices her life for the sake of her children. She endures violence by Daudi in the hope that she can see her children succeed in life. Women who divorce have to put up with stigma and discrimination. They are deemed 'dangerous' by patriarchy as they are not answerable to a particular man. Other women regard them as a 'danger' as they might attract or entice their husbands. As a result, women have to make do with violent marriages. Linga's recollection enables the reader to understand Beata's struggle:

> She also remembered with deep hurt and anger the times when her father would slap her mother and punch her with fists while she tried to protect her head. He would almost end up throwing her clothes out of the door, shouting at her things and get out of his house. (35).

In the above passage, Shaba uses the words such as 'slap' and 'punch' to convey the violent culture that has sustained patriarchy. This violence is dangerous because it diminishes the humanity of both women and men. Men are portrayed as a danger to women. By perpetrating such acts of violence, the man is also dehumanized in the process. The fact that Linga remembers these violent episodes with 'deep hurt and anger' is testimony to strained relationships in situations where men seek to dominate women. It is possible to suggest that that Shaba reveals her female characters possessing bottled anger which also suggests that they are capable of transforming this anger into a force for their good or bad.

The economic system that privileges male labour over women's labour also increases women's vulnerability to HIV. The colonial period introduced the idea of a 'bread winner' and ascribed it

to the man. Formal employment tended to promote male labour, with women being constructed as dependents. This weakened the status of women who used to have their own pieces of land in traditional societies (Schmidt 1992). Beata and Linga are victims of this history. Colonial ideology supported patriarchal systems that privileged the African man at the expense of his female counterpart. This is why at independence, most influential positions in most African societies were occupied by men and continue to be controlled by men. What is then implied in this unequal relation between women and men is that despite the attainment of independence, females are rendered dispensable by males. In the novel, the councillor takes advantage of Beata and Linga's situation and infects them with HIV. Without access to education and reproductive health, women and girls are at the mercy of men. Thus, "HIV and AIDS presents women with extremely complex challenges relating to their sexuality and reproductive health" (Pillay 2009: 43). Such challenges are often made worse by sexist notions of women's bodies. Linga's friends, Chipo and Noma play with their lives. Noma gets pregnant at fifteen and dies of an AIDS-related illness at eighteen. Chipo also dies from an AIDS-related illness (25).

In the novel, Beata's failure to seek treatment for an STI confirms the fact that there are high levels of stigma and discrimination that women have to negotiate. Society is too quick to condemn girls and women who have STIs. Unfortunately, this allows HIV to destroy the body more efficiently. The bias against women forces them to hide STIs because friends, neighbours, church mates and health personnel are all quick to condemn them. The negative terms that are used, including, "slow train", "slow puncture" or "expedited mail service" (19) illustrate the lack of consideration that prevails in society. It is such insensitivity in the use of terms relating to HIV and AIDS that Sontag (1988) writes about. Furthermore, there is also a fatalistic attitude that forces many people to embrace their uncomfortable situations when they could actually work towards a resolution. The effects are tragic. The author reveals:

> Those who did not treat their STIs also ran the risk of developing AIDS faster because their bodies' immune systems were constantly under siege. In some ways it helped Linga to understand how it had not been possible for her mother to ask about the sexual activities that went on under her nose. Firstly, she was part of a social psyche that dictated that some things are better left unseen and unsaid. It is better to turn a blind eye,

for what is the use of knowing when you cannot do anything about it? Secondly, she was from a generation where shame was worse fate than death. Still, Linga's mind struggled to comprehend that Beata had nursed an STI for fifteen years. (79).

The contexts of helplessness that women often find themselves in put their lives at risk. They are incapacitated to explore avenues that allow them to live fulfilling and meaningful lives. Furthermore in the era of HIV and AIDS, society's negative attitude to women who are HIV positive promotes the development of AIDS.

In *Secret of a Woman's Soul*, Linga becomes aware of how the world is set up in a manner that disadvantages women:

> She felt ashamed. Her spirit de-clothed, abused and left to the elements. No thought that she could clutch felt warm enough to cover that innermost part of her that had been pillaged. There was just the cold reality of what had happened. Just another sale of the soul in the oldest form of exchange, another shattered dream. She was left with the knowledge that she had entered some dungeon, some hidden room, the dreaded closet of secrets and shame, and was sentenced to for ever remain silent about what she had done, what had been done to her. She could almost hear the heavy door, slowly, heavily, silently, closing behind her. She could never tell anyone about it, ever. They just would not understand. (74-75).

In this powerful paragraph, Linga engages in deep psychological probing. Her spirit is denuded. She comes to the realisation that the virginity that she had prized had just been taken in the most violent manner. In this instance, it is significant to note the paradoxical nature of the whole discourse of women preserving their virginity. Preserving one's virginity shows a woman who is in control of her body. However, it is still patriarchy that will enjoy the benefits in the end, and not the virgin herself. Linga plunges from being a virtuous 'virgin' to a common 'prostitute'. Her struggle is manifested in how far apart society has put the two poles of being a virgin and a prostitute. Yet, the movement from one category of being, to another, was almost seamless for

Linga. If she would survive, she needed to challenge this harsh patriarchal ordering of 'reality.' It is not only Linga who experiences sex as forced and painful. The majority of young girls do not have happy memories of their first sexual encounters. Boys and men have not been trained to be sensitive to the needs of girls and women. They impose themselves and appear not to care about their partners' feelings. Linga reminisces:

> She had heard her friends narrate their first sexual encounters with their boyfriends: on desks in classrooms, in the grass, in maize fields, at the drive-in, in the cars of their boyfriends or those borrowed from heaven knew where, in absentee parents' or uncles' homes – everywhere. Some said they had not wanted to, but they were forced. Others said they had been locked in and that the only way they could leave was after sex. Others had been given a little too much to drink and were not too sure what had really happened. Most of them had not enjoyed it – at least that they shared in common. (82).

The words 'some', 'others' and 'most' in the above passage qualify the different perspectives of Linga's friends and their first sexual encounters. This pluralises women's views on how other women act different roles. The author suggests that women have options even when sometimes the same women give different reasons as excuses for not saying no to sex and unprotected sex. The author makes use of language to fracture a uniform identity for women. 'Some', 'Others' 'Most' all imply different positions in narrating the issue of danger and gender. Linga's friends and their first sexual encounters are partialised as the author gives different perspectives. Shaba differentiates the ways various people contract HIV. She does so in order to alert the young generation. The passage above shows different ways in which men seek to control women, thereby leading to HIV. The technique of partialising women's responses is a mark of growth in narrative consciousness on the part of the author. It is employed by Shaba to differentiate the developments in a bid to show continual development in the consciousness of her female characters. Shaba is laying bare the different options presented to Linga's friends. Some could have chosen to refuse the sexual advances. Multiplying these perspectives is a way by Shaba to show that girls have also bought into men's idea that girls are weak. However, as argued by Kamaara, the odds are heavily stacked against girls in sexual matters:

Persons introducing sex to young girls and engaging in sexual relations with them are more often than not, male figures in authority such as teachers, bosses, civil and religious leaders, etc. This confirms a positive relationship of male dominance and female subordination on one hand and sexual activity by young people on the other. Reasons given by the girls consistently indicate that they do not respond to their sexual needs but to those of their male partners. On the other hand, boys or men engage in sexual activity to boost their own egos as men and to satisfy their own sexual needs. This indicates a strong relationship between gender and sexual activity among young people. (Kamaara 2005: 77).

