

**The Burden of Affliction: A Literary Analysis of Representations of HIV-positive Women
and Girls in Selected Southern African Texts**

Cathryne Cherop

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (English
Studies), in the Graduate Programme in the School of Arts at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal,
Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

August 2022

Supervisor: Dr Thulani Mkhize

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	i
Declaration	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Abstract	vi
1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Purpose of the Study	1
1.2 Background to the Study	1
1.3 Historical Contextualisation of HIV and AIDS in South Africa and Zimbabwe	3
1.4 Women's Situation in Southern Africa in the Context of HIV and AIDS	10
1.5 Selection of Primary Texts	13
1.6 Relevant Biographical Information of the Primary Text Authors	13
1.7 Literature Review	17
1.8 Research Questions	21
1.9 Research Objectives	22
1.10 Theoretical Framework	23
1.11 Research Methodology	28
1.12 Chapter Overview	29
2. CHAPTER TWO: FICTIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF SOCIAL REALITIES FACED BY HIV-POSITIVE WOMEN	30
2.1 Introduction	30
2.2 Synopses	30
2.2.1 <i>Welcome to Our Hillbrow</i>	30
2.2.2 <i>Secrets of a Woman's Soul</i>	30
2.2.3 <i>The Uncertainty of Hope</i>	31
2.2.4 <i>Beauty's Gift</i>	31

2.3	Illness: Women's Experience with HIV and AIDS in <i>Beauty's Gift</i>	32
2.4	Victims of Harsh Environment	34
2.4.1	Stigma and Discrimination.....	34
2.4.2	Xenophobic Realities of Stigma: <i>Welcome to Our Hillbrow</i>	43
2.5	The Representation of Grief in <i>Beauty's Gift</i> and <i>Secrets of a Woman's Soul</i>	49
2.6	Conclusion	50
3.	CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS OF REPRESENTATIONS OF AFRICAN TRADITIONS, WOMEN'S VULNERABILITY, GENDER VIOLENCE AND GENDER INEQUALITY	51
3.1	Introduction.....	51
3.2	Culture and Tradition.....	52
3.2.1	Negotiating HIV and AIDS: The Position of Women in the Cultural Context: <i>The Uncertainty of Hope</i>	52
3.2.2	The Burden of Oppressive Culture: <i>Secrets of a Woman's Soul</i>	72
3.3	Women's Vulnerability.....	78
3.3.1	Socio-economic Affliction: <i>The Uncertainty of Hope</i>	78
3.3.2	Women's Struggle: <i>Secrets of a Woman's Soul</i>	82
3.3.3	Troubled Gender: <i>Beauty's Gift</i>	84
3.4	Gender Violence and Gender Inequality.....	86
3.4.1	Gender Hostility	86
3.4.2	Violence and Belonging: <i>The Uncertainty of Hope</i>	87
3.5	Conclusion	92
4.	CHAPTER FOUR: ADJUSTMENT OF GENDER DESCRIPTIONS AND NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITIES	94
4.1	Introduction.....	94
4.2	Destigmatising the Disease	94

4.2.1	Women's Willingness to Communicate about AIDS	95
4.2.2	Hopeful Future: <i>Secrets of a Woman's Soul</i>	103
4.3	Feminist Awareness: <i>The Uncertainty of Hope</i>	107
4.4	Love and Affection: <i>Beauty's Gift</i> and <i>Secrets of a Woman's Soul</i>	113
4.5	Conclusion	115
5.	CHAPTER FIVE: RESILIENCE AND COPING MECHANISMS.....	117
5.1	Introduction.....	117
5.2	Trauma, Hope and Coping Mechanisms.....	117
5.2.1	The Quest for Living: <i>Secrets of a Woman's Soul</i>	117
5.2.2	Voice of Courage: Life after Testing HIV-positive: <i>Beauty's Gift</i>	124
5.2.3	Representations of Hope: Conceptualising Gender and Hope in <i>The Uncertainty of Hope</i>	127
5.3	Conclusion	129
6.	CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION.....	130
6.1	Introduction.....	130
6.2	Synopsis of Chapters.....	130
6.3	Recommendation and Conclusion	139
	REFERENCES.....	141

Declaration

I, Cathryne Cherop, declare that:

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
4. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
 - a. Their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced.
 - b. Where their exact words have been used, the writing has been placed inside quotation marks or shown as an indented quotation, and referenced.
5. This thesis does not contain texts, graphics, or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the references sections.

Student Name

___Cathryne Cherop_____

Student Signature

Date _29th_August 2022_____

Name of Supervisor

___Dr Thulani Mkhize_____

Signature

Date 29th August_2022_____

Acknowledgements

I modestly declare the fact that the completion of this thesis would not have reached this far devoid of the support of numerous people. To begin with, my deepest gratitude goes to my distinguished supervisor, Dr Thulani Mkhize; words are not enough to express your profound expertise, dedication and quick response offered to me throughout my PhD project. I am forever appreciative for the skills you have offered to me. I also express my thankfulness to Professor Mbongeni Malaba for his invaluable inspiration. I equally extend my appreciation to my course mates for their steadfast support throughout this project.

My sincere gratitude to my adorable husband, Dr Kipchumba Cherono, for your encouragement and understanding, and for playing both dad and mum to our kids as I buried my head in this study. No words can properly express my indebtedness for your assistance. To my offspring, Gabriel Kipruto Kipchumba and Emmanuel Kiptala Kipchumba, many thanks for having understood the time I stole away from you, I love you. An immense indebtedness to my parents, Jane and the late Nathan Cherop, and my father-in-law, David Ng'osos, for your deep love and continuous supply of encouragement. Lastly, I would like to thank God for bestowing me with good health and strength throughout this research.

Abstract

This thesis proceeds from the understanding that literature is the mirror of society, reflecting problematic features, failures to provide social justice, and attempts to live with dignity and hope. Statistics show that Zimbabwe and South Africa have among the highest rates of HIV and AIDS in the world, with a prevalence of 18.9% and 12.7% in South Africa and Zimbabwe respectively, of adults afflicted, and women are much more vulnerable to the infection than men. Literary responses give voice to the perception and impact of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. This thesis examines the fictional representation of HIV-positive women in a sample of four selected Zimbabwean and South African novels.

The literary texts that are examined are: Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001), Lutanga Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* (2006), Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006) and Sindiwe Magona's *Beauty's Gift* (2008). The study strives to examine the plight of HIV-positive women through an analysis of the characterisation and the authors' representations of socio-economic and cultural burdens suffered by these women, as well as their coping mechanisms. My analysis of the agency of women characters in the chosen stories is underpinned by the theory of African feminism, which engages with, critiques and develops Western feminism, hinged on African women's hostility to Western domination and their heritage in African beliefs and cultures. Lastly, the theoretical concepts of stigma, shame and sexuality will be explored.

1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Study

In this thesis, I examine four southern African texts, providing an examination of the characterisation and the authors' representations of cultural and socio-economic burdens suffered by HIV-positive women and girls from 2001-2008, as well as a close reading of selected passages from the texts. The study examines how these selected South African and Zimbabwean writers depict and characterise women as they battle the pandemic of HIV and AIDS. The study examines ways in which the above-mentioned writers challenge negative representations of women and bestow on them a sense of hope despite the painful and gruesome journey that these fictional HIV-positive women experience. The study contends that the selected creative artists are rapporteurs of coping mechanisms. In their stories, these women writers have imaginatively moved away from negative representations of women as destitute victims of their culture, and instead depict them as warriors facing HIV and AIDS with vision and purpose.

The selected texts for this study consist of four novels from South Africa and Zimbabwe. The novels by South African authors are Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001), and Sindiwe Magona's *Beauty's Gift* (2008). The novels by Zimbabwean authors are Lutanga Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* (2006), and Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006). Each chapter analyses and examines thematically the four chosen texts. The next section highlights the previous and current information surrounding the study. It will also discuss the thesis statement of this research.

1.2 Background to the Study

This research recognises and responds to the knowledge that little critique has been done in response to the representation of HIV-positive women and girls and their survival mechanisms in literary studies. Obiema Nnamaeka observes that one of the adversities of the presently thriving analyses of the African women's writing be it from black male critics or from western feminist theorists is the affinity to rename, misname and silence (2005: 80). Though there has been a fair amount of writing of fiction by African women authors over time, representations of the plight of HIV-positive women and girls are still seldom voiced in imaginative writings. For this purpose,

the present study brings the textual representations of HIV-positive women in selected southern African texts into perspective. One particular relevant critic is Lizzy Attree (2010a), who examines the manner in which women re-build and re-define concepts of gender and femininity when writing about HIV and AIDS. She notes that “the widespread transmission of HIV and AIDS and high infection rate among women in southern Africa have meant that ideas and images of the disease have frequently focused on women and female sexuality” (2010: 67). Although the topic of HIV and AIDS is rarely addressed head on, the portrayals that are there are focused on women’s experiences and their coping mechanisms.

The argument that I am putting forward in this thesis is that, despite stigmatisation and other negative effects, novelists show women as finding equanimity and purpose. Stephenie Newell (1997) observes that gender imageries and philosophies continuously change to account for their varying position; this has led to the development of new standpoints which question, redevelop and examine hereditary, prevalent codes. She observes the effect of communal and societal variations in the African societies and how the community reacts to these collective differences. Newell observes how these depictions are changed in imaginative writing by noting that descriptions of masculinity and femininity are not fixed as they differ in point and time. Her opinion is suitable to this study because I anticipate to study how gender reflections are depicted and represented to cater for the shifting epoch, mainly in the current literary texts in this research.

Against this viewpoint of HIV and AIDS, authors in South Africa and Zimbabwe have started to voice out imaginatively. They have written poems, autobiographies and narratives that ought to discourse the HIV and AIDS pandemic. This research acknowledges the fact that South Africa and Zimbabwe have diverse socio-economic, geo-political, historical and cultural backgrounds. These variations will be discussed in depth in section 1.3, under historical contextualisation for the two countries. The novels under examination date between the years 2001 to 2008. The settings of the texts are spread across southern African locations, highlighting the widespread dominant concerns. The chosen novels centre on gender based violence, xenophobia and stigma, sexual abuse, which are contemporary issues in present-day Africa. The key concern for this study is how the chosen authors use the above-mentioned structures to narrate women’s susceptibility to HIV and AIDS, as well as their resilience approaches. The subsequent topic discusses the history of HIV in

Zimbabwe and South Africa. The topic will cover the cultural reaction and social concerns of the two countries, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

1.3 Historical Contextualisation of HIV and AIDS in South Africa and Zimbabwe

In the 80s when HIV was first discovered in the world, Elizabeth Fee and Daniel Fox (1988: 1) insightfully argue that HIV and AIDS stirred more attention in history than any other virus of contemporary times. Since the epidemic was first recognised in 1981, physicians, scientists, journalists and public officials have recurrently raised historical inquiries. From the onset of the 1980s, both South Africa and Zimbabwe recorded cases of HIV. There are similarities and differences. Shula Marks and Neil Andersson (1990) foreground the account of HIV and AIDS in the South African state, noting that, in the 1990s the projected incidence of AIDS in the South African state was below 1 per cent; and by 1998 the incidence had increased the percentage to 22.8, with the occurrence of 32.5 per cent in child-birth deliveries in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Additionally, for Zimbabwe, Anne Chitando (2011: 23) notes that HIV “made a discreet entry into the lives of many Zimbabweans from the mid-1980s”. Alongside other diseases, stigma and discrimination were a major concern in these two countries. Marks and Andersson (1990) further highlight that a projected percentage of 8.8 of grown persons in the African continent are afflicted, and of the seven states in Southern Africa at least one in every five is infected. It is estimated that in South Africa alone, there are over 1,500 new infections every day and many of them are adolescent girls and young women Mary Douglas (2002:15).

The World Health Organisation, 2018, captures the global statistics of HIV and AIDS noting that 38.0 million people world-wide are projected to be infected with HIV by the close of 2019 (Yakubu 2017). According to The National Library of Medicine, NCBI 2020, South Africa is statistically believed to be one of the states in sub-Saharan Africa with the highest infection rates with a projection of 7 million persons living with HIV, noting that despite this, “very little has been published about the burden of HIV”. Leah Gilbert and Liz Walker argue that “Although HIV and AIDS features prominently in the media and is fiercely debated in governmental and nongovernmental circles, the epidemic continues to grow rapidly, and efforts to combat it have not yielded the expected results” (2002: 7). The South African community is patent by social variations, revealing themselves largely along gender, class and racial positions which are mirrored

in the health sector. Gilbert and Walker (2002: 7) further note that “racial inequities in the form of apartheid have most significantly shaped the social profile and consequently the healthcare of South Africa”.

According to Quarraisha Abdool-Karim (2000), the first case of AIDS was officially documented in South Africa among gay men in the early 1980s. Initially, the virus was linked to all sorts of names relating to the homosexual world. This eventually initiated the belief that AIDS was a disease of gay men. Later in 1987, HIV was diagnosed in two women in the then Transvaal Province, who had male partners suggesting that AIDS could be transmitted in heterosexual sex. Allan Brandt (1988) informatively notes that the manner in which a culture reacts to difficulties of illness shows its innermost social, cultural and ethical ideals and this has unquestionably been the issue for South Africa. Brandt further notes that the Republic of South Africa in the 1980s reached the top of infection. Its fundamental wellbeing and its levels of social displacement took no care to foresee that HIV and AIDS would inflict mayhem in the country. A few open-minded physicians and health care experts had cautioned the society of the exponential rise and it was a matter of time.

The end of apartheid widened the horizons of desire. Nthabiseng Motsemme (2007) offers a nuanced description of South Africa noting that the country witnessed increasing rates of AIDS-related fatalities among the youth population. By the end of the 1990s, South Africa had the highest HIV prevalence rate in the world, with KwaZulu-Natal being the worst hit province. In the process, black South Africans were largely accused of the spread of the disease. Felicity Horne (2010) discourses on the responses of HIV and AIDS in South Africa. She notes that the political transformation performed a key part in the extensive dissemination of HIV and AIDS in South Africa. She highlights that as the repressive apartheid apparatus started to loosen, regulations such as inflow power plunged, granting black South Africans extra liberty to travel around the nation. Many of them congregated to the towns and cities to obtain employment, hastening urban growth and development. During the changeover phase from apartheid to a democratic state, further enormous social relocation took place as deportees, formerly isolated by apartheid, reverted to their motherland (Horne 2010).

Horne (2010) observes that at the beginning, Mandela did not challenge the incumbent's strategies in respect to the provision of the Antiretroviral treatment, nonetheless as Mbeki's tenure went on, Mandela turned out to be more candid and hands-on in his backing of initiatives, for instance preclusion of mother-to-child-spread and pulling energies towards persons stricken with HIV. Through his keynote address at the close of the 13th Global AIDS Forum in Durban, Mandela urged scientists to go beyond their fears about South Africa's president and pay attention to fighting the epidemic that is sweeping across the African continent.

South Africa has remained, and still is, inseparable from the concept of race. Correspondingly, illness and racialised medical discourse have for a long time been linked through dialogue in South Africa. Critical sensitivity and defensiveness towards views that AIDS is a 'black' ailment is alleged to be a great part of the object for Mbeki's hesitancy in confronting and dealing with the realities of the AIDS-pandemic during his tenure. When conveying the inaugural Z.K. Matthews Memorial Speech at the University of Fort Hare in 2001, Mbeki condemned depictions of Africans as 'germ carriers', and human beings of an inferior order that cannot subject its desires to reason by individuals who "broadcast that our continent is doomed to an inevitable earthly end because of our dedication to the depravity of lust" (Nattrass 20012: 80-90).