The social, economic and political system is depicted as unprepared to protect young girls such as Linga. It elaborates campaigns on abstinence, but it is incapable of cushioning vulnerable girls from cunning men such as the councillor. There had been an opportunity for Linga to be saved from her fate when she visited the Youth Services Centre and openly told them that she needed protection as she was going to engage in sex with an older man. The staff at the centre is not equipped to assist her:

So they called each other, narrated her story to each other and clucked at her plight. They gave her pills. She was happy she had the pills, but disappointed that they had not been able to offer her any alternatives to securing her schooling money. She also learnt a bitter lesson then: that people will share your problem with their friends, talk about it and apparently feel sorry for you, but none will lift a finger to help you. (71).

The Youth Services Centre has limited services. It does not offer material services such as paying fees for the disadvantaged. The provision of contraceptive pills only without other socio-economic support systems promotes the spread of HIV. This is evident in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul.* Linga ends up accepting to sleep with men without protection in order to get school fees. Motsemme (2007) calls this concept flawed agency because the end justifies the means with distrastrous results for the women.

Whereas *The Uncertainty of Hope* offers a more critical commentary on the political situation, *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* is more subtle. Shaba avoids attacking the post-colonial government for its abuse of women. However, she draws attention to the political violence that accompanies the birth of the new nation. Daudi's family is attacked for allegedly having supported Muzorewa's party and Linga just about survives rape (50-51). This metaphor of a woman either being raped or surviving rape at independence has serious implications regarding the well-being of women in the new nation. As (Vambe and Mawadza 2001) have shown, the post-colonial nationalist government was quick to imprison women for walking alone at night in urban spaces. Such women were charged with "the crime of soliciting sexual favours in exchange for financial benefit" (Vambe and Mawadza 2001: 60). Again, what is implied by the critics is that it is the women that are named as loose and dangerous and, therefore, deserving to be locked up in prison. The men with whom some women prostitute are not considered a danger. This discriminatory practice continues to contribute to the labeling of women as not only the inferior other, but the destructive element in society. It is a kind of depiction that is contested in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul.*

7.4 Women's Agency in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*

One needs to interrogate whether Shaba is persuaded that women have absolutely no chance in this world. Although Shaba acknowledges the various factors that make women's lives miserable in the time of HIV, she is convinced that there is a window of opportunity that must be exploited. Women possess many positive qualities that enable them to take the helm of life's numerous challenges. What they require is empowerment. When women are empowered they can negotiate the treacherous curves that the road of life brings forth. Shaba asserts that women's education is a critical step in the journey towards liberation. For her, an educated woman possesses many more options than one who has not had access to education. Linga is a good case in point. Although, like Beata, she is HIV positive, Linga's education enables her to control her life. She is able to live positively, access medication and maintain a clear vision of her life. On the other hand, her mother is not so empowered. As a result, she dies prematurely. In upholding this stance, Shaba advocates the education of the girl child. It is understood that education may not bring everything that a woman would desire in life. However, when a woman is educated, she is in a much better position to negotiate her way around a hostile world. Linga is able to look after

herself and her mother. Furthermore, Linga's friends marvel at how she is no longer afraid to speak out her mind. She is empowered and realises that she does not need men for her to attain her goals. Education has given her freedom and choice. In particular, she has control over her own sexuality. Shaba enlightens the reader:

> After the single experience of a sexually transmitted disease Linga took no chances when it came to sex. She kept her own pack of condoms in a drawer right by her bedside. No coyness or pretending she did not have them. On her wardrobe she had a cartoon of a condom head with a naughty smile and a bubble reading 'I can keep AIDS out. Can you?' Even if it was at a man's house she took pride in pulling a condom out of her handbag. (86).

While it is an established fact that the use of condoms is not hundred percent safe, the idea that women carry condoms to control the spread of HIV is a new consciousness showing a new woman who shatters the myth that it is the man who is always aware of the dangers posed by HIV AIDS. In the above passage, women such as Linga have taken over the mantle of responsibility and refuse to be portrayed as objects of pity. They actually begin to pity those men who do not possess a consciousness to prevent the spread of HIV. In other words, women's agency is an important factor in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. Where men were once given the credit of stopping the spread of HIV, women are now empowered to do it. This subverts the idea that it is men alone who can stop the spread of HIV. Women now dictate the terms. They have become subjects of their own survival.

Although her divorce is devastating, Linga manages to cope as she quickly realises that she has her destiny in her own hands. When Linga's husband divorces her for being HIV positive when he is negative, the possibility was that Linga could have easily thought that her world had collapsed and ceased to have any enthusiasm for life. Fortunately, she has not defined herself entirely through the prism of marriage. Assuming that a woman's value is determined by her marital status has led many women to sacrifice their careers and even lives.

Through Linga, the reader becomes aware of the various strategies that women use to manipulate men and accomplish their desired goals. While selling at the market, Linga uses her charm to encourage young boys and men to buy from her (66-67). Alternatively, when the councillor insists on having sex, she tells him she is having her monthly period. When the councillor finally has his way, she ensures that she manipulates him in order for her to get her liberation. These are some of the coping strategies that women in this novel have devised in their interaction with men. Women have identified men's weaknesses, especially around sexuality. They have used their experience to manipulate men and achieve their goals, even when men imagine themselves to be the victors in the war between women and men.

Women are also able to manage difficult men by employing various techniques. While Daudi is able to terrorise Beata, he stands no chance against the younger Emma (37). Emma uses her youthful advantage and the presence of her brothers to manipulate Daudi. Beata's older generation of women had to come up with numerous survival strategies in the wake of patriarchal oppression. For example, they had to attain extensive knowledge of herbs in order to take care of distinctively feminine issues. "Sensible aunties" possessed knowledge of the different herbs that women could use (46-47). More importantly, they had a motto, "You have to do what you have to do and that is that" (47). By upholding this principle, women become a danger to patriarchy. While men remain comfortable, thinking that women are under their control and obeying patriarchal rules, women have set their own rules. Unfortunately for men, these new rules do not conform to the patriarchal ones. Women have set new rules that are concerned solely with how women have to survive oppressive situations. In this way, women have subverted patriarchy.

Whereas men think they can impregnate women and leave the women to look after 'their children', women have found ways of performing abortions. The case of Mucha is instructive. After a series of men have used her and she falls pregnant, Beata assists her to abort. As a result of Beata's intervention, "the next thing Linga knew was that Mucha was her skinny self again" (48). Though dangerous to the health of women if carried out by unprofessional health practitioners, the issue of abortion reaffirms women's agency. Men basically have very little power to ensure that women carry their pregnancies up to delivery. This is why the question of

abortion elicits deep emotion amongst men. They find it difficult to accept women's autonomy. Through abortion, women pose a danger to patriarchy in that abortion denies the continuation of the male line of descent in a patriarchal or matriarchal society.