Signe Arnfred's (2004) notion of "the dark continent discourse" sexuality is relegated to darker and lower spheres. He notes the following:

As the land so the people. The loaded symbolism of one spills over into the other. According to 'the great chain of being' established by evolutionary theory, the white man was at the top and the black man at the bottom, with various other races in between. Since women in general were perceived as lower, less civilized and more animal-like than men, black women were even further down than were black men. (2004: 63)

In a similar manner, Randall Packard and Paul Epstein (1992: 347) discourse the way medical researchers' theories of sickness in Africa from the 19th century onwards have remained subjective by assumptions about the African continent, Africans and African life which were instilled by racial and cultural stereotypes. Consequently, President Thabo Mbeki took a contentious position on AIDS by attempting to unite the black majority in opposing the West. His arrogance exemplifies

the view that HIV and AIDS medical therapy is a racial scheme to degrade Africans by demeaning their self-respect, and to manipulate them by vending hopeless and poisonous medicines. The trade union federation's forerunner acknowledged that president Mbeki's views on HIV and AIDS were "tantamount to condemning HIV and AIDS victims to early deaths", the ANC commission purportedly voiced to Mbeki that they "do not have the luxury of fiddling whilst the masses are dying" (McGreal 2000: 32). His standpoint on the biomedical prototype was that antiretroviral medication is ineffective and utterly intensified the mortality rate of HIV-positive persons. Such paranoid observations were articulated when, in March 2002, Peter Mokaba stated:

The story that HIV causes AIDS is being promoted through lies, pseudoscience, violence, terrorism and deception. We are urged to abandon science and adopt the religion and superstition that HIV exists and that it causes AIDS. We refuse to be agents for using our people as guinea pigs and have a responsibility to defeat the intended genocide and dehumanisation of the African child, mother, family and society. (Sparks 2003: 266)

The point that Mokaba argues that the victims of this conspiracy are Africans is notable. His argument epitomises the view that HIV and AIDS therapy is a racist scheme to humiliate Africans by challenging their sexual dignity, and to exploit them by vending inadequate and poisonous drugs to them.

Subsequently, Neville Hoad in his chapter, "Thabo Mbeki's AIDS Blues", highlights Mbeki's appeal of racial discrimination in relation to the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Hoad observes the following mockery in Mbeki's controversial speeches:

To say that Africans contract HIV and AIDS through sex is to compound the racism. We are at an impasse; there is no way out or forward here. Both the historical racism that the speeches document and their critique of this racism, insofar as this critique may undermine a comprehensive public health policy that addresses the question of the sexual transmission of HIV and AIDS, have lethal consequences for the lives and bodies of Africans. (Hoad 2006: 101)

It is evident that Mbeki's assertiveness embodies the discourse of defiance. The overriding point here is that biomedical representations and approval of anti-retroviral therapy have robust

economic consequences, because these medicines are high-priced to the underprivileged, and hence must be given by the government, necessitating guidelines which reallocate financial distributions (Betony 2012).

Edwin Cameron (2000), an eloquent voice on HIV and AIDS in South Africa, comments on Mbeki's opening speech address in an International AIDS Conference in Durban. He comments as follows on Mbeki's scepticism:

In our national struggle to come to grips with the epidemic, perhaps the most intractably puzzling episode has been President Mbeki's flirtation with those who in the face of all reason and evidence have sought to dispute the epidemiology of AIDS. This has shaken almost everyone responsible for addressing the epidemic. It has created an air of disbelief among scientists, confusion among those at risk of HIV, and consternation amongst AIDS workers. To my regret, I cannot believe that President Mbeki's speech at the official opening of this conference last night has done enough to counter these adverse conditions. I personally yearned for an unequivocal assertion from our president that HIV is a virally specific condition that is sexually transmitted, which if uncontained precipitates debility and death but for which antiretroviral treatments now exist that can effectively and affordably be applied. To my grief, the speech was bereft of this. (Cameron 2000: 14)

Raymond Downing (2005) notes that Mbeki assigned Manto Tshabalala-Msimang as the nation's minister of health, who endorsed the use of home-made remedies, in particular lemon juice, beetroot and garlic to cure AIDS. This consequently led to her acquiring the nickname "Dr Beetroot".

J.J. Eli's (2004) short narrative, "Thabo's Tongue", mirrors South Africa's grim situation at the time. The story paints a clear picture of Thabo Mbeki's reaction to the scourge of HIV and AIDS. In this respect, Thabo's presidency mirrors disillusionment, as Horne (2010: 135) points out that this possibly deadly misconduct defined as 'capitalising the future' takes on a profoundly satirical connotation since the significances of such comportment will be sickness and bereavement, efficiently arresting the future of the South African state in totality.

Subsequently, President Zuma, despite his controversial act of sleeping with an HIV-positive woman without protection, always offered his assistance by taking a concrete step in the provision of the Anti Retro Viral drugs to individuals living with HIV. Consequently, President Cyril Ramaphosa has been candid in the fight against the disease by establishing a multidisease nationwide wellness campaign to fast-track screening and testing for HIV.

South Africa's neighbour, Zimbabwe, is a land-locked country with a populace of 15 million persons. It is geographically situated in the southern part of Africa. The country gained independence in 1980. The first occurrence of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe was documented in 1985 (WHO 2020). HIV made its entry in Zimbabwe in the late 70s and early 80s. Since HIV is an invisible virus, it was only in the 80s that it displayed a grim public health and social problem in Zimbabwe. Consequently, at the same period globally, HIV was reported as a worldwide problem (Treichler 1999). At this time, the HIV and AIDS condition in Zimbabwe was termed as catastrophic and a chief menace to growth and expansion and to human society (Piot cited in Beresford 2001).

Mutangadura (2001) notes that Zimbabwe had an unresponsive acceptance of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. As a consequence its initial reaction to the virus was lukewarm and reactive (Jackson 1999). Ray and Madzimbamuto (2007) argue that the official state response was disbelief and denialism that HIV/AIDS existed in Zimbabwe. Ray and Madzimbamuto (2007) further note that numerous reasons could have influenced the government's stance. Firstly, the conviction that an admission to HIV's presence in the country would damagingly shake its thriving and fragile tourism industry. Secondly, it was alleged that Western tourists would not want to visit an HIV-ravaged African state.

In 2002, the Zimbabwean government declared the HIV/AIDS pandemic a state emergency to stress the severity of the problem. By 2004, a projected 1.8 million Zimbabweans were living with HIV (National Aids Commission (NAC) 2004). From that figure an estimated 350 000 were in need of antiretroviral therapy. By 2007 about 80 000 Zimbabweans were able to access ARVs via the public health sector (NAC 2007). Fifty-nine percent of expectant mothers visiting antenatal clinics in 2009 received medications to avert the transmission of HIV from the mother to the child.

Estimations by United States Agency for International Development (2001) revealed that the death rate in the Zimbabwean state was more than 200 per cent higher in the year 2005 than it was in the 1990s. Statistically, it is projected that the Zimbabwean population declined by four million between 2002 and 2006 (Avert 2010). Kerkhoven and Sendah (2000) note that there had been a major rise in “pauper burials” in the country. The pauper funerals, which the Zimbabwean government stopped owing to cost allegations, amounted to over a 1000 weekly. Pauper funerals are conducted by the State in the event of families failing to collect their dead kins from the mortuary for burial or in the case of unidentified persons. To generate space in morgues, an unclaimed body within a fixed timeframe is disposed of by the State and relegated to a pauper burial.

One in every four children in Zimbabwe is orphaned due to AIDS (NAC 2007). By 2007 there were a projected one million minors orphaned through AIDS in Zimbabwe. Children bereaved by AIDS were the biggest and leading growing group of minors in “difficult circumstances” in Zimbabwe (UNICEF 1999). Nearly 8 percent of children beneath 15 years of age in Zimbabwe had lost their mothers to AIDS by the close of 1996. Research by Jackson (1999) observed that there were more paternal than maternal orphans in the countryside areas of Zimbabwe. Their justification of this manifestation was that Zimbabwean men were becoming plagued much earlier than Zimbabwean women.

The present infection patterns in Zimbabwe reveal the persistence of the trend. The National AIDS Commission (2007) notes that the ratio of young women (15-24 years) infected with HIV was three times higher than that of their male counterparts in the same cohort age. Young women at the age of 15-19 years are more exposed to HIV. Avert (2010) reports comparable findings. The HIV endemic in Zimbabwe is heterosexual. Vertical transmission of HIV is the chief source of pediatric infections. Vital statistics approximates that around 3000 Zimbabweans succumb every week due to AIDS-related causes (NAC 2007). This interpreted to roughly five hundred Zimbabweans yielding to AIDS-related causes daily.

Jackson (1999) notes that men coming from the urban areas because of labour dismissals and labour refugees residing in rural areas hastened the rapid spread of HIV infection by acting as

conduits for the virus among high and low infected zones. The countryside residents then regarded AIDS as an urban plague (Mutangadura 2001). There was a misconception that rural residents were safer than city dwellers. Rural inhabitants were reserves of native culture, alleged to act as a deterrent on high-risk individuals (Kakuru & Paradza 2007.)

In Zimbabwe gendered duties, cultural tenets and customs dictate the anticipated behaviour of men and women and the interpersonal relations in which sexual behaviour arises. Noting exceptions in heterosexual men, majority of these men have multiple sexual affairs. The necessity to achieve basic needs and security force women and young girls into unequal sexual relationships that put them at the risk of HIV infection. This mirrors the forced lifestyles and nature of sexual unions women get into for them to survive. In agreement with this observation HIV infection rates have been documented to be highest among women aged 15-29 years (HSRC/Nelson Mandela Fund 2002; UNAIDS 2020). The HIV and AIDS pattern within Zimbabwe unfortunately puts women at the centre of this scourge in several ways. First, the age difference between spouses in marriage has problems connected to it. The usual range between a husband and a wife is nearly 3 – 5 years, with men classically being the older partner. This practice is very common and customarily notable in Africa. It nonetheless renders women susceptible to bargain for safer sex and habitually leads to violence from their partners if they insist on condom use (Avert 2010).

1.4 Women's Situation in Southern Africa in the Context of HIV and AIDS

The UNAIDS 2020 Report presents vital factual information, particularly with reference to the vulnerability of women, which can be summarised as follows: the HIV epidemic in southern Africa is a prominent health concern. Sub-Saharan area is a region worst affected by HIV and AIDS. According to the UNAIDS 2020 gazette report, South Africa has the upmost HIV transmission rate compared to any other state in the globe. HIV is still the primary root cause of death amongst women of procreative age in southern Africa, however access to HIV testing and medication remains minimal. Gender disparity and sexual violence prevent many womenfolk in South Africa and Zimbabwe, especially young women, from safeguarding themselves against HIV infection. From the inception of the HIV scourge, in South Africa and Zimbabwe, women are at greater danger of HIV infection than men. HIV infection is more common amongst women, particularly those below the age of 40. Adolescent girls and young women specifically account for

an unequal sum of new HIV transmissions amongst the young population living with HIV in southern Africa. In 2020, according to UNAIDS, there were a projected 380,000 additional HIV infections amongst young southern African women in the age group of 15 to 24, amounting to 60% of all new HIV transmissions in young individuals.

Notably, the 2020 AIDS Foundation Report indicates that womenfolk are more at risk of HIV infection than men. On a normal rate in South Africa, for every three women infected with HIV, two men are infected. What is interesting is that world-wide, men die earlier than women, except in South Africa. Staff Writers' "South Africa holds the Lowest Life Expectancy in the World" observes:

While much of the world is expected to see a boom in older populations, the growth will be much slower in Africa – particularly South Africa, where the prevalence of HIV and AIDS has given the country the lowest life expectancy out of all countries covered [....] South Africa's life expectancy at birth was only 49.7 years of age in 2015. While South African men are expected to live a little longer (50.7 years), women fare worse, at 48.7 years. (2009)

Women's susceptibility and the force of HIV prevalence proves to be appalling at domestic and society level. This is witnessed more in the 15-24 age cluster, where three young women for each young male are infected.

In the South African and Zimbabwean social setting, intimate partner violence is common, therefore escalating the menace of HIV infection in women of reproductive age. Goitseone Leburu and Nomonde Phetlho-Thekisho's (2015) "Reviewing Gender-based Violence Against Women and HIV/AIDS as Intersecting Issues" observes that young women and adolescents who suffered intimate partner violence were extremely likely to get infected with HIV than persons who did not experience violence. Social and cultural norms concerning intimate partner violence also increases a woman's chance of HIV infection. Leburu and Phetlho-Thekiso further observe that other aspects that have undeniable power over the dissemination of HIV infection comprise: sexually transmitted diseases, gender discrimination and disparity, poverty, social unsteadiness, sexual

brutality, unequal access to suitable medical care, and a history of poor governance in the response to the scourge.

In Zimbabwe, on the one hand, women are anticipated to be devoted to their spouses even if they are in an afflicted union, and on the other hand, men are praised for engaging in extramarital sexual affairs. Lois Chingandu draws attention to this critical matter:

The high levels of AIDS-related deaths in Zimbabwe have forced men to acknowledge that AIDS is indeed a problem that they can no longer afford to ignore and demands that they find new ways of doing business. The message of abstinence, faithfulness and condom use (ABC) is well known to all. However, the desire for multiple sexual partners has convinced men that small houses could be a safer way of continuing to enjoy sex with multiple partners, rather than choosing monogamy and faithfulness, which are widely viewed as western ideals not applicable to Africans. (Chingandu 2007: 2)

Literature plays an important role in exposing gender biased and barbaric cultural practices. Consequently, Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*, through an imaginary voice, boldly depicts multiple concurrent partners and the aftermath. Onai Moyo, her main character, is a mother of three and a vegetable dealer. She is in an abusive marriage with her alcoholic husband Gari. Gari, a manager in a beverage company, has failed to cater for his family, however he ekes out a living for his several concubines, also known as "small houses". He finally succumbs to HIV and AIDS through his illicit relationships with prostitutes.

In South Africa and Zimbabwe, the destitution for women afflicted with HIV and their families starts long before they succumb. Stigma, humiliation and denial linked to presumed infection make these women postpone or decline testing. Hopelessness and fear often follow diagnosis, because of a lack of support. Poverty inhibits these infected women from having a proper diet to help avert the commencement of illness.

The notion of women as victims of pain and disease resonates in African societies in general. While HIV and AIDS trauma have affected a large number of South Africans and Zimbabweans across the gender divide, women are the most anguished. Evidence from semi-autobiographical narratives by women authors who have experienced the harrowing pain and consequent trauma of

HIV and AIDS, for instance Lutanga Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, indicate that successful resilience and coping with HIV and AIDS begin with the woman. However, according to Jane Bennett and Hope Chigudu (2012), South Africa and Zimbabwe have made huge progress in managing the HIV and AIDS pandemic since 2008. Statistically, women on antiretroviral therapy have soared considerably.

1.5 Selection of Primary Texts

The reasons for choosing the above-mentioned texts is because of the fact that South Africa neighbours Zimbabwe. There is a huge number of immigrants from Zimbabwe into South Africa, therefore they have a common social and cultural background. Another reason is that the texts under study were written in the same period when South Africa and Zimbabwe were adversely affected by the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Consequently, these chosen texts offer the therapeutic aspect of survival strategies. Lastly, the primary texts in this study offer depictions of the intricate approaches in which women characters showcase dually as agents and victims in imaginary settings where gender aggression is endemic. Biographical details of the primary texts' authors is significant because their personal life experiences and history will help shape this thesis.

1.6 Relevant Biographical Information of the Primary Text Authors Phaswane Mpe

According to Adele Kirsten (2014), Phaswane Mpe was a black South African male novelist and a poet. He studied at the University of the Witwatersrand, where he lectured African literature. In 1998, at Oxford Brookes University, Mpe was awarded a Master's degree in Publishing. His first novella, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, was launched in 2001. A compilation of poems and short stories, *Brooding Clouds*, was published retrospectively after his death in 2008. Mpe hails from the northern city of Polokwane, and relocated to Johannesburg at the prime age of 19 to pursue his studies at university. Similar to numerous black South Africans, Mpe assented to a diverse belief structure that adopted a blend of African and Western culture. Due to his lack of funds, he ended up residing in the underprivileged section of Hillbrow, a setting where he later established his first novella.

Welcome to Our Hillbrow is an essential work as it was the first text to deal with the transformations of city life in South Africa, a decade after the end of apartheid. The novel describes

the black South Africans tackling the challenges of HIV and AIDS, unemployment issues and poverty. The text is remarkable in that the challenges established by apartheid are in the backdrop. Taking into consideration that South Africa has the greatest prevalence of HIV and AIDS in the globe, Mpe decided to factor in the AIDS scourge as one of the main themes in his creative work. Prior to his death, he had started his doctoral research on sexuality in post-apartheid South African literature, however he died unexpectedly. Lizzy Attree discusses the autobiographical elements of Mpe's writing:

Phaswane Mpe's interview took place a few short weeks before he died, and this fact adds poignancy to his responses in his interview which focuses mainly on his novel *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, although he has also written short stories and poetry. His admission that he identifies with the main character in *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, and that he wrote the book as a form of therapy for his own depression, confirms the reader's impression that the novel is largely autobiographical. (2010b: 38)

Though unconfirmed, it is in the public knowledge that Mpe succumbed to HIV and AIDS. Consequently, the voice in the narrative notes: "He died, poor chap; of what precisely, no one knew. But bizarre illnesses courted in Hillbrow could merely translate into AIDS" (Mpe 2001: 3). This in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is perceived as an autobiographical statement. Phaswane Mpe however died at the tender age of 34 at the moment he was about to commence training as a traditional healer. He leaves behind two children, a daughter, and a son.

Sindiwe Magona

The second primary text author is Sindiwe Magona. She was born in 1943, in the rural community of Gungululu in the countryside of Eastern Cape, previously referred to as Transkei. According to Dianne Shoher's (2011) "Women in Higher Education in South Africa", Magona received her high school and university education by correspondence, and soon after secured a bursary to study for her Master's education in Social Work at Columbia University. Magona is one of the numerous globally renowned South African authors, whose work is enlightened by her understanding of femininity, impoverishment, and rebelliousness to subjugation. She criss-crossed South Africa's socio-cultural-economic areas while concurrently being a community leader, wife and mother in a

township. She is foremostly civil servant, prolific writer, and a primary school teacher, who has authored nine books.

Magona has authored several plays. She delivers key addresses at conferences and colleges, both within South Africa and abroad. Up until her retirement in 2003, she worked in different positions in the United Nations, where she worked for 20 years. Among her globally celebrated works are *To My Children's Children* (1990); *Living, Loving, and Lying Awake at Night* (1994); *Push-Push! and Other Stories* (1996); *Vukani* (2007); and *Beauty's Gift* (2008).

Magona is the first South African female writer to write about HIV and AIDS. In her interview with Sindiwe Magona, Attree details the following:

Sindiwe Magona's work had interested me since she started publishing short stories about HIV and AIDS in 1999; in fact, she is the first South African woman to my knowledge, to write about HIV and AIDS in her fiction. I could not have known when we originally met in 2006, that she would become the first black South African to publish a novel focused on HIV and AIDS: *Beauty's Gift*, 2008. (Attree 2010b: 16)

The novel, *Beauty's Gift*, opens with Beauty's funeral in a cemetery in NYF Gugulethu. This text examines the effect of sorrow and grief on Beauty's four friends. The story's timeframe is between the present, the funeral, and time after the funeral that extends back to a moment just a few months prior to when Beauty's ailment first became obvious. Magona expresses a view about HIV and AIDS, and about women's necessity to shield themselves from a virus that will deprive them of their lives.

Valerie Tagwira

The third primary text author is Valerie Tagwira. She is a medical doctor and a fictional writer. According to "Time of the Writer" (2009), Tagwira is from Gweru, Zimbabwe, and lived in Rutendo for most of her upbringing. She obtained her education at St James High School, Nyamandlovu and Monte Casino Secondary School, Macheke. She was awarded her first degree in 1997 from the University of Zimbabwe's Medical School. She is currently employed in London. Her first fictional work, *The Uncertainty of Hope*, has a setting of a highly populated

neighbourhood of Mbare, Harare. It examines the sophisticated lives of Katy Nguni, a black-market currency trader and her best friend, Onai Moyo, a market vendor. The narrative gives an understanding of the encounters faced by a large portion of Zimbabweans in modern-day times. The story revolves around HIV and AIDS, homelessness, household aggression and poverty, and a multitude of other financial and social encounters of the time. The narrative also gives insights into the complexities of modern-day Zimbabwe with regard to how people try to make ends meet.

Lutanga Shaba

The last primary text author is Lutanga Shaba. Tasiyana Javangwe (2011) details her biography. Shaba is an advocate for women, author and political commentator. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* is her primary fictional text. She is also a lawyer with a Master's degree in Policy Studies. Shaba is an Executive Director and founder of Women Trust in Zimbabwe (formerly Women in Governance and Leadership Trust). She has been aggressively engaged in the struggle for women's emancipation in Zimbabwe. Shaba's significant role was to remind the Zimbabwean nation that women can also offer effective leadership in the society. Chitando (2011) notes that Shaba's most important strategy has been the formation of a constitutional philosophy that places womenfolk at the political forefront. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* (2006) is based on her own life story. She details some "shameful" personal secrets that many would never want revealed even when they are long dead, challenging the societal setting that always seems to favour men rather than women. She openly speaks about her HIV status. In the novel, she portrays the life of a mother who fights to shape a better future for her child. Shaba has set up a dating agency for HIV-positive people. This support group offers therapy to help HIV-positive people in managing the disease. It is important because they share ideas, and provide emotional support for one another. Shaba is dedicated to country-wide leadership coaching for women. She firmly trusts in women's ability in leadership.

1.7 Literature Review

Mary Douglas (2002) is vital in pinpointing causes for and the impacts of interpreting HIV as a dangerous contaminant. Analysing concepts of purity and pollution in the African continent, Douglas credibly notes that “ideas of dirt [...] express symbolic systems and that the difference between pollution behaviour in one part of the world and another is only a matter of detail” (2002: 43). AIDS is commonly known as a pollution in the blood. The above study has a direct relevance to this thesis.

Jenny Doubt’s (2015) contribution is important to this study. She observes that as AIDS research enters its fourth decade, the correlation between silence and HIV/AIDS is gradually being explored. For some time, social sciences research has included studies exploring disclosure, gossip and silence. In literary studies, the dense use of non-literal, figurative language to refer to HIV/AIDS has been read as indicating the sustained operation of AIDS denialism, silencing societies across South Africa. Shame is one of the key themes in this study, therefore Doubt’s readings of shame are undoubtably relevant to this study.

Ellen Grünkemeier (2013) contributes a critical reflection on taboo topics. She notes that HIV and AIDS has long been a critical topic in South Africa. Selected texts that highlight the epidemic, for instance, *Nobody Ever said AIDS*, are discussed. The author considers the silence surrounding AIDS and its connotations of secrecy, shame, denial and disclosure. Grünkemeier’s research reflects current women’s matters in southern Africa, therefore it is an important precursor to my research.

Mumbi Machera (2004) notes that the term sexuality draws metaphors of belongingness, physically and emotionally. Sexuality is a multifaceted phrase with a complex meaning denoting deep emotive feeling as well as subjects of power and susceptibility in gendered relationships. The feelings and supremacy concept appear to be connected to the biological existence of an individual as either male or female. Nevertheless the scope of sexuality is socially created; sexual feelings and behaviour are influenced and controlled by cultural meanings and exclusions rather than by physical prospects for sexual indulgence. This study analyses the social dimension of sexuality by

examining possible connections between the constructions of the female sexuality and the prevalence of the HIV/ AIDS epidemic.

Equally valuable to this study is the contribution of Sylvia Tamale (2011: 14-15). She notes that the misconstruction of African sexualities is to be drawn back to the colonial era. Essential to colonial objectives was the conviction to enlighten African people. Tamale contends that colonialism with the assistance of traditional patriarchy established rules and perceived circumstances through which women's sexuality was reserved under control and surveillance (Tamale 2004: 51). Consequently, customary decrees were set into writing and strengthened through the government, religion and patriarchy constructions. Tamale's notions are informed by research done on African sexualities by Caldwell *et al.* (1989). Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* sheds light on the inequalities of Zimbabwean society whereby women are subdued and subjugated to masculine and bigoted norms which render them chattels in society.

Attree's (2010a) *Women Writing AIDS in South Africa and Zimbabwe* examines how women re-define concepts of female sexuality in the domain of imaginary writing and culture. She asks: "could writing on the topic of HIV and AIDS signify a rejection of the common idea of silent suffering, subverting gender expectations by expressing individual and collective pain for the first time?" (2010a: 67-68). She pinpoints important views about women's reactions and how they convey a revolutionary reconceptualisation of resistance and agency. She further argues that when women talk about HIV and AIDS in writing, understandings of female sexuality emerge in distinct ways. Attree's work is an important guide for my study since this research studies the aspects of sexuality and femininity in the perspective of HIV and AIDS.

Horne's thesis (2010) explores the theme of displacement in AIDS-related texts in post-apartheid South Africa from 1994 to 2010. The thesis investigates stigma, the lasting power of pre-existing discourse of HIV and AIDS and defensiveness. The different forms that this thesis examines contribute greatly to the analysis of my study.

Chitando's thesis (2011) explores the representation and survival of women in the time of HIV and AIDS. She further examines the women's responses to HIV. Likewise, Betony (2012) focuses on how imagery and symbolism offer a particular way of conveying and transmitting the

familiarity of the inflicted body in the framework of the conceptualising proficiency of modern medication. She explores two cases in which creative writing and metaphor might give particular insight into the understanding of HIV and AIDS in South Africa. She details that in South Africa the damaging effects of reading HIV and AIDS as symbolic are due to stigma and shame which make acceptance and treatment of the disease complicated.

Attree's (2010b) *Blood on the Page: Interviews with African Authors Writing about HIV and AIDS* encompasses a compilation of interviews with 14 individual writers from Zimbabwe and South Africa, who have written about HIV and AIDS from the 1990s. Pertinent for my purpose is Attree's interview with authors of my primary texts, namely Phaswane Mpe, Sindiwe Magona and Valerie Tagwira. This collection of interviews adds significantly to the examination of this research as it will add first-hand information to this research.

Cuthbeth Tagwirei's article (2014) "'Lame Ducks' in the time of HIV/AIDS? Exploring Female Victimhood in Selected HIV/AIDS Narratives by Zimbabwean Female Writers" explores ways in which female victimhood is rooted in Zimbabwean women's writings about HIV and AIDS. This article focuses more on the discourse which emphasises the role of men in spreading HIV and AIDS under the auspices of culture. Tagwirei argues that this structure of blame evolves from a myth which deems culture as all-powerful and individuals as debilitated. This thesis deconstructs the patriarchal classification by exposing its dark side where culture is used as a tool to subjugate women. From the foregoing perspective, in the framework of HIV and AIDS, it is evident that social and cultural factors impede women's liberation. Therefore, the above literary analysis provides additional information for my research.

This study examines women's discourses and identities from both contemporary and traditional male-controlled beliefs that underpin the eccentricity of women and that approve violence against women and misogyny. Abeda Sultana notes the following:

Patriarchy, which pre-supposes the natural superiority of male over female, shamelessly upholds women's dependence on, and subordination to, man in all spheres of life. Consequently, all the power and authority within the family, the society and the state remain entirely in the hands of men. So, due to patriarchy, women were deprived of their

legal rights and opportunities; patriarchal values restrict women's mobility, reject their freedom over themselves as well as their property. (Sultana 2011: 7)

Sultana (2011) argues that it is a delusion to think that womenfolk have no significance in customary traditional cultures. I agree with Sultana that there are misunderstandings on women marginalisation and subjectivity. In regard to Sultana's argument, this research examines the techniques in which women authors, in their imaginative works convey women's reactions and agency to patriarchal prejudice.

Pasch Mungwini's (2008) presents an insightful analysis of cultural interpretations of women in the Shona culture. Mungwini argues that women's susceptibility to HIV has been predominantly because of marriage or giving birth. He opines that these dual attributes expose women to HIV infection. The present study borrows Mungwini's discussion of culture and traditions with regard to Shona culture. This thesis places its importance on the subject of agency with consideration to the approaches female characters use to neutralise the damaging impacts of patriarchy in an attempt to outlive the menace of HIV and AIDS. It extends on the influences of earlier novelists, however, it continues to offer new visions into Zimbabwean women's authorship on HIV and AIDS.

Tomris Turmen (2003) concurs that cultural and socio-economic influences place women in conceded positions:

HIV and poverty are inextricably linked. Poverty contributes to HIV and AIDS transmission and HIV and AIDS contributes to poverty. Women and girls are seriously affected both ways as they are among the poorest in society. Although women's economic situation has been improving, there are still significant inequalities between women and men, and there is evidence that these inequalities play a role in increasing vulnerability and exposure to HIV. (2003: 415)

By using imageries in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Tagwira's character Onai, rises from destitution and betters her life.

This study strives to use the resilience theory in the analysis of my primary texts, explicitly to establish that the characters portrayed in these narratives are more than victims who change and

reform due to the predicament and survive through novelty. Resilience is the ability to strategically absorb disturbance and trials, and managing to survive the complex uncertainties in life so as to live and go beyond survival (Mlambo 2011: 200). The stress is on resilience, how to survive in the midst of a difficulty, the subjectivity that originates from people to overcome trials and encounter the challenges in their enormity and extremes.

Douglas Crimp's (1992) collection of essays *AIDS: Cultural Analysis / Cultural Activism* will inform this study. In his introduction, Crimp states:

AIDS does not exist apart from the practices that conceptualise it, represent it and respond to it. This assertion does not contest the existence of viruses, antibodies, infection, or transmission routes. Least of all does it contests [sic] the reality of illness, suffering and death. [...] If we recognize that AIDS exists only in and through these constructions, then hopefully we can also recognise the imperative to know them, to analyse them and to wrest control of them. (1992: 3)

Crimp acknowledges the existence of the epidemic and the existence of sickness, affliction, and death. He confronts the alleged underlying reality of HIV and AIDS. Crimp's work will feed my analysis of the theme of illness.