Since women are aware of the numerous challenges before them, they are conscious of the need to be determined to struggle against forms of oppression that diminish their personhood. Although male-dominated social views have constructed women as weak, they are incredibly strong. They do not have the luxury of allowing their secrets to wear them down. Instead, they have had to find ways of carrying on with their lives. Shaba is, therefore, making Linga representative of many women who have had to make peace with their secrets, when she says that:

> Linga knew her emotional survival depended on her ability to gain strength from the good memories, and to try and forget the bad things that coloured her present. Her task was to make them colours of light and hope, instead of darkness and despair. She was not even sure she wanted to forget. In any event, that was another luxury women of her generation could not afford, be they farmers tilling the land, labourers breaking their backs in the factories, or professionals wearing power suits in the high-rise buildings in the city, for they bore the same soul-destroying legacy of secrets. (19).

Linga gets her power to live from the happy memories. This positive attitude in women is contrasted with the destructive tendencies in the roles that men are portrayed acting out in society. This is discussed in the next section.

7.5 The Portrayal of Men in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*

In *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, Shaba is unforgiving in her portrayal of men. The reader struggles to find a good man. Apart from the positive father-daughter relationship exhibited by Daudi and Linga, when Daudi inspires Linga to become a lawyer, almost all the men are programmed to take advantage of women. They do not hesitate to seek sexual favours and abuse their positions

of power to do so. The way Daudi relates to his daughter Linga is one of the redemptive elements in Shaba's male characters. Linga observes:

> In spite of his violence and ill treatment of her mother, Linga was clear that if it had not been for his clarity of vision for his daughter, and his forthright manner in relating to her during her mother's absence, she would not have had the ambition or the discipline to become a lawyer. She was grateful to him for that gift. That was one of the paradoxes in the relationship between her father and mother, and father and daughter. He had constantly beaten her mother, but he virtually never laid a finger on her. (44).

Violence underlines the theme of men's agency in cultural and social spheres. Shaba uses the words 'violence' 'ill treatment' and 'beaten' as evidence of men's arrogance and bullish behaviour However, Shaba entertains the idea of possible progressive patriarchy, "where responsible fatherhood seeks to use its power positively so as to empower than violate its own children" (Chitando and Madongonda 2007: 170). Daudi is, however, not a very inspiring man. He subjects Beata to violence and co-habits with different women (34). While he thinks that he is asserting his manhood, his daughter has a different interpretation: "Instead, she saw him as a petulant, weak man desperately trying to subdue a woman refusing to be cowed" (35). While Daudi is presented and presents himself as a powerful man by dominating his wife, he fails in his role as protector when the mob comes to 'discipline' him for his political activism. His beloved daughter just about survives rape while he is crying from the vicious beating. This reminds men of their powerlessness and the need to be sensitive to the cries of women. Linga recollects an incident when Daudi showed his weakness in the face of other men:

> On the terrible night of the assault, Daudi had not attempted to protect Linga. As the gang had hammered on the door, he had cowered in his bedroom. She recalled how her mother used to scornfully narrate how he once came running from some men he had provoked, locked himself in the house and proceeded to shout at his pursuers through the window. (51).

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This illustrates the concept of weak people fighting weak people. Daudi bullies Beata but cannot stand any fight with other men. According to Shaba, Daudi is a good example of weak men who fight women:

> Only weak men and cowards assault the weak,' she always said, with direct reference to her husband, whom she had concluded was both. The beatings she sometimes suffered at her husband's hands, of which Linga had seen a few, made Beata respect him less as a man. She passed on another lesson to Linga: 'Strong men have no need to demonstrate their strength. It is the weak ones who hit, and for them, hitting a woman is like dipping into the honey pot of male power. He smacks you once, and you can rest assured, Mama, he will do it again, and again, and again. That's just the way it is. It tastes even better for them if the woman is a strong woman. (51).

Men such as Daudi attain self actualization by undermining the other, who is the woman in this case. They are dangerous at the basic level. Beating the women results in physical pain, psychological trauma, as well as an assault on the spiritual being. Shaba's vocabulary shifts when she talks of men. She uses masculine and violent vocabulary such as 'punch' to undermine men and show their weaknesses. Beata exposes violence against women as showing inadequacies on the part of men who perpetrate it. She also empowers Linga to be on the look-out for violence. She enables Linga to understand that men use violence as a poor strategy to reassert their depleted manhood. Men who are secure do not need to use violence, she suggests. Men think that using force is a demonstration of power. However, Beata's understanding of negative socialization of men confirms that it is in fact weak and cowardly men who use violence. According to Richter and Morrell (2006), many men use their role as fathers to define their violent masculinity.

For example, the councillor comes across as a very scheming and unfair man. He abuses his position of authority and ends up infecting both Beata and her daughter (Linga) with HIV. He has sexual relations with both women without any sense of shame. The councillor represents negative masculinity. Negative masculinity refers to those ways of being men that threaten the

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health of women. Ultimately, these anti women and anti-human tendencies in most men also threaten the health of men themselves as in the novel, the councillor also is HIV positive himself. The construction of men as having insatiable sexual desire is a danger for both women and men, as exposed by Chiroro *et al*:

> …having multiple sexual partners, engaging in casual sex without a condom, sexual coercion and sexual abuse of women (including rape), are merely overt expressions of the internalized male psyche that is driven by the pursuit of sexual gratification by men from women in a variety of situations. (Chiroro, Mashu and Muhwava 2002: 24).

Daudi and the councillor are not isolated men. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* generally considers men a dangerous gender. Men have contributed to the conspiracy of secrecy that grips society. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* does not spare any category of men. Men from all walks of life have forced women and children into leading lives that are marked by the keeping of secrets. Shaba writes:

> Fathers that sired with their daughters; faith healers, be they pastor, brother or *n'anga*; the old and abandoned women in their huts, fragile and brittle bones cracking and snapping in the dark of the night; housemaids, factory workers, secretaries, students – all forced to work extra hours on their backs and knees on threat of dismissal or failure, looking for a place to call their own and dragged into the chamber of society's shame. Trapped like rabbits in the glare, trampled upon, and like vermin thrown by the wayside, flapping and sliding in the slime behind the closed door, in the fetid rotting air of the closet of society's dark shameful secrets. (80-81).

The passage above is a portrayal of the negative roles played by men. Fathers engage in incestuous relationships with their daughters. All men are potentially guilty of abusing and victimizing women. This includes men in the religious sector in its different forms. Faith healers, pastors, Pentecostal 'brothers' and traditional healers have all used women. The imagery of women trapped like rabbits is indicative of the violence men perpetrate against women. Shaba

presents the reader with women who have endured abuse at the hands of men. These women who are oppressed by men come from diverse social classes. In this passage, Shaba posits gender struggle in which men have brought misery to women. Men abuse their power in society to force women into unwanted sexual relationships. Men are portrayed as being uncaring and unsupportive members of society.

Defective socialisation has led men to think that they are entitled to pleasure and leadership at the expense of women. Small boys have come to know that the role of the mother is too burdensome and so they steadfastly refuse to play mother. "Boys or girls could play father but the boys flatly refused to play mother" (25). The shaping of boys has made them conscious of the low position of the mother, even from a very early age. Boys have been made aware of their importance to the continued existence of their families. However, this leads many of them down the path of arrogance. Linga's two brothers, Lamulo and Zondwayo follow their father's unhelpful life-style. They both squander their school fees, want to order Beata around and are difficult to live with. However, Beata is an empowered mother who will not tolerate any of her sons' nonsense. Linga remembers:

> the time when one of her older brothers was complaining that he had not been consulted and, as a male in the home, should have been. '*Ish*' was Beata's response. 'As if anything would have come out of it. All that is done the whole day is just dangle them, and what gets done? Nothing. The oblique attack, characteristic of African women, hit home, and after having their manhood reduced to dangling testicles, the boys always complained that women ruled the household and the men had no say. It suited Beata just fine. (43).

The words 'consulted, attack and complained' in the passage above are a symbol of progression, illustrating growth in women's agency. Firstly, women are known for **consulting** patriarchy in everything. Secondly, they become aware of their oppression. They question, challenge and **attack** patriarchy. Lastly, they become assertive. Men begin to **complain** that women have taken over and men no longer have any say. When this happens, men are bound to view women as dangerous, for their control over women is destabilized. These women positively transgress

patriarchal norms, forcing roles to change. Women no longer 'consult' men. Men 'complain' of the 'attack' on their previous privileges. Beata is not intimidated by her sons. She even forces them out of the home when they get married, thereby exposing their challenged masculinities (44-45).

In order to belittle or dwindle the image of men in the face of the growing awareness from women such as Linga, Shaba deploys vocabulary calculated to diminish the stature of men. To refer to men as only 'dangling testicles' and nothing else significant is a weapon used to ridicule men. Shaba's use of vulgarity reminds one of carnival feasts where people are allowed freedom of expression to even ridicule the system. The comedy of carnival feasts is also linked to satire and parody. Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (1968) depicts such feasts. Carnival feasts are generally characterized by a lot of vulgarity. This is meant to evoke laughter and satirize the intended audience. The role of laughter in this case is quite significant, as it is also meant to correct wickedness. Shaba assumes a role similar to that of someone who is sanctioned to run a public satire. She mocks patriarchy in the process.

Shaba writes openly about what society views as taboo and throws it into public domain. The area of HIV and AIDS has been viewed as a prohibited subject for discussion in most African societies, "essentially because of its intimate relationship with the sexual act" (McFadden 1992: 158). The concept of carnival feasts is similar to '*chihwerura'* in the Shona culture, in which comedy, satire, parody, mockery and laughter are entertained in order to ridicule and correct vice. Shaba adopts this style to overtly write about HIV and AIDS. The discourse she uses turns the official worldview upside down. Her mentioning of private parts is meant to demean, mock or laugh at the intended target, that is patriarchy in this case. This laughter is the starting point. To laugh at a system means one is claiming better standing, better moral ground, or that one has better options to offer. The insistence by patriarchy on describing women in negative images compels one to conclude that there is something positive about women's danger, which is being hidden from the rest of the world.

While Spivak (1995: 28) observes that the subaltern as female is "even more deeply in shadow" and struggles to speak, Shaba demonstrates that women can speak effectively against the

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oppressive regime of patriarchy. Her women characters strike back against male authority and undermine it. Although they operate within a patriarchal framework, they are subversive in their operations. They expose the limits of patriarchy and threaten its grip. In *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, the subaltern speaks even when sometimes this subversive speech acts are depicted as contradictory. Nonetheless, Linga's target is to dethrone the dominant male views and install at the centre of the AIDS narrative, a rehabilitative women-centred consciousness.

Simba, Linga's new husband, is representative of patriarchal patterns of thought patterns that selfishly think of himself alone. This self-centredness is depicted as dangerous. In the novel it manifests when Simba discovers that Linga is HIV positive and he is HIV negative. Simba pursues the path of divorce. As far as he is concerned, Linga must have been promiscuous. This reminds one of the stigma and discrimination that people (especially women) living with HIV have to face. Like most men, Simba does not know how to comfort a grieving partner. When Beata dies and Linga is mourning her, Simba remains aloof: "when she had tried to talk to him about her loss he would just get up and go elsewhere in the house" (18). Men are not trained on how to handle emotions. They are unable to deal with their own emotions and, therefore, struggle to deal with the emotions of others. Perhaps if they had allowed themselves to play mother during '*mahumbwe*', they would have been better prepared later in life. The socialisation of men as strong and unfeeling brings misery to both women and men. This is undermined in Dangarembga's novel, *Nervous Conditions* (1988) in which Tambudzai deconstructs emotions, feelings of pity and sympathy when she announces that she did not feel angry when her brother died. Patriarchy is not trained to take this kind of assertiveness coming from women.

7.6 HIV, AIDS, Activism and the Politics of Reconfiguring Private Space

Shaba is a woman activist, lawyer, political commentator and writer. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* is her first novel. Shaba has been actively involved in the struggle for women's empowerment in Zimbabwe. She has been heading a women's organisation, Women's Trust (formerly Women in Governance and Leadership Trust). In 2008, her organisation led the campaign, "Women Can" that sought to mobilise women to be candidates in the general and presidential elections. To name the campaign "Women Can", is an almost direct response to Spivak's question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1995). Shaba's answer to Spivak's question in this case affirms that "women

can speak". The major thrust of the campaign was to remind society that women were there not just to vote for men, but to provide effective leadership. The Women's Trust has been one of the leading women's organisations in Zimbabwe. Organisations such as the Women's Coalition and the National Association of Non-governmental Organisations (NANGO) have supported Shaba's gender activism.

Having graduated from the University of Zimbabwe with a law degree, Shaba went on to attain a Masters in Policy Studies. She is quite committed to leadership development training for women in the country. Through the Women's Trust, she has reached out to young women in tertiary institutions as well as older women in the rural areas. She strongly believes in the leadership potential of women. As an activist promoting the cause of women, she has also commented on the country's political history. Her major concern has been the establishment of a political culture that takes women seriously and prioritises their needs. These biographical notes on the author are only provided here because they shade some light as to why she believes in powerful women like Linga who are prepared to overcome social adversity.

As a lawyer, Shaba has been involved in the struggle to ensure that the laws of the country take women's human rights seriously. As a member of the Women's Coalition, an umbrella organisation for women's organisations in Zimbabwe, Shaba has been part of the struggle for women's emancipation. Organisations such as the Women's Trust

> …have aligned themselves with poor urban and rural women in confronting the state and demanding that laws that dehumanize women be abolished, they have the legitimate authority to struggle for women's human rights because they are organically connected to grassroots women. (Abdullah 2007: 153).