On a general note, regarding the literature review about HIV and AIDS, Cameron (2005) responds to the stereotypes associated with AIDS. In his autobiography, *Witness to AIDS*, he offers numerous meanings of AIDS and underscores the several connotations of HIV and AIDS to those infected with it. He states that: AIDS is an illness, a disease, a disorder, an ailment threatening human life (Cameron 2005). From Cameron's classification of AIDS, one can say that it affects persons in various degrees: psychologically, societally, economically, physically and politically. As previously noted, however, the female gender is enormously affected by the pandemic of HIV and AIDS. Cameron's work therefore has a direct relevance to this thesis.

1.8 Research Questions

The following are the key questions that will guide this research:

- How is the theme of illness represented in the texts?
- What are the authors' representations of stigma, xenophobia and discrimination?
- How are the negative stereotypes of HIV-positive women formed and represented in the texts?
- What are the authors' representations of sexuality, socio-economic and cultural burdens of HIV-positive women?
- How is the vulnerability of HIV-positive women represented and challenged in the primary texts?
- How is feminist consciousness and awareness represented in the text?
- How are HIV-positive women portrayed in the texts as finding equanimity and purpose in life?
- How is the theme of trauma, hope and coping mechanisms of HIV-positive individuals represented in the texts?

1.9 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study, as already indicated, are to explore southern African texts and demonstrate the plight of HIV-positive women through an examination of the themes of illness, stigma, violence, shame, xenophobia and gender inequality, in four selected literary texts. This research explores the representation and portrayal of main characters. The study examines the various patriarchal practices exemplified in the selected texts. This is attained by analysing patriarchal subjugation within the context of South African and Zimbabwean texts. In addition, I examine how women characters challenge hegemonic patriarchal doctrines and provide an understanding of patriarchal stereotypes and cultural beliefs. Another aim of this research is to identify the strategies adopted by the characters to cope with the menace of HIV and AIDS. Lastly, I explore how women characters develop a sense of agency or independence.

1.10 Theoretical Framework

The body of this research is underpinned by a number of theories. To start with, this study is placed within the theoretical standpoint of African feminist examination. African feminist literary analysis is preoccupied with the critique of narratives from a historic standpoint of gender inequalities amongst top masculine structures positioning women as subservient. Perceptions and conceptions of conventional interpretations can be accounted for by the theoretical force of feminist understanding. Womanism as a concept was established in fictional writing by Alice Walker (1983). Walker observes that, a womanist is a woman who understands and favours women's philosophy and tradition, women's strength, and women's emotive flexibility (Walker 1983: xi). Since then, further developments of these ideas have taken place.

African womanism is essentially a component of African feminism. The notion of womanism is important to this study as it endorses knowledge and appreciation of the significance and influence of black women in society. African womanism is a philosophy invented by Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1985: 711). It is essential to mention that Ogunyemi prefers to precede the term womanism with the word "African" in a bid to separate it from the African-American form of "womanism" as advocated by Alice Walker. It is this edition of feminism that was a denunciation of women's liberation that was deemed selective and uncompliant of black female encounters (Walker 1983: xi). Ogunyemi's foresight of African womanism is explicitly voiced by Arndt (2002: 711) when she notes that because African-American womanism and feminism ignore African norms and traditions, there is necessity to have an African womanism.

Arndt (2002: 712) notes that the essence of Ogunyemi's classification of African womanism is the principle that the gender matter can be traded with only in the framework of other concerns that are appropriate to African women. Ogunyemi emphasises the significance of marriage, family and motherhood in the lives of African women. This suggests that African womanists are accepting of women who desire motherhood. The restrictions of Western feminism are once again deplored in womanist assumptions for its malfunction to tackle the difficulties of women of colour. Similarly, African womanism emphasises at the inception a conservation of collective society devoid of personal progress. Ogunyemi's conceptual framework of this principle guides my study of the African women's agency in trading with gender aggression. Ogunyemi believes that all the

discussions of the African version of feminism can be incorporated under the theory of womanism, for it succeeds in determining the vital points created by the activists of other categories of the theory. Shaba's, Tagwira's and Magona's literary vocalisation of womanism, as demonstrated in their creative works, corresponds with Ogunyemi's description that it is black focused and considers the autonomy and liberty of women similar to feminism. Distinct from radical feminism, it yearns for significant association between black men, black children and black women (Ogunyemi 1986: 65). For Ogunyemi, womanism operates as the supporting-point of the women of African origin and they strive to realistically affirm their humanity in the face of the patriarchal mindset. Nevertheless, it does not undermine the self-pride of men; instead, it entices men into acknowledging living amicably with women by ditching their egoistic view as superior companions in the joint battle for a healthier society. The contributions of Ogunyemi (2007) to women's examinations as applied to literary texts is applicable to my study. She validates how women are perceived and how they operate in crucial moments.

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1995) explores women's empowerment and marginality; she contends that one of the obligations of a woman author ought to be the rectification of untrue representations of the African woman. She reckons this method will alleviate the problem of African women. It is important to note that Sindiwe Magona's *Beauty's Gift* condemns cultural values and beliefs that are detrimental to women and girls. In the narrative, Magona's women characters go beyond stigma and discrimination. They embrace dignity through sisterhood and unity. Ogundipe-Leslie (1995) further expresses the emancipation of African womenfolk, contending that it is not a compassion to be accorded by compassionate males. This underscores the purpose of this research, as the examination of the representation of the socio-economic and cultural burdens of HIV-positive women and girls is captured in the analysis of the four novels of this research. A section of this research intends to investigate the relationship of HIV-positive women and their survival mechanisms in the community at large. I will employ Ogundipe-Leslie's theory to analyse the above-mentioned themes.

Susan Sontag's two texts: *Illness as Metaphor* (1978) and *AIDS and its Metaphors* (1989) are a response to her experiences as a cancer patient, as she observed that the cultural mythologies surrounding cancer negatively affected her as a patient. She discovers that, a decade later, cancer is no longer swathed in shame and secrecy, but has been substituted by AIDS as the virus largely

demonised by society. She observes that the symbols that we correlate with infection contribute not only to stigmatising the illness, but also stigmatising individuals who are ill. She reckons that myths and metaphors eventually cause more deaths from this virus (Sontag, 1988: 16). Sontag opens her discussion of the danger of using metaphors with the allegory that: illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. She argues that everybody who is born possesses twin nationality, in the empire of the well and in the realm of the ill (Sontag, 1988: 16). One of the objectives of this study is to point out the misconceptions and stigmas of women living with HIV and AIDS. The themes of illness and bereavement will be explored at length, therefore Sontag's theory will shape this research.

This study employs two theories of stigma: social identity theory and self-stigma theory. Social identity theory describes how individuals use social concepts to judge or label a person who is different; therefore, society weighs individuals to determine if they fit social norms (Overton & Medina 2008). The subsequent theory, self-stigma, is defined as an internal assessment procedure where individuals judge themselves based on societal standards (Overton & Medina 2008). The effect of this judgment results in isolation, lowered self-esteem, subservience, self-hate, and disgrace as they feel they do not live up to social standards (Overton & Medina 2008). The theme of stigma and discrimination will be examined under the lens of the above mentioned theory.

Janice Irvine (2009: 71) argues that “the sensation of shame is a social tool, nurtured in order to bring about and dampen certain forms of conduct”. It is a political disciplinary instrument, but one that is intensely gendered. Irvine further observes that shame is particularly “captivating because of the way in which it is historically linked up with sex”. Irvine demonstrates how “dialogues of sex and sexuality, and dialogues of shame coil together, mounting their own and each other's power” (70). Irvine's theory is a useful guide in the analysis of the themes of stigma and discrimination.

The research is set within the African feminist model in its approach to African sexualities. This is because the majority of academics who have reacted to Western opinions on African sexualities have been African feminists. Consequently, the theoretical context of this research is an African feminist approach to the legislation of understanding on African sexualities as noted by Arnfred and Tamale (2002, 2011). To be specific, the research will use the models and insights of Arnfred

and Tamale with respect to African sexualities. Numerous views in the form of information and knowledge, and the various understandings of African sexualities reveal power magnitudes of those whose knowledge is substantial.

With respect to African sexualities, the policies of knowledge are decisively employed to highlight how knowledge on African sexualities is shaped, used, connected and understood as power. Additionally, the construction of knowledge on African sexualities is imperative to examine what knowledge is created, how it is shaped, and whose knowledge takes precedence. Even though knowledge is used to empower, it can be used as an instrument of controlling as well, and subduing the other, for instance, according to the poststructuralists, for the present state to survive as a dominant, self-reproducing supremacy, it has to produced a series of apparatuses of control that thwart individual subjects from exercising their independence of choice, or even their intellectual autonomy (Tamale 2011: 110).

Tamale (2011: 14-15) asserts that the colonialists' creation of African sexuality is exhibitions of profligate and hyper-sexual (2006: 89) behaviour, amplified suppression and control of women's sexual rights. Hence, traditional customary acts were placed into writing and reinforced through state-run religion and patriarchy constructions. Tamale's theories seem to be cognisant of research that has been done on African sexualities such as research by Caldwell *et al.* (1989) and Vaughan (1991). One of the core topics central to my study is African sexuality, therefore the above theories will be a useful precursor for this research.

Jessica Murray (2017: 24) observes that Feminist literary analysis can expose the patriarchal conventions that are entrenched in texts in order to alert readers to the omnipresent, yet quite unsaid, gendered attitudes that render women defenseless to silencing and violence in the first place. Literary criticism offers an additional space where those discussions that are opened up in literature can be taken further, and can be beneficial from the extra acumens provided by theoretical interventions. Murray analyses depictions of silence, disgrace and gender violence. Women's voices, and their own expression of the means in which their lived realities are controlled on the basis of gender, remain vulnerable to being silenced in popular dialogues – by means of the politics of publishing as well as in the academic setting (Murray 2017: 24). Correspondingly, Pumla Dineo Gqola (2015) discourses the tendency to shy away from conversing about the

ubiquity of gender violence in our everyday lives noting that novelists can expose and resist prevailing masculine ideas by advancing alternative and less oppressive understandings of women and their abilities in societies.

Sultana's article "Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis" sheds light on the way in which culture is moulded over time as follows:

So, the norms and practices that define women as inferior to men, impose controls on them, are present everywhere in our families, social relations, religious, laws, schools, textbooks, media, factories, offices. Thus, patriarchy is called the sum of the kind of male domination we see around women all the time. In this ideology, men are superior to women and women are part of men's property, so women should be controlled by men and this produces women's subordination. (Sultana 2011: 8)

The insight above offered by Sultana is significant as it stresses that there are ways in terms of the traditional African law which violate the constitutional principle of equality.

Mlambo (2015) notes that resilience theory is in its budding phase in literary circles though it has been in use in social sciences. Resilience is the ability for strategically absorbing disruption and contests, and for managing with the multifaceted uncertainties in life to survive and move beyond survival Mlambo (2015: 200). Theorising such an intricate condition as survival and the rebuilding of the city space in modern-day Zimbabwe appeals for a philosophical shift; it becomes vital that a change in vision should direct our critical efforts to address what Vambe (2003: 17) has called the "poverty of literary theory" in the explication of Zimbabwean literature. This is an observation that homogenises persons and emphasises weakness, victimhood, fragility and incapability to act positively for survival. Analysing literary novels through the lens of the resilience conceptual theory thus means focusing on the people's survival skills, their receptiveness in exploiting prospects, and their capability to prop up agency even in the worst of circumstances similar to those in question Mlambo (2015: 49). The resilience theory mentioned above opens space for the discussion and examination of the theme of coping mechanisms, therefore it is a useful precursor for this study.

1.11 Research Methodology

The selected approach for this research is literary analysis, relying on textual critique and close reading. I read critically and analyse the four primary texts in order to examine the authors' style in relation to the representation of the plight of HIV-positive women and girls, and their strategies for survival. The research will be based on the textual analysis of each of the earlier-mentioned novels. The objective of textual examination is to illustrate the structure, functions and content of messages contained in the story. Catherine Belsey (2013: 24) observes that "textual analysis as a research method involves a close encounter with the work itself, an examination of the details without bringing to them more presuppositions than we can help". In order to exhibit textual analysis, Belsey explores the painting *Tarquin and Lucretia* and asks the following key questions:

What is [the text] about? What kinds of prior knowledge illuminate it? What difference does it make if we locate the work textually and historically? What position, or range of positions does the text offer its readers? How can we best let the text itself set the agenda for research that will generate insights? And finally, how far, as a result of all this labour, can we expect to arrive at a definitive interpretation? (Belsey 2013: 24)

Belsey offers a critical analysis of textual representation. She notes that an excellent textual analyst should be cognisant of the text's obligations, and a good analyst would recognise that its audience might intentionally reject the stance the text presents, and as an alternative decide to look at it from somewhere else. She notes that "a text can never compel its reader to view it in a particular way. We do better to adopt a critical vocabulary which allows certain readings and offer specific positions to its addressee" (2013: 27). She further argues that any vital textual examination is contingent on a comprehension of how connotation operates. We study to mean and understand from outside, from a language which continuously pre-exists us. She contends that one has to understand the process of understanding as the consequence of a relation between a text and a reader. There could be conversation in a text, but the text itself similarly engages in dialogue with the reader. I will apply Belsey's methodology to the texts examined in this research project in so far as it maintains relevance to the primary texts.

This thesis is divided into four chapters, excluding the introductory and concluding chapters. The study engages with four of the southern African novels mentioned earlier. The introductory section has outlined the purpose and content of the thesis. The motivation for the selection of the primary texts, and the purpose and background to study them have been provided. The historical contextualisation of HIV and AIDS in South Africa and Zimbabwe, as well as a discussion of the southern African women's writing on HIV and AIDS have been explored. Women's situation in southern Africa in the framework of HIV and AIDS has been outlined. The chapter has provided an overview of previous literary studies related to HIV and AIDS explicitly from Zimbabwe and South Africa. Finally, the research methodology, literature review and theories that will be employed in the thesis to analyse representations of socio-economic and cultural burdens suffered by HIV-positive women in the chosen texts have been addressed.

Chapter Two, Three, Four and Five analyse four texts, namely: *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001), *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* (2006), *Uncertainty of Hope* (2006) and *Beauty's Gift* (2008). The chapters are organised thematically.

Chapter Two discusses themes of illness, stigma, xenophobia and discrimination, and women's grief. Chapter Three examines the culture and traditions, women's vulnerability, gender inequality and gender violence in the context of HIV and AIDS. I examine the multifaceted depiction of agency and victimhood, with specific reference to postcolonial feminist preferences in depictions in the novels. Chapter Four focuses on women's willingness to communicate about AIDS, feminist awareness, love and affection. Chapter Five focuses on the themes of trauma, hope, and coping mechanisms of HIV-positive women and girls, and those around them. The last chapter is the Conclusion. It presents a review of the arguments examined throughout the analysis and recommendations on the representations of the plight of HIV-positive women, and their survival strategies.

2. CHAPTER TWO: FICTIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF SOCIAL REALITIES FACED BY HIV-POSITIVE WOMEN

2.1 Introduction

This chapter starts off with a synopsis of each of the four primary texts. Using the method of textual analysis, I explore the experience of women living with HIV and AIDS in the perspective of illness, in *Beauty's Gift* and *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. I additionally examine the theme of stigma, xenophobia and discrimination in *Beauty's Gift*, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* and *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. Lastly, the chapter analyses the representations of grief in *Beauty's Gift* and *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*.