Shaba has infused her gender activism into *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. The narrative confirms her passion for women's liberation. To this end, one may argue that to some extent, Linga is Shaba. What Shaba might struggle to achieve in real life, Linga is able to achieve in the spaces created by the imagination. There is consistency between what Shaba seeks to achieve in life through her women leadership training, and Linga's empowerment. Through both writing and

practical engagement, Shaba seeks to authorize new ways of being human in a patriarchal society. She challenges society to abandon its hypocrisy and stop judging women unfairly. Women have very few choices to make in a patriarchal society. The shame and secrecy they endure is brought about by an insensitive patriarchal society. Women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS is a result of structures that favor men. However, Shaba is not silent on what needs to be done. For Shaba, in addition to all other supportive and progressive measures, men must invest more in the education of their daughters. Society must abandon harmful beliefs and embrace gender equality. Songs of happiness must replace the secrets stuck within women's souls. When the life of the author and her aspirations to have women control the space around are put together or side by side with the assertive characters such as Linga one is bound to conclude that Shaba has created a formidable work of art. Its significance in the retinue of women who write on HIV and AIDS is to reveal that women are scapegoated as the carriers of the disease. If this depiction appears commonplace, Shaba suggests commonsense is ideological. As such, her positive looking characters are depicted struggling against what society deems common knowledge. In short, Shaba, more than any other female writer discussed in this study, has stretched the meanings of the word 'danger' that has come to represent those negative roles that men think women are capable of playing out. In fact, Shaba subverted this traditional notion of the meaning of 'danger' when she infuses or inflects it with positive meanings associated with women's quest to expand the democratic space that they can control outside the stigmatizing male gaze.

Shaba deals with the thorny issue of HIV using a style that is unforgettable. Her novel uses flashback and sometimes very short sentences such as "She floated. She laughed. She cried…" (80), and in the process, the narrative pays attention to women's emotions. These emotions that men want to disregard is what the author thematizes and invests with authority to narrate HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. It is as if with all its denialism and hypocrisy, the post-independence male ruled society is incapable of narrating the nation through reflecting on the issue of HIV and AIDS. The male discourses on AIDS are characterised by stereotypes that work at the expense of women. When women narrate their experience of HIV and AIDS, they do not have to reverse and begin to demonize men. This the greatest achievement of Shaba in using female characters to narrate their identities of self and nation. In the process, Shaba does not hold back, even when describing very disturbing scenes of violence. Shaba is eager to let the reader get into the mind of

the character and see the world from the character's point of view. For example, one understands Beata better when one appreciates the socio-cultural context in which she is located. Beata finds it easier to live with an STI for fifteen years than to disclose as shame is regarded as worse than death in her context. Shaba discloses:

> Linga had sought treatment, and her mother had not. The strong social stigma attached to illness of a sexual nature kept Beata silent about her real affliction even to the very doctors who were her only salvation, strangers to whom she could have confided in, using anonymity as her shield from gossiping friends. She had nursed the STI for fifteen years. Linga's heart wept for her mother and all the women of her generation who had endured the ravages of ignorance and stigmatisation created by a self-righteous, morally bankrupt society, whose measure of goodness was based on the misfortunes of their friends and neighbours. (80).

In the novel, Shaba addresses the issue of stigmatized roles. She empowers Linga through education so that she lives positively after testing HIV positive. This resonates with what Shaba does in her real life of activism. Christianity has been criticised in African literature (Mugambi 1992). Shaba follows this trend as she exposes how superficial it is. Whereas missionaries had hoped to create 'responsible' women, the urban context has led to the emergence of women who 'put on' Christianity when it suits them. Shaba observes:

> Come morning the churchwomen went about their rounds of collecting mealie meal from each household for a funeral in the line. They met every Thursday and did their rosary. The little girls learnt their catechism and at Passiontide walked in front of the priest with their baskets of flower petals chanting 'sweet Jesus' and kneeling to the sacrament held up by the priest. The women who had been part of the crowd jeering the stripped lover donned their crisp white church uniforms with the sky blue cloaks and floated off to Sunday service. The Catholics in the local parish felt special because they were the only church with a white priest. However, in his attempt to Shona he was said to have once uttered some obscenities during a sermon. He wanted to say 'The women of this parish

love church.' His Shona pronunciation of the word for church came out as sounding like 'sex.' It was a popular joke in the location. (27).

The portrayal of men's own socialisation comes out as a danger to men's progress. The councillor's abuse of power results in him contracting HIV. Daudi is unable to enjoy a happy marriage because of his insistence on patriarchal control. This spills over to his sons who fail in life. In sharp contrast, it is Linga, a woman, who graduates as a lawyer. Her own brothers can only try the gown at the graduation as they have not pursued the path of education. Shaba is making a very bold statement in this regard. She is calling upon society to invest in the education of the girl child as the likelihood of success is much greater than in educating the boy child. Men are depicted as a danger to society. They are shown as the root cause of the shame and secrecy that is found amongst individuals, families and communities. Their selfish pursuit of instant gratification results in the rapid spread of HIV and the increasing death rate. Shaba suggests that men are ill-equipped to provide leadership. Daudi, Zondwayo, Mayola, Simba, the councillor and other men are not shining examples. If anything, they are depicted as representing the challenges of male leadership. Shaba is suggesting that men have not taken their families and communities to higher levels. Instead, they have stalled progress by abusing girls and women.

In short, Shaba is a sophisticated writer who resists the temptation to portray women as waiting for external agents to save them. Within the limitations posed by culture, religion, politics and the economy, girls and women fight to get on with their lives. Beata and Linga succeed in defying patriarchy on many occasions. They also manipulate men's weaknesses, especially around sexuality, to achieve their desired goals. In this way, women are actually a danger to masculinity. While men assume they are in charge of issues, women are busy subverting their authority.

7.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been argued that Shaba is keen to draw attention to women's vulnerability to HIV in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. She shows how lack of cultural, political and economic power affects women such as Beata, and Linga who are suffering from AIDS. Shaba's novel is consciously feminist in orientation. As I noted at the beginning of the chapter, feminist critics

such as Moi, McFadden and Gaidzanwa have bemoaned the tendency that portray women as victims. The critics also emphasise that creative female writers are not exempted from the onerous tasking of depicting women's positive contribution to society. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* confirms that women act in creative ways to subvert patriarchy. This clearly comes out in Linga who gains a new consciousness and begins to challenge patriarchy. She subverts patriarchal order to her advantage. The novel bemoans society's harsh dealings with women and pleads for a more sensitive approach.