2.2 Synopses

2.2.1 *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*

Phaswane Mpe's novella, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001), narrates the lives of Black South Africans living in Hillbrow. The narrative spans borders, oscillating between the countryside town of Tiragalong, the neighbourhood of Hillbrow in Johannesburg, and Oxford. The novel foregrounds the realities and complexities of post-apartheid South Africa and the attitude and prejudices of Black South Africans toward African immigrants from other African countries. The epidemic of HIV and AIDS is believed to be brought by Black African immigrants from countries like the Congo and Nigeria. Refilwe, one of the novel's protagonists, goes abroad for a Master's study. While in Oxford, she gets into a relationship with a Nigerian, a fellow student. The two get sick after a short while, and they get to know of their HIV status. Refilwe flies back to South Africa to die at home amidst stigma and discrimination from her village folks, while her boyfriend travels back to his home country, Nigeria.

2.2.2 *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*

The foreword for *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* contends that although the text is a creative story, it is founded on a real narrative. In short, Shaba, the author, feeds the story. Noting that she is an advocate for women's rights, and also living with HIV, this implies that *Secrets of a Woman's*

Soul mirrors her life encounters. The manner of composing regarding the self is essential in illustrating concepts of identity. Shaba makes no apologies as she tells a mother's story through the daughter's eyes, probing into the experience of being refuted choices, concealing humiliation and coping with life following her HIV-positive test. Simon Gikandi (1992) notes that the necessity by women to compose their own stories in which they recreate their personal lived encounters emanates from the knowledge that a story is critical to the finding of their selfhood.

Secrets of a Woman's Soul enables the author to narrate her side of the story. She grasps the chance to recount her battles and foresight. Shaba connects with her readers and guides them to see the challenges she has gone through and conquered. She composes her story with a lot of confidence, thus making it obvious that in spite of being a victim of HIV, she would prefer to live with it rather than perish from AIDS. Shaba has been involved in her career as a lawyer to safeguard the laws of the state that look critically at women's rights and liberation.

2.2.3 *The Uncertainty of Hope*

The Uncertainty of Hope (2006) narrates pressing issues in contemporary Zimbabwe. The novel foregrounds Zimbabwe's corrupt government, gender inequality and HIV and AIDS. The main protagonist, Onai Moyo, a responsible mother of three and a market woman, narrowly escapes HIV infection from her husband. She is married to Gari, a very irresponsible man. He leads a reckless life and does not provide for his family. Instead, he sleeps around with self-proclaimed prostitutes, Sheila and Gloria, both of whom die of HIV and AIDS. Tagwira calls for the emancipation of womenfolk in a male-controlled culture through the action of imaginative authorship and dedication to the real problems of HIV and AIDS. She urges the Zimbabwean nation to cease from classifying women in conventional expressions, arguing that patriarchy has nothing to give to women and that women's susceptibility to HIV and AIDS springs from a structure that favours the male gender.

2.2.4 *Beauty's Gift*

Sindiwe Magona's *Beauty's Gift* (2008) narrates the story of her protagonist named Beauty. The novel foregrounds marriage and life that are plagued by HIV and AIDS. Hamilton, Beauty's husband, infects her with HIV. Her mother, Mamkwayi, alongside her four best friends, Cordelia,

Edith, Amanda and Doris, also known as the Five Firm Friends (FFF), look after her during the time of illness. Beauty abruptly falls very sick, and passes away after six weeks. On her deathbed, she pleads with Amanda and the other FFF not to die prematurely like her. “May you live a long life, and may you become old”, she begs Amanda (2008: 73). The four girls swear after Beauty’s untimely passing that they will not have unprotected sex with their spouses, and that they will go for HIV testing together with their husbands. Magona rams home this gendered susceptibility in a didactic and unequivocal stance on the representation of HIV and AIDS. This text is written to educate and inform through consciousness-raising.

2.3 Illness: Women’s Experience with HIV and AIDS in *Beauty’s Gift*

Beauty’s Gift initiates a dialogue on women’s illness and susceptibility in a setting patent by an intensely engrained patriarchal setting. The novel presents Magona’s fictional representations of social realities of the plight of HIV-positive women characters. The narrative presents Beauty’s illness when Amanda is celebrating her 35th birthday with her four friends. The story commences with Beauty’s memorial service and then traces her short life (2008: 3). The narrative gives voice to the marginalised perspectives of the plight of sick women. *Beauty’s Gift* suggests that a truthful gauge of individual autonomy lies in feeling at home, but this is in contrast to what Beauty gets. Beauty is imprisoned in the trappings of the institution of marriage. It is in this particular account of her illness that Beauty tries to unlock the secrets of her marriage when she falls sick. Magona’s mode of understanding the plight of women is modelled on the kind of care they receive at home and in social spaces. Beauty’s husband, Hamilton, does not want anyone to visit her when she falls sick. He lies and covers up Beauty’s sickness. The novel foregrounds: “It is the same day after, and the day after that, and every time he says that Beauty can’t come to the phone, she’s in a meeting, they have visitors, she’s resting” (Magona 2008: 39). This is an indication that the body stricken with HIV and AIDS is regularly vulnerable to gender discrimination, in addition to sexual violence. Additionally, a confined space is an indication of imprisonment. Therefore, this narrative serves to deepen the reader’s insight into the complexities the HIV-positive women undergo in the time of illness. In this sense, even so, Beauty does not lose her identity and dignity. Nonetheless, Beauty’s plight draws our attention to a country whose women and girls are the most vulnerable and abused in society. The passage’s depiction of Beauty’s husband symbolises autocracy in marriage and a crisis of masculinity. Magona demonstrates a thorough understanding of the socio-

political and historical landscape of the prevalence of HIV and AIDS in South Africa. She carries the theme of illness with a positive mind-set to a higher level.

There is much to be gained from Magona's contributions, particularly with respect to the primacy of women's relationship during sickness. This stance is epitomised by the text's nuanced depiction of women's friendship in the time of illness. Through *Beauty's Gift*, Magona reflects the role of women in a troubled HIV-epidemic prevalent country. The novel provides a powerful indicator of the mutual connection between Beauty and her woman friends that is closely rooted in the time of sickness. The novel's title points to a dominant topic in the story, which is the relationship between Beauty and her woman friends. This engagement of friendship reinforces the importance of constructive ties as they all find points of connection through Beauty's illness. With this observation in mind, the analysis demonstrates the overarching concern of Magona which is to link the individual to the collective. Beauty achieves social liberation through her woman friends.

Magona fearlessly explores the issue of illness in the public spheres. Her narrative signals towards a sense of emotional and psychological contentment which surpasses the stiff detention linked to illness. Beauty's woman friends form a very strong bond of friendship. This makes one value Flora Nwapa's remarks that a female-focused circle focuses on thoughts of sistership amongst women who display their love and abhor societal ineffectiveness (quoted in Wisker 2000: 134). There is commendable unity amongst Magona's female characters as they pursue to live.

Through Beauty's woman friends, the author approves ideals such as open-mindedness and respect in terms of sexual roles. Beauty's illness does not diminish her hope. She notably unlocks the cosmos of silence in the story by confiding to her woman friends what she is suffering from. Beauty ultimately defines herself within the vision of a greater woman. Magona reinforces the insolence demonstrated by Nawal El Saadawi's (2007) depiction of the character Firdaus. *Beauty's Gift* explicitly identifies El Saadawi's character Firdaus with Beauty. Beauty goes beyond the boundaries of sickness by confronting HIV and AIDS and infusing resilience by affirming her agency in the face of patriarchal pressures and supremacy of her community. On her deathbed, she pleads with Amanda and the rest of her four female friends not to pass away prematurely like she is doing. "May you live a long life, and may you become old", she begs Amanda (2008: 73). There is much to be gained from Magona's contributions, especially with regard to the primacy of

women's relationships during sickness. Beauty helps the reader to acknowledge that individuals with HIV and AIDS are not beyond the social pale. For instance, Beauty, who is strikingly portrayed as the star in the narrative, engenders authority despite her illness. This is demonstrated in the story when Beauty's friends Cordelia, Edith, Amanda and Doris take a lesson with them after Beauty's death, "they commit to test for HIV and stay positive irrespective of the outcome" (2008: 75). Ultimately, Beauty assumes agency, as well as representation of an appealing character whom readers are encouraged to identify with. A significant component of Beauty's agency in the story is when she boldly discloses her HIV status to her woman friends which ultimately changes their viewpoint of life.

2.4 Victims of Harsh Environment

2.4.1 Stigma and Discrimination

This section seeks to analyse stigma and discrimination in the chosen novels, namely *Beauty's Gift*, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* and *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. Secrecy, silence, stigma and shame are social circumstances that propagate the spread of HIV, leading to a common response of silence. Alta van Dyk offers the following insightful report:

In one study on HIV care and counselling in South Africa, 98% of the subjects indicated that 'secrecy and confidentiality concerning AIDS are very important to them because they fear rejection by the community and even death if their HIV-status becomes general knowledge'. (2001: 10)

Humiliation, silence and seclusion wreak havoc in women's agency when they try to confront the simple fact that there is a need for a transformed feminist obligation to the basics of female empowerment. Hailey Arbrah *et al.* (2017) define stigma as undesirable mindsets, intolerance and violence targeted at people living with HIV and AIDS.

Magona explores the concept of shame and stigma. In the context of South African black culture, HIV is connected with sex, a subject considered taboo, therefore confidentiality and silence become survival tactics for persons living with HIV. Shame and stigma often accompany this group of people. Holzemer (2007) note that politics centers on the aspect of power affiliations,

whereby persons living with HIV and AIDS are ostracised in the cultural, legal and policy environment, and economic aspect. Individuals who stigmatise others could have a secondary achievement, which leads them to have the control to stigmatise others. It is thus challenging to foster candidness and disclosure about the epidemic in most ethnic South African communities. Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* (1978) and *AIDS and its Metaphors* (1988) address the intersection of meaning and disease. In the earlier text, Sontag notes that ailment is not an allegory, and the very honest way of involving sickness, and the fittest way of being unwell, is one highly purified of, truly resistant to, metaphorical philosophy. Metaphoric beliefs allow potentially harmful myths to collect around a disease. This further governs characterisation of those suffering from AIDS and in turn gives rise to moral judgement (Douglas 2002).

Literature, has the capability to be a space where topics that are challenging to talk about and that tend to be covered in disgrace and silence – such as gender violence, female sexuality and women's bodies can be conveyed to light and explored (Murray 2017). Magona chooses information on HIV and AIDS that dispels falsehood and misrepresentation which in this case includes denial, shame and disgrace against individuals living with HIV and AIDS. Her narrative, *Beauty's Gift*, exposes the level of ignorance by her characters through Cordelia's conversation with Gabula (2008: 44). Portraying reality, Magona firmly opposes such stereotypes, and endorses hope for female agency. Gabula embodies a homophobic view; therefore, it is on grounds of such mistaken views and obliviousness that makes Magona contend that absence of communication generates an atmosphere where there is no expression to address the source of infection amongst the most affected gender, including those who are vulnerable. This misrepresentation comes in various forms, and lack of knowledge and communication leaves women dangerously exposed, as Magona reveals by pointing a condemning hand at Gabula. His utterance disturbs the reader when he accuses the female gender of being the source of HIV and AIDS. He paints women negatively as he states that everyone knows that is how men get infected. Discourses on gender and HIV are not static. Many patriarchal cultures blame women for being the sole culprits of the virus (Tagwirei 2014: 217). By extension, in his mind he concludes that the Sonti twins got AIDS from their girlfriends, accusing them that "they will give AIDS to other brothers, unless they also die!" (69).

Gabula represents the terrible impact of ignorance, whereas Cordelia is represented as a symbol of the voice of reason in the novel. She questions: "If a man sleeps with more than one partner, how

can he be absolutely sure his girlfriend is the one who gave the disease to him?’” (Magona 2008: 69). By uttering these words, Cordelia’s steadfast dedication prompts her to articulate the crisis of motherhood stating that African mothers, devotedly married women, are killed by promiscuous spouses (Magona 2008: 70). She casts a wary eye upon this idealistic conception that puts women at risk. The above extract therefore seeks to underscore the realism of ostracism that is encountered by widows in South Africa. It is on such grounds that characters like Cordelia in the novel advocate for awareness in order to confront the stigma placed on women.

Magona’s contest to the form of discrimination conservatively celebrated in traditional societies in South Africa is supplemented by the way she employs the features of the archetypical female character: “[She] raised a hand in salute, like the anti-apartheid leaders of old, ‘let us fight back! Don’t let the busy-tongued gossip stop you from testing! Don’t let him stop you from getting the medicine you need!’” (Magona 2008: 85). Regarding stigma, Mrs Mazwi is a fictional spokesperson of the views of Magona herself, a subtle interpretation of the narrative thus suggests that Magona condemns modern-day society’s elevation of shame and humiliation over love and care. Thus, Magona’s critical engagement with the HIV and AIDS pandemic in *Beauty’s Gift* offers a template of positive change in a South African community’s perception. For instance, the platform for HIV and AIDS campaigning in the second Sonti twin’s funeral attests to Magona’s paradigm shift in her literary representation of shame, silence and disgrace.

Contrary to the negative depictions in the novel, through the description of the setting of *Beauty’s Gift*, which foregrounds socio-cultural problems, stigma and discrimination, Magona encourages the reader to see the textual world positively. The narrative utilises the second Sonti twin’s memorial service as a stand for HIV and AIDS campaigning. Unlike Beauty’s funeral, silence and deprivation have been substituted with frank discussion and action about HIV. This is apparent in the manner the burial is organised: “three girls and three boys line up at the gate to the humble family home. Each hold a basket of red ribbons, which they hand out as people walk in” (Magona 2008: 77). Worldwide, red ribbons symbolise the battle against the HIV and AIDS scourge. The boys and girls at the funeral give out pamphlets on HIV and AIDS along with the programme. Read this way, talking about HIV and AIDS assumes a redeeming element, where the ultimate objective is to galvanise the South African rainbow society from its blind pretence in the face of

the pandemic. This resonates with the concept of a collective civil society approach to re-imagining the future of the rainbow nation.