However, *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* ends on a promising note. Linga has a daughter, Chiedza, which means light. There is light in the time of HIV. Although the loss of Beata is painful, her spirit has joined the ancestors. Just like the hope that Tariro brings in *Days of Silence,* Chiedza brings light in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul.* The names Chiedza and Tariro imply that life will continue to be bright and full of hope, even when one is HIV positive. Linga manages to absolve herself of the sense of guilt and is convinced that the future would be alright: " it was going to be all right" (115). It is on this note that the novel ends. Despite the violence of secrecy that shrouds HIV and AIDS, Shaba's female characters create and adopt various strategies to cope with it. The novel emphasizes human agency. Women are forced to lead lives of shame and secrecy because society has not paid attention to their numerous struggles. In this regard, Shaba sustains the focus on women's issues that was initiated by other women writers in Zimbabwe such as Tsitsi Dangarembga and Yvonne Vera.

The next chapter is the conclusion. The conclusion seeks to summarize and evaluate the findings from the study. The conclusion also endeavors to answer the research questions in the introductory chapter, as well as offer recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION TO THE STUDY

8.1 Restatement of Research Questions

In this study, I set out to explore the relationship of the concepts of feminism, gender, danger and HIV and AIDS in a Zimbabwean context. The main aim was to analyse selected novels in English, written by Zimbabwean women. The motivation was to reveal the impact of cultural beliefs and practices on gender dynamics in literature written by women in Zimbabwe. In this regard, it was proposed that comparing perspectives on the representations women in women's fiction that addresses HIV and AIDS could enable one to emerge with distinct and yet differentiated patterns of female characters' responses to the HIV pandemic. It was fore-grounded from the beginning of the study that such an endeavour needs to adopt a critical stance that can help the critic to interrogate the proffered 'liberating perspectives' on women's images on HIV and AIDS authorized by Zimbabwean women. The main argument was that there is need for Zimbabwean women to depict female characters that challenge gender biases where they manifest themselves through negative portrayals that demonize women as loose and dangerous. Such an argument also implied being sensitive to the dialectical nature of image and metaphor, wherein what men describe as danger, could actually be re-considered and be re-interpreted as the condition of possibility that women should embrace in order to emerge with new meanings linking danger to creative acts that can guarantee freedom for women.

8.1.1 Research Questions

In an exercise intimately connected to the above, I endeavoured to find answers to the following research questions:

- What is the general understanding by critics, of the relationship between the concepts feminism, gender, danger and HIV in a Zimbabwean context?
- How have Zimbabwean female authors, writing in the English language depicted HIV in their novels?

- What are the continuities and discontinuities in the depiction of HIV and AIDS in the creative works by Zimbabwean female writers?

- Are there alternative ways of reinterpreting gender and danger in positive ways that might lead to liberated and liberating images of women in the context of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe?

- How can we explain the contradictory representation of women in a group of selected women authors in general, and within the work of a single author in particular?

8.2 Research Findings in the Context of Theoretical Foundations

8.2.1 Connectedness of Feminism, Gender, Danger and HIV in Zimbabwean Literature on HIV and AIDS

The focus of the first question was on the understanding of the relationship between the concepts feminism, gender, danger and HIV in Zimbabwean literature on HIV and AIDS. This study principally utilized the works of gender theorists such as Gaidzanwa (1985), Saadawi (2007) and McFadden (1992). Central to the theoretical framework that guided this study, was the understanding that social scientific approaches to the pandemic have placed emphasis on women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. These social scientific approaches maintain that HIV is intrinsically a gendered pandemic. Women are rendered vulnerable due to social, economic, cultural and political factors, (Walker, Reid and Cornell 2004). In this study I employed a literary analysis to interpret the relationship between gender and danger in Zimbabwean literature by women. The underlying hypothesis was that Zimbabwean women writers would not remain indifferent to the pandemic. Through selected literary works, the study described, analysed and assessed how authors have re-presented the relationship between gender and danger.

As I stated in chapter one, the study is motivated by African feminism, whose central concern is that African women must thrive amidst multiple forces of death (Kalawole 2004). The theory of African feminism contends that upholding the dignity of African women is vital. It resists images of women that are disempowering. The thesis discovered that Zimbabwean women writers seek to live up to the ideals of this theory, although they do face specific challenges in their

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descriptions of women in the face of HIV and AIDS. The feminist theory in itself has its shortcomings. Its preoccupation with women will not be quite helpful in addressing issues of HIV and AIDS. In this regards, HIV challenges the feminist theory in a direct way. Feminism tends to isolate women's issues from men's. Nonetheless, for a successful resolution of HIV, women and men's issues should not dealt with in isolation. This is what Africana womanism. Women and men need in each other in all aspects of their lives.

Saadawi (2007), Gaidzanwa (1985), McFadden (1992) and Chitauro *et al* (1994) are key critics who advance the argument that creative writers must challenge stereotypes of women as loose and dangerous. Their views were acknowledged for their insightful observations on ideologies that marginalise women. These theorists have drawn attention to the impact of gender ideologies that would want women to remain subservient to patriarchy. They expose these ideologies and challenge women to liberate themselves. For them, the art of writing equips women to claim space for themselves. In these imaginative spaces, women are free to create new identities. The views illustrated by these theorists have provided the theoretical framework that guided this study. Womanism celebrates women's survival in oppressive patriarchal settings. Critics such as McFadden, Saadawi and Gaidzanwa maintain that authors have the responsibility to come up with images of women that are life-giving. The Africana Womanist theory endorses this, and emphasises the need to recognize complementarity between women and men for society's survival. In this study, I found out that indeed, Zimbabwean female creative writers strive to capture women's struggles against patriarchy in the context of HIV. They also endeavour to show how men's minds and social views about women need to be transformed in order to create a new social order. However, as I shall demonstrate below, the female authors face considerable challenges as they seek to live up to the ideals set by the critics.

In chapter three Phiri's *Desperate* describes women's vulnerability to HIV due to cultural, religious and economic factors. However, in this novel, the interface between gender and danger is simplistically reduced to the existential threat that men pose to women. On the other hand, Mukonoweshuro in *Days of Silence* stressed the need to fight HIV stigma and discrimination, and yet her own moralistic approach tends to confirm the stereotype of women as loose and dangerous. This negative picture of women's images is modified in Tagwira's *The Uncertainty*

of Hope because this novel calls for solidarity among women. In a way, Tagwira's work redefines the idea of danger by inflecting new meanings to it so that what is depicted as dangerous in women can actually be liberating to them as the women would use their skills to challenge patriarchy. This trend in which women's new roles in society actually 'embrace' the notion of danger as liberating is extended in *Unlucky in Love* by Westerhof. The author attacks stigma attached to women and suggests that this has the negative impact of promoting the discrimination of women in other social spheres of their existence. It is true that Westerhof does not place as much emphasis on education as does Shaba in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. In *Unlucky in Love,* on the other hand, the issue of economic emancipation of women is underscored. Self-confidence is crucial if one is living positively. In *Secrets of a Woman's Soul,* Shaba uses her female characters to express the view that women need to be empowered economically to be able to provide for themselves in contexts of HIV and AIDS. Shaba offers the most refreshing understanding that when men describe women as loose and dangerous, it is a demonstration of men's fears of the potential that women can unleash in order to recreate their identities, something patriarchy fears. It is in Shaba's novel that the ambivalence embedded in the concept of danger and gender has been clearly unravelled. In the novel, danger has been fore-grounded as a condition of pain that women go through at the hands of patriarch. The irony that is revealed in Shaba's novel is that women appropriate strategies that are considered dangerous in order to further their struggles for freedom. One of the main schemes highlighted in the novel is that when women get education their consciousness also develops in ways that subvert oppressive systems.