Secrets of a Woman's Soul trades with transactions that womenfolk have been compelled to hold within themselves as they battle with stigma. Shaba tackles the matter of stigmatised positions. She inspires Linga all through schooling so that she remains optimistic after testing positive for HIV. This echoes what the author does in her real life of activism. In the text, culture defines disease which ultimately attracts public stigma. Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton (2003) expound:

It is vitally important to recognize that stigma arises and stigmatization takes shape in specific contexts of culture and power. Understanding this history and its likely consequences for affected individuals and communities can help us develop better measures for combating it and reducing its effects. (2003: 17)

The disgrace connected to obnoxious sexual conduct can be used to rationalise suppressing medical therapy and empathy. Shaba therefore actively seeks to cultivate new structures of engagements and new concrete procedures, through which the stigma and discrimination can be appropriately understood and negotiated. Beata is from a generation where indignity is doomed. Beata struggles with the shame of her status for fifteen years. She tells the doctor at every hospital visit that she suffers from stomach pains hoping that the doctor would figure out her illness. As a gender activist who is dynamic in the fight against disgrace and intolerance of HIV and AIDS, Shaba challenges women to reject submission to masculine persecution. This is evident in the story when Boora, the city councilor takes advantage of his administrative position to lure Beata and Linga into the trap of HIV infection. Consequently, the narrative offers salient factual representations of stigma in Zimbabwe. Tendayi Westerhof rightfully observes:

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. (2005: 51)

Openness is dominantly important in fighting the menace of HIV and AIDS. In contestation, Shaba calls upon women to break away from harsh traditions that hinder them from disclosing their status. Beata fails to seek proper treatment because she is cognisant of the society's detrimental attitude on HIV-positive people. She therefore opts to hide her HIV status for fear of being ostracised. Textually, this confirms the high level of embarrassment and prejudice that women have to deal with. The novel also foregrounds judgmental attitudes of the medical professionals in the healthcare system. The novel notes that the robust societal stigma connected to sickness of a sexual nature keeps Beata voiceless regarding her actual situation. The narrator notes that Beata kept silent even to the health physicians who were her only redemption, foreigners to whom she could entrust her condition. Because of shame, Beata uses anonymity as a shield from gossiping friends and medics. Maretha Visser *et al.* (2009) in "HIV and AIDS Stigma in a South African Community" in their research overwhelmingly observe:

Stigma often carries a religious significance – the afflicted person is viewed as sinful or evil – or a moral connotation of weakness and dishonour. Thus, the stigmatised person is defined as alien other, upon whose persona are projected the attributes the group regards as opposite to the ones it values. (2009: 204)

In this sense, shame aids in defining the social identity of a person. The shame and secrecy that Beata endures is created by a callous patriarchal culture. Women's exposure to HIV and AIDS is a consequence of systems that favour males. Nevertheless, the author is not quiet on what ought to be achieved. According to Shaba, society should abandon harmful beliefs and embrace gender equality.

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. (Maretha Visser *et al.* 2009: 19)

Similarly, Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* encapsulates in concrete terms Shaba's criticism of the need of transformation of public perception of HIV and AIDS. Beata's and Linga's experiences are a microcosm of the plight of individuals afflicted by HIV and AIDS in the Zimbabwean nation. Thus, for this matter, a creative voice is a powerful way of investigating the impact of intolerance on the subject's reality and impression of self-worth. The author is keen to allow the reader to travel into the worldview of the character and imagine the world from the character's viewpoint. For instance, one gets to understand Beata well when one grasps the socio-cultural situation in which she is situated.

Further, Beata is troubled at her workplace as she faces social discrimination. Linga alludes to the fact that it has not been easy to nurse her dying mother when people around her speak of her mother's illness in lowered voices and euphemisms. Later in the novel, Linga through social interactions with members of her society comes to understand why it had not been workable for Beata to talk about sexual actions that proceeded under her nose simply because she is a component of a communal consciousness that dictates that some things are better left unsaid and unseen. The narrator notes the following:

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 a worse fate than death. (Shaba 2005: 79)

Shaba further highlights some of the difficulties people with HIV deal with within their societies. Mai Likuma, Beata's friend, feeds her with cruel gossip about people in the neighbourhood who are sick or have died from AIDS-related illnesses. The gossip shames and curses Beata into shadows and silence, "forcing her to keep her own condition from the public eye" (Shaba 2005: 100). Irvine elucidates that the feeling of disgrace "is a social function, nurtured in order to bring about systems of conduct" (2009: 71). Secrecy provides means of protecting the self-respect of a person. Consequently, Miranda Pillay (2009) notes that the soaring HIV occurrence rates amongst women regularly ends in womenfolk being labeled the shippers of the disease. Women are deemed accountable for the trans-generational carriers of the virus. The link between female sexuality, wickedness and illness is also drawn by Megan Vaughan in her examination of a debate instigated

in 1908 on what was thought to be an epidemic of syphilis amongst the Baganda community in the Uganda Colony:

Female sexuality was everywhere a danger, it seemed, but the enlightened early-twentieth century male medic saw that female sexuality in ‘civilized’ countries had been successfully tamed. Only when female passions had been brought under control was it possible to grant women greater freedom without endangering the whole society. (Vaughan 1991: 133)

Therefore, the very spot and symbol of civilisation is female chastity, and equally, unrestrained ‘free’ female sexuality is the source of wickedness, sin and disease. It is a similar apprehension that pushes Linga’s mother into suppression once she becomes cognisant of her HIV condition. The earlier-mentioned prejudice against women forces them to conceal Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) because of the society’s quick condemnation towards them. Furthermore, the author through her narrative questions the role neighbours and friends play in curbing stigma. Linga cries for her mother and all the women of her generation who endure the consequences of stigmatisation and obliviousness conceived through a self-virtuous, ethically insolvent society, whose gauge of kindness is established on the misfortunes of their neighbours and friends (Shaba 2005). She recounts and reflects on this ensuing issue:

This closed cupboard of society weighed down on her soul, her spirit, and wearied her. It was like a door that opened to a huge dark cavernous closet, fetid with secrets and shame. [...] Anything that took place in that closet was never to get out, it was a secret you kept to your death. It was your fault you got dragged into the closet of shame, and then it was your secret to keep it. (Shaba 2005: 80)

Beata’s physical vulnerability is thus shown to incite difference and segregation. She is devastated as she imagines that the rumour-monger is undoubtedly telling the whole village of her condition, “judging from the casual ‘drop-ins’ who pretend surprise at seeing that Beata is ill but cannot hide the naked appraisal in their eyes that has a can’t-wait-to-tell-someone look” (Shaba 2005: 104).

Consequently, the narrative through the above scene challenges society’s negative attitude towards people living with HIV. Therefore, Shaba calls upon society to shun discrimination and embrace love. Stigma encompasses the formation of new confines. Stigma functions via symbols that seek

out to portray this miserable abnormality, accrediting an identifiable symbol like filth in the blood in a bid to bring it down and consequently safeguard the self, at least on a figurative level (Douglas 2002).

Beata's marginalisation and vulnerability in the novel are a representation of women who experience discrimination because of their HIV status. Again, in the framework of social discrimination, through *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, Shaba criticises self-imposed stigma. Through the narrator Beata questions what type of society produces "women who normalised being unwell [...] [W]here did such depths of shame come from, that dictate that it is better to die quiet and lonely than to have people know your situation?" (Shaba 2005: 98). Shame has historically and culturally been used to shame black female bodies into being disciplined bodies (Irvine 2009: 70). It is in this context that Beata struggles with the shame of her status. While Linga receives treatment Beata's condition alerts the readers to the battles around receiving anti-retroviral therapy. Both secrecy and silence leave Beata in a state of paralysis. Linga is an embodiment of acceptance and forgiveness. Her ability to change perceptions has significant implications for my reading of Shaba's novel. Such implicit analysis, I argue, can promote more nuanced responses to the phenomenon of women's traumatised and violated. It is through Beata's condition that the author creates awareness in her readers about the consequences of denialism and self-stigma.

The metaphor of illness is evident in the narrative. In designing the metaphorical connotations of HIV and AIDS, Shaba presents a concrete example to demonstrate her society's vindictive attitude towards victims of HIV and AIDS: "the undesirable expressions that the people use, for example, sluggish train, slow puncture or accelerated mail service" exemplify the absence of reflection that triumphs in society (Shaba 2005: 19). It is these categories of symbolic misinterpretations that propagate the hesitancy to embrace effective treatment. Consequently, the illustrations above also suggest a need to elucidate something that is not well understood. The dialogue of virus is mutually semantic and cultural. The use of the term "sluggish train" or "accelerated mail service" indicates the conversational nature of HIV. The component of connotations rooted in these dreaded manifestations accelerates isolation and is employed as a method of transposition to handle fears linked with the last phases of illness.

John Kobia's Metaphors on HIV and AIDS Discourse among Oluluyia Speakers of Western Kenya (2008) underscores the existing metaphorical discourse of AIDS:

If one has to understand metaphor, he [she] should internalize, perceive and map it from the source domain to the target domain. To be able to internalize the metaphorical mapping, one also has to consider the shared attributes between the source domain and the target domain. [...] Quite a number of metaphors in Oluluyia are used to refer to HIV/AIDS as a calamity, catastrophe or a tragedy. The source domains are the calamities like floods, drought, soil erosion, thunderstorms, hailstorms and lightening which are used for the target domain, HIV and AIDS. (2008: 54)

Kobia ends by issuing the statement that HIV and AIDS is an ordinary ailment. Through the excerpt above, Kobia lists a collection of connotations connected to HIV and AIDS, comprising its climatic signs and its interpretation in devastating conversation. He reminds people that it is in the end, an illness and not anything new.

Over time, illness has been accorded connotations outside its genetic description. Sontag dismisses the use of symbols when describing disease, asserting vehemently that disease is not an allegory (1978: 3). She reckons that the way sickness, and for this matter HIV and AIDS, is conceived through symbolism can intensify the engagement of illness for the subject and dampen support for the ailing individual by others. Thus, the experience of illness has biomedical and biological dimensions. Sontag draws exemption to the usage of symbols in relation to disease because of the conceivably vindictive connotations that might be granted to ailments and individuals who are sick when adverse figurative connotations are enacted (1978: 3). Horne (2010) drives commitment to the point that placing everything into linguistic or other structures of figurative interpretations inevitably entails dislocation in that it then becomes a restoration of a spectacle, unique and diverse from the phenomenon itself.

Shaba suggests that women should not burden themselves with society's prejudice. She therefore appeals to her readers to be critical of such a society that operates on the foundation of bigotry, through which it endeavours to discriminate, instead of advocating for empathy and tolerance of HIV-positive persons. Linga's survival in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* concludes the narrative on a

positive tone, with the vow of emancipation for HIV-positive individuals. This approach of engagement with fictional work allows the researcher to illuminate the way in which narratives, like *Secrets of a Womans Soul*, could transform into worthwhile discursive apparatuses that provide practical avenues of exploring the intricacies of the plight of women through the imaginary portrayals of women's lives seen in Shaba's narrative.

2.4.2 Xenophobic Realities of Stigma: *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*

The novel, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, highlights the battles faced by women living with HIV. The narrative provides a thought-provoking criticism of stigma in society. Refilwe is introduced in third-person narration, which lets the readers dissociate themselves from her standpoint, whereas at the same moment obtaining invaluable insight into her situation. When she is first introduced into the narrative, she is labelled as an "outcast". Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* illustrates that the problem of HIV and AIDS in South Africa starts from a gender standpoint where women are compromised since they are already allegedly branded as the foundation of the problem. The story focuses on her key moments in her adulthood, which is shattered by her sickness. She is troubled by her rapid deterioration and swears to herself that she would shortly unite with her adored Refentse in paradise to anticipate the "coming of the other bone of her heart" (2001: 115). Refilwe plays a significant role in the narrative. Through her representation in the novel, the vulnerable position of women in the society is made evident. She is depicted as a defiant victim who challenges the xenophobic ideology thrust upon her by her society.

Illness associated with the fear of an outsider is one of the concerns with which Phaswane Mpe engages in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. The danger of infection, in this instance of HIV and AIDS, makes one alert to one's border surroundings, fearful of those who originate outside of them.

These Africans from the West were the sole bringers of AIDS and all sorts of other dirty illnesses to this centre of human civilisation. Their passports were scrutinised, signatures checked, double checked and triple checked. Our Heathrow strongly reminded Refilwe of our Hillbrow and the xenophobia it engendered. She learnt there, at our Heathrow, that there was another word for foreigners that was not very different in connotation from

Makwerekwere or *Mapolantane*. Except that it was a much more widely used term: Africans. (2001: 57)

This creation of “African AIDS” was streamlined on the justification of the invented variation between European and African sexuality, with the latter being closer to nature than the former. Paton observes that even the spreading designs of the epidemic had to be elucidated in a way that made Africa the natural habitat of the virus. Mpe uses his literary work to reflect the xenophobic realities of stigma in South Africa. He maintains the distant relationship amongst non-South Africans and South Africans through the typecasting of their daily lives, which dehumanises South Africans. It is the exterior getting in, contravening conventional boundaries in an uncontrolled way.

Consequently, Paton discloses the degree to which the Western world participated in crafting myths that associated HIV and AIDS to a specific race. He notes an absolute style in the 1980s where Western science was rapidly consolidating around a specific assembly of what was denoted as “African AIDS” (Paton 1997: 397). Through this development the West had intended to detach itself from the plague, and progressed on to show Africa as stricken by the virus beyond restoration. The ‘othering’ procedure works when some types of people are branded and ostracised through stereotyping, thus creating social fear in the public domain. Moreover, foreignness is synonymous with difference, therefore in post-apartheid South Africa, the symbol of the *lekwerekwere* has been created and employed to depict African immigrants in South Africa as the country’s aliens. It is ironic that the people of Tiragalong use pre-existing xenophobic discourse to justify HIV infection, which equates non-South Africans with AIDS infection, in a post-colonial and post-apartheid context. Ultimately, Refilwe is a nonconformist to this culture, as is first made evident when she dates a Nigerian boyfriend. She is a free-spirited female who does not fit into the guidelines that her culture has put on her. Whilst in Oxford, she engages romantically with her boyfriend. This relationship acts as a temporary refuge from her troubles. One can argue that Refilwe’s transgression of society’s rules makes her a pariah. She is further excluded from her community because of the above factor, and being HIV-positive. The novel further details the following:

It became instead a story about an HIV positive woman from Tiragalong, who was ostracised by her fellow villagers when they learnt about her health status. The Tiragalong

of your fiction said that she deserved what she got. What had she hoped to gain by opening her thighs to every *Lekwerekwere* that came her way? She was a child who had, in effect, committed suicide. And, as Tiragalong well knew, the cry of a person who has committed suicide is a drum; when it plays we dance. (Mpe 2001: 54)

The narrative additionally foregrounds that it was a heart-breaking narrative about a gentleman and his lady who had fallen victim to HIV. The narrator further notes that they share a deadly disease with each other. Arguably, “When they go back to their respective villages and the people there learn that they are suffering from AIDS, they say: Indeed! Is it not known what the fruit of sin is?” (112). Refilwe’s community is portrayed as judgemental and irrational. This vindictive attitude towards women would thus be interpreted as an act of callousness.

Moeketsi Letseka explains that neighbourhood is vital in South Africa provided that Africa is nevertheless essentially a collective culture. This collectivism describes the people’s experience of self-awareness, their autonomy, and their location in the societal entirety (Letseka 2013: 358). However, in the literary novels under examination, South African citizens act in a disparaging manner towards African immigrants because of their cultural, national, and ethnic discrepancies. Mpe uses his imaginative writing to critique South African society, principally with regard to the xenophobic performance of cruelty perpetrated towards African immigrants. The novel notes:

Stories of Refilwe’s decline brewed along the village grapevines, spilling out into the streets of Tiragalong and then to other areas, via the NI, Telkom, Vodacom and MTN. Refilwe the incarnation of AIDS, former beauty turned into a scarecrow. An example of what Oxford, Johannesburg and Makwerekwere could do to the careless thighs of the otherwise virtuous ones of Tiragalong. (Mpe 2001: 121)

In relation to grieving, doubt asserts that “the disgrace and shame that has defined the South African response to the pandemic has meant that persons living with HIV and AIDS have been inclined outside of the territories within which their lives would be recognised as lives and their deaths considered mournable deaths” (Magosvongwe and Nyamende 2016: 1364). As one can see from this, the use of the above rogue images evokes the notion of society’s hostility towards HIV-positive persons. Refilwe’s physical decline arouses her community members’ curiosity. Her

social and health status coupled with her identity as a woman reminds the readers about her community's cruelty towards women. Similarly, in Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, Beata's exclusion from her community allows Linga to develop a richer understanding for persons who face rejection and intolerance because of their HIV-positive status. Irvine (2009) argues that the ostracised person can endeavour to correct his ailment by indirectly dedicating much secluded effort to the mastery of an area of activity customarily thought to be barred on incidental and physical grounds to one with his limitations. Linga obtains a mutual field and a common individuality with her mother on comparable attitudes of isolation and seclusion.

The novel recounts the difficulties in attempts to ascertain belonging in Refilwe's own community. The narrator captures her extinguished hopes noting that Refilwe's foremost declaration was to cease going home to Tiragalong where the wiggling tongues do their best to accelerate her demise (Mpe 2001: 54). Refilwe is a casualty of the predominant masculine apathy towards women in the society. Arnfred (2002) positions these complex relationships between males and females in the framework of AIDS in the colonial era and how it created images of the metropole's others. He quotes Victorian and evangelical concepts of sexuality and femininity that underscored the dissection of the mind from the body, with the body being female and the mind male. The rationality of this concept is further advanced to create the woman as body, and consequently the carrier of sexuality. The only restoration therefore arises if the woman upholds her self control and chastity, therefore assuming the form of the Madonna as opposed to a prostitute. Girls are shown to arise from childhood with a foundation for compassion constructed into their principal definition of self, in a manner that boys do not. As a result, social affiliations and reliance are experienced differently by women and men. This notion has a robust impact on how emotions work in both genders (Boersema 2013).

The stringent ethical policies of Refilwe's society and unawareness around HIV and AIDS-associated concerns result in her converting to a social pariah, as she recounts the complexity and sufferings of a lonely life. The narrator notes that Refilwe deteriorated. Those who knew her in the city, especially the unsympathetic ones, stated that she was skinny, her outfits were easily swinging on her bony physique (58). The above scene bears stark resemblance to an occurrence from Margaret Ogola's novel (1994). In this particular piece of work, the novel recounts punitive actions directed towards the female gender. In the narrative, Becky, one of the novel's characters, is

depicted as pretty and appealing to men, but her ethical impoverishment ends in her death because of HIV and AIDS. Becky is ostracised by her community since HIV illness is believed to be the outcome of individual recklessness. There appears to be no empathy for the victim of HIV infection. These moralistic attitudes fail to do fairness to intricate aspects that have an impact on women's susceptibility to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Emmanuel Obiechina (1990) offers an insightful observation when he notes that African authors trade with oppression on dual levels: of individual and group perception. He argues that the topic is studied mostly in novels and plays; these are categories that present full scale for the evaluation of human involvement in its expanded aspects with the probability of creating a clarification or statement of a particular human predicament or situation (1990: 151).

In *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, a look of defiance dominates Refilwe's face as she is shocked and horrified by the Tiragalong residents' actions. Additionally, in the novel, the polarised nature of women is captured. A poignant note runs through this novel as it starkly reveals the plight of HIV-positive women, and the pivotal striking point of the text is Refilwe's decision:

She wanted to be laid to rest in our Tiragalong, even if it meant exiting this world amidst the ignorant talk of people who turned diseases into crime. She knew, as Lerato had known, that it was difficult for a woman to face her friends, colleagues and the whole community, and say her name, when they all judged her to be just a loose pair of thighs with voracious appetite in search of wandering penises to come and caress them. [...] Now it was her turn to be accused. She now was the one over whom the gods and devils of Tiragalong would sit in judgement. (Mpe 2001: 116)

In the framework of post-apartheid South Africa, Murray (2017) notes that women's understanding of the embarrassment of their sexuality and appearance, as well as the indignity that outlines the sense of responsibility they feel for upholding interpersonal relationships, are as racialised as they are gendered. Refilwe's marginality is connected to her HIV status. This results in her family lacking an emotionally close relationship with her. The novel uses her case to reflect society's brutality and ruthlessness at family level. Consequently, detachment and loneliness characterise her life. The narrative projects the traumatic anxieties associated with her abandonment. After her encounter with her community members, she has a nightmare which propels her into taking a stand

against her community and family. This turning point occurs in the novel when her family members turn against her:

When she arrived at Johannesburg International Airport, where her family and friends had gathered to welcome her, she wondered whether she could brave the keen grief in their eyes. Against their will, they failed to disguise the fact that they had already given her up to the gods. Her thinness made their attempts at disguise impossible. [...] They spoke no words to express their muddy whirlpools of feeling. But as you walked into the parking lot, where your younger brother had parked your car, which he had been taking care of, in your absence, you heard a voice whispering: But she is so thin! Look at how the clothes are simply hanging on her bony shoulders. And look at those sticks of legs! The voice was sensitive to your feelings, whispering in order that you would not hear. Articulating, you knew, the collective thoughts of your family and friends. [...] In the mean-time you were treated to chicken Hillbrow by your loving family and friends. You were treated to chicken Tiragalong. Life was going on, as it would continue to go on, long after you had bid this world farewell. (Mpe 2001: 118-123)

The family is not merely the miniature of the larger society, but additionally a means for the tangible articulation of collective ideals. Refilwe's returning back home to Tiragalong translates to loss of a sense of self-esteem, and the shame of losing her health affects her view of her own femininity. Shame leads to resentment, habitually in vicious circle, and this in turn to denialism and narcissism (Boersema 2013: 9). The narrative raises the question of values and standards. Unlike Mpe, Gikandi (1992) and Evan Mwangi detail that the HIV and AIDS pattern has been utilised, mainly in the 1990s, to infuse consciousness into fictional novels: the infectivity has been attributed to negative characters as a way of penance in the narrative's ethical structure (Parker 2007: 23). Contrary to the above insight by Gikandi and Mwangi, Mpe's vision for people and the South African society have enabled him to write this novella that reveals the tension between the demands of social responsibility and individual involvement. Further, through the above excerpt, Mpe grasps the significance of compassion, the capacity to put oneself in someone else's shoes, and the essence of love, seen in the shift from third person narration to intimate second-person, a direct and poignant address to Refilwe as "you", Mpe thus stresses the importance of having a strong sense of empathy to individuals suffering from HIV and AIDS.

2.5 The Representation of Grief in *Beauty's Gift* and *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*

Magona activates readers' active sympathies by her poignant representations of bereavement and grief in *Beauty's Gift*. The reader is invited to feel the demise of Beauty, through the point of view of Mamkwayi, Beauty's mother, as she comes to a grown-up's understanding of grief. The novel presents a grieving mother: "Dear God! When and how did Mamkwayi turn over this cruel new page where it is written that parents shall bury their children?" (2008: 59). The reader is invited to empathise with Beauty's death in the family space through the viewpoint of Mamkwayi, as she cruises to an awareness of anguish through HIV and AIDS. Here, Magona evokes sympathy for feminine subjectivity. The author believes that women bear the social and economic burden of the death of their children due to HIV and AIDS. Coping with the loss of a family member or a close friend is one of the hardest things to deal with as it leaves emptiness and pain that cannot be explained.

Amanda, Cordelia, Edith and Doris mourn the death of their friend Beauty. They think that Hamilton should be the one dead as they strongly believe that he is the one responsible for their friend's death (Magona 2008:15). Amanda feels empty and depressed following the death of her friend. The narrator observes: "If Amanda was angry at herself, she felt murderous towards Hamilton. There was not the slightest doubt in her mind that he was the cause of Beauty's death" (15). *Beauty's Gift*, is a story of five women's experience with HIV and AIDS. The text explores the affiliation between the five woman friends. Each of these women finds understanding and comfort through this friendship when Beauty dies. In the description of the above close ties between Beauty and her woman friends, Magona highlights the intensity of loss and grief that women bear. Magona therefore utilises shared grief as a vehicle to convey her message of hope and resilience in the time of loss. In *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, the novel foregrounds Linga's resilience after the death of her mother who dies at 56 from AIDS complications. Linga knows her emotive endurance depends on her capability to attain enthusiasm from the great reminiscence, and to try and overlook the awful memories that colour her presence (Shaba 2006: 19). She visits her mother's grave for the first time after the traditional burial closure ceremony and she is able to find peace and accept her mother's death without guilt, and with less anger (Shaba 2006: 111). Shaba's story offers potency to her women characters out of their grieving and peripheral stance. Ogunyemi (2007) examines the influence of portrayal employed by African female authors, remarking that

African women regularly arise not merely as sufferers but also as warriors of a brutal structure and a dreadful past.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the fictional representations of the themes of illness, bereavement, stigma, xenophobia and discrimination in the selected texts. In the theme of illness, Sindiwe Magona's *Beauty's Gift* advocates for care and love in the time of sickness. The novel's title points to a dominant topic in the narrative, which is the connection between Beauty and her woman friends. The title provides a formidable marker of the mutually beneficial association between Beauty and her woman friends that is deeply entrenched in the time of sickness. This engagement of friendship reinforces the importance of constructive ties as they all find points of connection through Beauty's illness. With this observation in mind, the analysis demonstrates the overarching concern of Magona which is to link the individual to the mass.

Like Sindiwe Magona, Lutanga Shaba through her narrative shuns stigma and discrimination. Her novel depicts characters affected by society's prejudice and negative attitude towards people living with HIV. Shaba therefore calls upon readers to embrace disclosure and break away from harsh culture and traditions that encourage marginalisation of HIV positive victims, suggesting that there is life after testing positive for HIV. Mpe's narrative portrays to the reader the inhumane side of the society; it examines characters who conform to vindictive attitudes towards HIV-positive individuals. He uses literary art as a foundation for his work to address matters connected to xenophobia and stigma. Therefore, he tacitly appeals for a change in society and a re-evaluation of the South African state towards foreigners and HIV-positive individuals.

The chapter also puts into perspective various aspects of grief and bereavement. The readers' alignment with grief is encouraged through Magona's depiction of Mamkwayi, who displays pity and sorrow. The argument in this study concludes that dealing with the loss of a family member or a close friend is one of the hardest things to deal with as it leaves emptiness and pain.

3. CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS OF REPRESENTATIONS OF AFRICAN TRADITIONS, WOMEN'S VULNERABILITY, GENDER VIOLENCE AND GENDER INEQUALITY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter Two analysed Magona's *Beauty's Gift*, Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* and Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. The discussion was on women's experience of HIV and AIDS as an illness. The chapter further discussed the representation of stigma, xenophobia and discrimination in all three of the mentioned novels. Magona's story actively seeks to cultivate new structures of commitment and new theoretical countermeasures, through which the different susceptibilities of the post-apartheid society could suitably be recognised and realised. Mpe's narrative challenges the South African society to address the humiliation, and suppression that surround the epidemic. Lastly, the chapter examined Lutanga Shaba's engagement with shame and how women deal with stigma in the framework of HIV and AIDS. She underscores some societal aspects that position women in circumstances of victimhood.

This chapter focuses on three novels, namely: *Uncertainty of Hope*, *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* and *Beauty's Gift*. Through the afore-mentioned texts, the chapter analyses the fictional representation of African black women's traditions. The chapter also focuses on a dialogue of how women in the cultural perspective negotiate gender violence and gender inequality. Additionally, I analyse women's vulnerability, and I argue that socio-economic factors cause women to be disproportionately prone to the pandemic of HIV and AIDS. As previously noted, Ogunyemi explains that a womanist will recognise black women's contribution to society, remarking that several black women authors' inscription in English have explicably not aligned themselves with radical white feminists, noting that where a white female author might be a feminist, a black female novelist is probably a womanist (1985: 64). I have stated that essentially, the same can be thought of Tagwira, Shaba and Magona, in this study. Their apprehensions in the stories under examination connect to a realisation of gender and traditional matters.

3.2 Culture and Tradition

3.2.1 Negotiating HIV and AIDS: The Position of Women in the Cultural

Context: *The Uncertainty of Hope*

African women activists assert that it is of essence to handle gender justice as a critical issue. Gender practices influence men's and women's cultural dialogues and their feelings (Boersema 2013). By definition, the African woman is by and large an active participant in a brutal and male-dominated society. She is a victim of her own culture. *The Uncertainty of Hope* portrays the social and cultural difficulties faced by many Zimbabwean women, especially those living in the city. Life is difficult and complex, and indeed traumatic. The novel's protagonist, Onai, lives in a high-density area of Harare. She is subjected to a range of Zimbabwean patriarchal pressures. Sultana (2011) defines patriarchy by stating that it is the chief impediment to women's growth and progression. She explains:

Despite differences in levels of domination the broad principles remain the same, i.e. men are in control. The nature of this control may differ. So, it is necessary to understand the system, which keeps women dominated and subordinate, and to unravel its workings in order to work for women's development in a systematic way. In the modern world where women go ahead by their merit, patriarchy therefore creates obstacles for women to go forward in society. Because patriarchal institutions and social relations are responsible for the inferior or secondary status of women, patriarchal society gives absolute priority to men and to some extent limits women's human rights. (2011: 1)

In the perspective of Zimbabwe and the HIV and AIDS epidemic, Tagwira's narrative suggests that the creation of women's identities is intensely ingrained in the patriarchal and social views of the cultures in which they reside. Consequently, literary texts open up imaginary spaces where novelists can expose the persistence of patriarchy; concurrently, they can resist and oppose prevalent masculine views by postulating alternative, less repressive understandings of women and their proficiencies in societies (Gqoba 2015: 24). In most of the African societies, women are anticipated to abide by the set regulations and rules, traditions and values of their community, as

seen in Buchi Emecheta's (2006) *The Slave Girl*. Remi Akujobi (2006) opines that the African tradition suppresses its women. She makes the following remarks in this respect.

It is the tradition that says that a woman must not own anything for herself and in the case of the man's death, the woman is not expected to touch or eat anything that belongs to the man. The woman must not even contest the injustice done to her because it is a taboo to do so, such a tradition eternally condemns the woman. She is condemned to a life of squalor. (Akujobi 2006: 7)

The above situation resonates with the novel, *The Uncertainty of Hope*. Tagwira puts into perspective the culture that looks down on women. It is women's vulnerability that prompts them to become victims and thus find themselves unknowingly trapped into negotiating with the scourge of HIV and AIDS menace which they know little about. These women are compelled to remain in toxic marriages simply because their culture dictates it. In the story, Ma Musara fits the requirements of a traditional woman. She cannot imagine any other means to become liberated and attain the status of a mother, as there are no other possibilities presented to her. The novel's narrator further notes that "Ma Musara's union with Onai's late dad had been wearisome, but she remained for the sake of her children and since marriage was something that one could not just get away from. When you get in you stay" (Tagwira 2006: 7). Ma Musara is not alone, there is much to deliberate with herself. She reflects on her offspring and the social position that her matrimonial union offers. This is one example of a bad culture that entraps women in violent relationships or marriages. Thus, the absence of choice for women in *The Uncertainty of Hope* is visible in the representation of the marriage institution. The motive for her determination, her children, makes a daring declaration with regard to the fate and destiny of women in Zimbabwe.

The polarised nature of women in *The Uncertainty of Hope* is captured through the story of Onai and Ma Musara. Ezra Chitando (2004) scrutinises the biblical features of a wife of a virtuous charisma:

10 A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.

11 Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value.