8.2.2 Depiction of HIV by Zimbabwean Women Writers

The views above informed my response to the second question which was: how have Zimbabwean female writers in English depicted HIV in their novels?

One can justifiably argue that these women creative artists have demonstrated remarkable creativity in their engagement with HIV. Although one would have expected them to interrogate the political system more, one may still acknowledge their commitment to the total liberation of women. The female writers confirmed Saadawi's (2007) theory of dissident creativity that stresses the need for women to be assertive in order overthrow patriarchal oppression. Other

African feminist authors and critics have challenged women to refuse to collaborate in their subjugation. Agency, as already been indicated, refers to the actions taken by women to negotiate their existence in suffocating situations. An analysis of the actual novels revealed that women have made gratifying progress, although problematic aspects remain. Phiri, for example, lays bare the factors that expose women to HIV and AIDS. She implicates patriarchy on the whole discourse of gender, danger and HIV and AIDS. In her collection of short stories, women are portrayed as having limited options, to navigate their lives in contexts of HIV and AIDS. The negative factors that shape women's lives in *Desperate* recur in the rest of the literary works assessed in this research.

8.2.3 Continuities and Discontinuities in the Depiction of HIV Among Zimbabwean Female Writers

The observations above guided my response to the third question which was: what are the continuities and discontinuities in the depiction of HIV among Zimbabwe female writers?

The most positive aspects coming out of literary works by female writers on HIV relate to women's creativity in surviving oppressive patriarchal contexts. Characters such as Onai in *The Uncertainty of Hope* demonstrate courage in resisting patriarchy and negotiating HIV. Even if the women, such as Rumbi in *Unlucky in Love* and Linga in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, get infected, they steadfastly refuse to let it undermine their resolve to evolve strategies to continue living, defying the commonplace assumption that once one has contracted HIV and AIDS, this is an immediate death certificate. These women dig deep within themselves and find spiritual resources to live positively with HIV. Another positive dimension that comes out of these works is how women empower themselves through education. Linga becomes a lawyer and does not need a man to finance her life. In short, although writers such as Mukonoweshuro emphasise women's victimhood, other writers such as Tagwira, Westerhof and Shaba confirm this negative status of women as a reality. In the works of Shaba in particular there is a shift, first, in terms of the number of female characters in the story, and secondly, in the way each of the characters responded to HIV and AIDS differently. It is these differentiated responses that enable Shaba to provide a gallery of female characters who define gender and danger in ways that go beyond the identity of suffering. In fact, some female characters are depicted as manipulating the concept of

danger. These women then use danger to authorize new identities that show them reorganizing their lives positively, without being dependent on men's approval. I argued in this study that agency is positive and should be celebrated.

8.2.4 The Search for Alternative or Liberating Perspectives to the Problem
The fourth question was: to what extent do the authors' portrayal of characters affected by HIV suggest alternative or liberating perspectives to the problem?

Zimbabwean writers who have published on HIV and its effects on women have done very well to portray the active steps that women have taken to overcome its negative effects. The sex workers in *Desperate* are keen to encourage their partners to use condoms. This theme is picked up by Onai in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Linga in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* and Rumbi in *Unlucky in Love*. While society has socialised women to be submissive in sexual issues, these women under discussion emerge as empowered and keen to protect their health. Although Linga and Rumbi are already HIV positive, they know that using condoms will prevent re-infection. These female creative writers portray women as proactive. From an analysis of the creative works by women writers, women's economic empowerment is vital if women are to overcome the effects of HIV and AIDS. In *Desperate*, women who have embarked on economically viable projects are able to abandon sex work. In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Onai's future looks bright once she gets the support to initiate an income generating project. Linga survives divorce in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* because she has her own income to rely on. These characters are able to avoid transactional sex because they have their own financial resources. The authors are making it clear that women must be economically empowered for them to negotiate patriarchy, exploitation and HIV. To this extent, female characters who enter sexual relationships do so from a relatively strengthened position. They are able to negotiate for the space for freedom.

8.3 Agency in Zimbabwean Women's Writings on HIV and AIDS
Reading Zimbabwean women's creative works on HIV and AIDS, it emerges that women's agency is not exclusively about an individual woman's actions to survive in patriarchal spaces. Agency also refers to the collective steps that women take to help each other. Apparently, women can enhance their cause for freedom when they are in solidarity with men. Women pick

each other up when the going gets tough. Sex workers assist each other in their dangerous encounters with men in *Desperate*. Onai is supported by Katy, while Linga and her mother support each other, and Jean is Rumbi's pillar to lean on. This solidarity by women allows and enhances their agency. It is informed by religious ideals, socialization and the sheer realisation that women need each other to survive the onslaught of patriarchy. As discussed in the previous chapter:

> Women get strength through supporting one another, through praying for one another, through crying together and feeding one another's family when you are down and out. (Maane 2009: 186).

The focus on women's agency in fiction by Zimbabwean women artists is a passionate act. Women writers sternly refuse to project women as victims. Instead, they show women as determined individuals who are willing to transgress social norms in order to survive. To this end, Zimbabwean women writers on HIV and AIDS have been subversive. By siding with sex workers, rebellious women and single mothers, they are suggesting that women must author new ways of being. These authors reinforce the defiance demonstrated by one of El Saadawi's key characters, Firdaus. Zucker sheds light on Firdaus's defiant nature by stating that:

> In her defiance of victimhood, Firdaus continues in line of Third World women who demonstrate assertions of selfhood in the face of tremendously repressive cultural structures. She willfully rejects the supplicatory posture required to ask for anything, even her life. In her aggressive refusal of the 'victim' posture, Firdaus exhibits great courage and strength, such as that demonstrated by a progenitor of 'Third World' women's refusal of victimisation'. (Zucker 2010: 248).

Agency in African theoretical works is described as the capacity to act in ways that enable the subject/individual to change her/his circumstances for the better. Even the weakest author realizes the need for agency. Education of the girl child as well as that of the boy child is critical for facilitating agency.

Agency can also be subversive, where the end justifies the means. Motsemme (2007) calls this flawed agency. *Desperate,* for example, is concerned more with the end result, but the process is dehumanizing. However, this study focuses on the constructive aspect. Phiri does not condemn the sex workers because the conditions they live under offer little options. Employing the concept of agency is vital so as not to construct women as helpless victims of patriarchy who are unable to do anything to change their circumstances. However, agency in Zimbabwean women's writings on HIV and AIDS is triggered by internal consciousness. Authors such as Westerhof and Shaba contend that it is only when a woman awakens to her intrinsic value that she stops yearning for a man to preside over her life. *Days of Silence* addresses this in the context of self-stigma. Women living with HIV need to overcome self-stigma which prevents them from pursuing productive enterprises. They need to gain energy and self-confidence (Kateketa-Westerhof 2009: 14). Overcoming self-stigma leads to self-awareness and confidence. Rumbi in *Unlucky in Love* manages to drive Horst out of her family's life once she embraces herself as an autonomous being who does not need a man in her life.

8.4 Masculinity, HIV and Zimbabwean Women's Writings

This research interrogated versions of masculinity in creative works on HIV and AIDS by female writers in Zimbabwe. As discussed in chapter one, Africana womanism celebrates complementarity between women and men (Hudson-Weems 2004). It is, therefore, crucial to assess the extent to which individual authors portrayed relationships between women and men. Overall, the images of men are quite negative. Men come across as sexual predators in *Desperate*. Each one of the sex workers has terrible stories to tell about their ill-treatment at the hands of men. Simbarashe comes across as having been a womanizer in *Days of Silence*. Garikai in *The Uncertainty of Hope* is totally hopeless and dies without achieving anything notable. Horst in *Unlucky in Love* does not take Rumbi as his equal and treats her with absolute disrespect. The councillor in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* does not hesitate to take advantage of girls and women.

These women are penetratingly critical of men. They regard men as having been wrongly socialized to believe that they have unlimited sexual desires and are privileged to treat women with disrespect. As a result, they do not take the call to be faithful seriously. In addition, men

suffer from "condom phobia" where they fear that using condoms compromises their manhood and enjoyment of sex. Unfortunately, the combination of "condom phobia" and having multiple concurrent partners on the part of the men means that they constitute a real "danger" in the time of HIV and AIDS.

In the creative works under review, men come across as spoilt, violent, insensitive and unsupportive beings. Their motivation is almost always to seduce women and abandon them immediately after. As Shaba passionately argues in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, men are determined to make women "work" for them – on their backs, on their hands, or how ever (81). One wonders whether Rumbi is in fact unlucky in love: are there any men out there who are better than Emmanuel, Joe and Horst? Gari is a pitiable caricature of a man. Sex workers in *Desperate* confirm that their clients come from across the social spectrum. Almost all men, it would seem, fall short of the expectations.

Interrogating masculinity in Zimbabwean women's writings on HIV and AIDS allowed this thesis to draw attention to the negative images of men that run through the publications. Men are in desperate need of redemption. They abuse women. They abandon their partners. Their leadership is dysfunctional. They do not inspire their families and they do not protect their children. Men are portrayed as reckless beings who stifle women's efforts. They are perpetrators of gender-based violence and increase their partners' vulnerability to HIV. Their agency is destructive. In their interaction with women they always take advantage. They are out to get whatever they want from women 'by any means necessary'.

However, despite the dominant negative images of men, there are some positive male characters in the works I have studied who exhibit constructive agency. Some men, white or black, do try to give their partners space. They encourage them in their ventures and accept their views. In *Desperate*, Mr. Jackson is a white man who persuades Nhamo to advance her education so that she disengages from sex work. The two marry in the end. Nhamo quits sex work and there are prospects of a fulfilling life thereafter. Similarly, Sihle leaves sex work and settles with her partner Fernando who is fully aware of her past. Fernando is a truly liberated man. Katy's husband, John, in *The Uncertainty of Hope* also emerges as a caring husband who seeks to live

up to the ideal of a provider. That such men are very few confirms the dominant view of Zimbabwean women writers on HIV and AIDS: there are only very few good men. Mr. Hove in *Days of Silence* is a responsible and caring husband and father. Pastor Taguta in *Days of Silence* also represents a progressive husband and social father. He fights HIV stigma and discrimination and calls for tolerance.

It is ironical that out of all the five female writers selected for this research, Mukonoweshuro, whose work is the least sophisticated in terms of offering a radical version of society in terms of gender equality, is the one who offers a more balanced presentation of women and men. Perhaps Mukonoweshuro's Christian commitment leads her to focus on positive male characters such as Pastor Taguta and Mr. Hove. Whereas *Days of Silence* suggests that men who go to church, such as Pastor Taguta are examples of positive manhood, Westerhof predominantly and rather one-sidedly paints all men as advocates of evil. Her portrayal of men does not redeem the men she presents in her narrative. For them, all men are a danger to women. This is a naïve approach to gender and danger, particularly when this thesis has revealed that some men undeniably display positive agency. Such men can actually build bridges with women who also flaunt positive agency, for the good of society.

Whereas Africana womanism seeks to promote harmonious relationships between women and men, most of the works discussed in this study preclude this possibility because of their problematic descriptions of men. They use stereotypical descriptions to project men as abusive and insensitive. It is, therefore, difficult to imagine a new society where women and men collaborate as partners when men are demonized. Without the active participation of men, it is difficult to defeat HIV. To a large extent, therefore, Zimbabwean female writers have not lived up to the ideals set by Africana womanism.

8.5 Contribution of Research to Zimbabwe Women's Writings on HIV and AIDS
It has been discussed earlier on in this study that one of the distinctive contributions that this study makes to theory and criticism of Zimbabwean literature is its holistic approach to the theme of gender and danger in the face of HIV and AIDS in works by female artists. As a matter of consistency, I have examined the portrayal of both women and men in selected Zimbabwean

women's literature on HIV and AIDS. The concept of agency was adopted as an analytical tool in the evaluation of selected literary texts. This was done in a bid to understand the various strategies that women characters use to survive in environments that do not promote their well-being. The study has endeavoured to answer the key research questions and meet the stated objectives. It has shown how different female writers in Zimbabwe describe women and men in the context of HIV and AIDS. Using Africana womanism and African feminism, the study illustrated the varying achievements of female authors in Zimbabwe in describing the impact of the pandemic on women and men. African feminism, Africana womanism and Western feminism all ultimately seek the total emancipation of women in the family and society. Although the female writers whose works I have reviewed have different levels of sophistication in painting images of the new society that they envisage, they are united in the quest to promote women's well-being.

In this study, the notion of agency clarified the extent to which women engage in subversive acts to undermine patriarchy and ensure their own survival. This constitutes my main original contribution to the study of women's writings on HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. The women whose works I have examined have sought to end *days of silence* by highlighting the challenges that come from those in *desperate* circumstances and have been *unlucky in love*. They disclose the *secrets of a woman's soul* while holding on, despite *the uncertainty of hope*. These women express innovative views which communicate powerfully the necessity for writing to develop into an autonomous space in ways that overcome divisive variables such as gender, age, class or race.

8.6 Recommendations

In view of the findings of the study outlined above, the study recommends that:

- African women creative writers should be more aggressive in challenging stereotypes of women as loose, and dangerous.
- Literary critics should pay more attention to the theme of masculinity in order to understand men's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS as well.
- Society should shun negative masculinities and promote harmony between women and men.

- Policy makers should reflect on the theme of agency to empower women to challenge patriarchy, survive HIV and AIDS and control their lives.
- Future studies should also analyze representations of gender, danger, HIV and AIDS in other genres such as Zimbabwean drama, poetry and film.

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