12 She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.

13 She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands.

14 She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar.

15 She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family
and portions for her female servants.

16 She considers a field and buys it;
out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.

17 She sets about her work vigorously;
her arms are strong for her tasks.

18 She sees that her trading is profitable,
and her lamp does not go out at night.

19 In her hand she holds the distaff
and grasps the spindle with her fingers.

20 She opens her arms to the poor
and extends her hands to the needy.

21 When it snows, she has no fear for her household;
for all of them are clothed in scarlet.

22 She makes coverings for her bed;
she is clothed in fine linen and purple.

23 Her husband is respected at the city gate,
where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.

24 She makes linen garments and sells them,
and supplies the merchants with sashes.

25 She is clothed with strength and dignity;
she can laugh at the days to come.

26 She speaks with wisdom,
and faithful instruction is on her tongue.

27 She watches over the affairs of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.

28 Her children arise and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:

29 “Many women do noble things,
but you surpass them all.”

30 Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

31 Honor her for all that her hands have done,
and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

Proverbs 31:10-31 Holy Bible New International Version (HBNIV)

Chitando argues that the falsification of this sacred reading in matrimonies establishes masculine ideals which render women hopeless in the marriage bed (2004). In spite of the submissiveness of

the women and their conformism with cultural concepts of African womanhood and Christianity, *The Uncertainty of Hope* notes that “they still remain vulnerable to their men” (Tagwira 2006: 7). Lois Tyson’s (2006) *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide* reflects on the significance of women in the society. She argues that:

While biology determines our sex (male or female), culture determines our gender (masculine or feminine). That is, for most English-speaking feminists, the word gender refers not to our anatomy but to our behavior as socially programmed men and women. I behave “like a woman” (for example, submissively) not because it is natural for me to do so but because I was taught to do so. In fact, all the traits we associate with masculine and feminine behavior are learned, not inborn. (2006: 92)

In a patriarchal culture the victors are men – they are insensitive, obstinate, predatory and lustful, and the victims are women – who are marked by virtuousness, candid naivety, openness and suffering. This reiterates the theme of women’s vulnerability. Tagwirei (2014: 219) argues that the prevalent dialogues of blame in terms of HIV and AIDS are fashioned by a binary construction which is not only oppositional but also classified. These discourses function in a polemic which positions alleged victors against perceived victims. In the story, Ma Musara’s optimal choice to endure might be understood in the framework of the remark that an African woman will acknowledge that, besides her awareness of sexual matters, she ought to integrate political, cultural, socio-economic, and national reflections into her standpoint (Ogunyemi 1985: 64). Tagwira’s narrative notes that despite the violence and beating that womenfolk like Ma Musara suffer at the hands of men, they nonetheless desire ties with their male counterpart. Regardless of all the resentment and treachery, both the gender characters of *The Uncertainty of Hope* cannot live separately from one another, as each sex encompasses the vital half that renders an individual complete.

There is a formidable power of African womanism viewpoint at this point. Onai’s mother represents African women who promote gender violence and gender inequality. In her marriage to Onai’s father, despite the abuse that she experienced in her marriage, the narrator argues that she remained and felt exceptionally pleased that “she was able to do so for her children. Ma Musara has internalised oppression and perpetuated it” (Tagwira 2006: 7). According to her, this was the

spirit of a real African woman. Tagwira's portrayal of Onai's mother elicits feelings of pity and fear. She foregrounds these discrepancies in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, demonstrating her worry over the subjugation of womenfolk in the Zimbabwe at the time the text was written. Tyson (2006) contends that:

Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive. These gender roles have been used very successfully to justify inequities, which still occur today, such as excluding women from equal access to leadership and decision-making positions (in the family as well as in politics, academia, and the corporate world), paying men higher wages than women for doing the same job (if women are even able to obtain the job), and convincing women that they are not fit for careers in such areas as mathematics and engineering. Many people today believe such inequities are a thing of the past because antidiscriminatory laws have been passed, such as the law that guarantees women equal pay for equal work. (2006: 85)

Tyson's definition of women's gender roles and tradition is like Ogunyemi's description, that women have a fundamental commitment of bringing up children. Ironically, this tone reflects the anguish brought about by politics of culture. She further remarks that it is right that the father's obligation is to offer support, security and protection. However, Ogunyemi stresses that it is the mother who has the child under her sustained and exhaustive nursing, constructs its personality and ensures that her children align to social and community customs. If the child misbehaves and becomes unsuccessful, it is the mother who is usually deemed to have failed (Ogunyemi, 1985: 7).

Tamale (2008: 51) notes that the falsification of African sexuality particularly for women during the epoch of colonialism and into the postcolonial period led to what she terms as prospects of subservience and subjugation of women. A reading of Ma Musara's character in interpretation of Tyson, Ogunyemi and Tamale's analysis demonstrates the black African woman's awareness and action in trading with sexual cruelty. Onai's plight is the unspoken plight of women in Zimbabwe. Women have been socialised by their cultural norms to believe that endurance in abusive marriages is a yardstick for successful unions. This fact resonates with Onai's situation. The narrator points out that Onai had heeded thoughtfully, admitting that if her mother had abandoned her father, she

could have ended up living on the street with her two young brothers, diminished to a life of pleading and petty criminality (Tagwira 2006: 7). Cultural and social cruelty consequently contextualise brutality to bestow it meaning. In this issue, I connect cultural brutality, for example, to the tolerance of spouse battery.

As a matter of fact, in this narration, the actual calamity is not Onai's mistreatment in separation, but somewhat the male-controlled constructs that tolerate it, and her intimate incorporation of her setback that leaves her the "second class". Onai adopts Ma Musara's philosophy by "benchmarking" her situation with that of her mother. Consequently, Onai's mother instils patriarchal values in her daughter, arguing that no woman can have a decent family deprived of a "man by her side" (Tagwira 2006: 7). Consequently, this causes Onai to be subconsciously excluded from the emancipatory discourse of modernism. This demonstrates Tagwira's apprehension with the predicament of womenfolk where women are disregarded and polarised contrary to men.

Ma Musara is clearly a proponent of traditional values. She expresses customary beliefs regarding power and gendered restrictions by remarking that the women characters are useless, and the most powerful ones are subject to "home-wrecking". Tyson (2006) examines the status of women who are accustomed to imagine that men are the redeemers and champions, remarking that the practice of constructing a record of women is nonetheless in progress and will persist for a moment. She notes:

I call myself a patriarchal woman because I was socially programmed, as are most women and men, not to see the ways in which women are oppressed by traditional gender roles. I say that I'm recovering because I learned to recognise and resist that programming. For me, such recognition and resistance will always require effort—I'm recovering rather than recovered—not just because I internalized patriarchal programming years ago but because that program continues to assert itself in my world: in movies, television shows, books, magazines, and advertisements as well as in the attitudes of salespeople who think I can't learn to operate a simple machine, repair technicians who assume I won't know if they've done a shoddy job, and male drivers who believe I'm flattered by sexual offers shouted from passing cars (or, worse, who don't give a moment's thought to how I might feel or, worse yet, who hope I feel intimidated so that they can feel powerful). (Tyson 2006: 86)

The novel portrays an oppressive power disjuncture between Onai and her husband Gari, as Gari's financial responsibility does not go beyond paying the council rates (Tagwira 2006: 33). Although he is a section manager at Cola Drinks plant earning reasonably good money, his wife does not know how much he earns. He is a tyrannical patriarch whose money is only reserved for alcohol and other women (33). Tagwira links autocracy and masculinity in the family setup. The crucial feature connecting all of these destructive traditions is a superior belief of being male, a rejection to acknowledge that women are the other half in the family. It is evident that in Gari's society women do not matter. When Onai dares to ask about Gari's salary she is threatened with a divorce. Despite all of this, Onai is accommodative to Gari. She strives to support the unification of the family, whilst employing new approaches for survival. In resonance of Onai's cultural life, Tamale (2004) acknowledges domesticity in the perspective of an African feminist arguing that domesticity as a philosophy is culturally, customarily and traditionally fashioned and intimately connected.

Domesticity is linked to a home that establishes familiarity and allocates gender responsibilities. Restricted to procreation, child-nurturing and household tasks, women in customary backgrounds dare not cross established border lines. It is this situation that has caused young women, for instance the novel's Dr Emily Sibanda, to stand up and challenge patriarchy and domestic violence. Gqola (2015) contends:

We are not speaking these truths enough, and until we are able to address them as well as the long histories we come from, approach them with imaginative new ways to break the patterns, we will continue to live with the scourge of gender-based violence. (2015: 67)

Dr Emily Sibanda urges Onai to report domestic violence anytime she experiences it:

“Help is available for people in situations like yours,” she said kindly and laid a warm hand on Onai's stiff shoulder [...] She tried again a little more forcefully. “I don't know what you are afraid of, but I can refer you to an excellent support group with whom I work. They will take care of you and help you through.” (Tagwira 2006: 44)

Support groups bring together people facing similar issues, whether relationship issues or major life changes, providing a sense of empowerment and control. It is in the support group that Dr

Emily Sibanda believes that women like Onai would assist in conquering patriarchal structures in their families. Esther Smith discusses the significant impact of women taking on the task of helping one another. She voices interest to the intricate collection of views in African narratives, noting that it signifies intricate truths, but if an impression merits a thousand expressions, the display of a thousand women in the massive scenery of African literature projects a compelling image. These imageries display an intensity of determination for women more than equal to the duties they assign themselves (Tagwira 1986: 42).

For this reason, Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* offers a template for change to women. But Onai is in denial; she emphatically denies that there is any sort of abuse in her home. She internalises the dogmas of her tyrannical husband, preventing controversial subjects or the secret of the hostility that she endures, and keeping silence to herself to escape punishment. The narrator notes that Onai did not aspire to be intimidated into disclosing matters which had the ability to damage her matrimony as she would not be capable to endure the embarrassment of being a divorcee (Tagwira 2006: 44). In the African context, divorce holds a symbolic value of disgrace, shame and dishonour. That is why women in the same predicament as Onai's opt to suffer in silence rather than come out of abusive marriages.

The novel further explores the impact of African traditions with reference to the plight of women battling with HIV and AIDS. Luckson Mashiri (2013) in "Conceptualisation of Gender Based Violence in Zimbabwe" examines how the culture of masculinity has heightened the susceptibility of women in the framework of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. He emphasises that masculine ideals and customs have ensured that the complaints by women stay silenced and suppressed. He states:

The Shona and Ndebele Culture, which are predominant in Zimbabwe, condone multiple sex partners for men, a practice that increases the risk for women to contract HIV. Unequal power relations within marriage have compromised women's ability to negotiate for safer sexual practices whilst social and cultural norms have pronounced silence and submissiveness and conformity for women in sexual relations. As a result, decisions on how and when to have sex therefore remain exclusively for men. Through this, women are subjected to psychological abuse as they cannot say no to sex when they feel like not having it or when they are going through their menstrual period. (Mashiri 2013: 98)

The Shona culture where Tagwira hails from is an example of a culture that tolerates bigamy. By virtue of his gender and the indigenous value systems, Gari, Onai's husband, has a secret affair with Gloria. It is within the realm of his Shona culture that Gari's craving for sex is eventually applied. He is in an informal relationship commonly known as "small houses". The advent of "small houses" renders married women like Onai vulnerable. In the conversation between Silas and Gari we observe male complicity in situations which entrench patriarchal power:

Silas looked at Gari and smiled. He spoke with sudden brightness, "You are right. Let's wait and see what will happen." He hit Gari playfully on the back and asked with a mischievous glint in his eyes, "ko small house yakadii?" "How is the new missis?" The thinking about Gloria lifted Gari's spirit considerably. Small houses, the new euphemism for mistresses, were the best thing to happen to a man. Spending some time with Gloria was guaranteed pure bliss because Onai was not at home. (Tagwira 2006: 37)

One of the significant aspects of the above excerpt is the way masculinity and sexuality is expressed and represented. As it turns out, the ideology of sexuality and masculinity are patriarchally organised along the lines of gendered domination. This concept of control is seen as bestowing men with the authority to decide on sexual matters, to the degree that they expose themselves and their spouses to HIV by having several sexual partners, while women are considered too disempowered to challenge men's control (Baylies & Bujra 2000). African social norms and beliefs have been fashioned in favour of men. Tendayi Westerhof (2009) clarifies that African societies grant men so much freedom, remarking that "small houses" are a tolerable component of the urban ethos and bigamous associations are nonetheless popular in the countryside.

"Small houses" are key elements in the explosive spread of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. By definition, "small houses" is modern-day polygamy. On the part of men, it translates to lack of satisfaction with one wife and for women in secondary relationships, it is based on economic need. Chiroro *et al.* (2002) offer insightful information noting that having numerous sexual affiliates, participating in unplanned sex minus protection, sexual intimidation and sexual manipulation of women are simply explicit expressions of the internalised masculine being that is motivated by the search for sexual fulfillment by males from women in a variation of circumstances. (2002: 24)

Through an analysis of the stories in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, this sub-section of the thesis invites the reader to query whether masculine celebrations of African ethos are workable in the era of HIV and AIDS. Mungwini (2008) in his urge for a redemptive methodology, invites women to explore complementary attributes. He notes that AIDS compels women and everybody to critically imagine and perhaps begin probing the socially fashioned and endorsed structure of the ultimate Shona woman. I contend that the positions acted by both genders in Tagwira's society are biased. Gari's issue is embedded in a gendered traditional setting, the impact of which stretches to the current textual presence.

When Gari plans to bring Gloria in as a second wife, the novel explains that "traditionally, this would seem acceptable and no one would criticise Gari. In fact, with a second wife as young as Gloria, he would be the envy of a lot of men" (Tagwira 2006: 218). Chitando (2011) notes that the concept of a "small house" is intimately linked to the notion of men having voracious sexual desires that necessitate them to have several sexual associates. She notes that obtaining a "small house" is viewed as an emblem of respect and integrity, and an affirmation that one is a "brave man". Even males who are battling monetarily, for instance Gari, endeavour to have a "small house" (Chitando 2011: 150).

"Small house" is a threat to women in marriage because it is in this institution that women get infected with HIV and AIDS by their husbands. It is of vital importance to take cognisance of the deep social nature of the Zimbabwean society and how the metaphor of "small house" predispositions men to have the obligation to normalise the sexual behaviours of their wives without regulating their own sexual behaviours. The notion of "small house" therefore presents a challenging discourse of gender, health and sexuality which should be cross-examined and re-evaluated within the cultural and social spaces.

McFadden (1992) points out that Colonial discourse projects sexuality as savage, and therefore it is associated with Africans. In Western philosophy therefore, African sexuality is somewhat reducible to pathology, with the allegations that African women convey their identities in heterosexual relationships from a compromised standpoint (1992: 164). Male classifications of a woman's value are exposed in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. Tagwira uses Gari as an indicative case of the unrestrained use of masculine force. The above results in Onai lacking bargaining power,

and thus being unable to making a stand regarding Gari's love affair. This is an indication of the peripheral position of women in the Shona culture. Ultimately, as the novel's title suggests, *The Uncertainty of Hope*, disillusioned women like Onai in the cultural context bear the burden of the HIV and AIDS scourge. Attree (2010a) notes that the extensive spread of HIV and AIDS and the soaring infection rates amongst women in South Africa and Zimbabwe have meant that concepts and views of the infection have habitually focused on womenfolk and female sexuality. She observes: "Attempts to assert control over one's life as a woman, by limiting fertility, for example, has led to further stigmatisation, culminating in one of the major consequences of the AIDS pandemic for female sexuality" (Attree 2010a: 66). Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* seeks to fight the nature of cultural practices that victimise the womenfolk and render them defenseless against the scourge of HIV.

Further into the narrative, Tagwira's depiction of Chipo points out misconceptions about HIV and AIDS. Upon Gari's death, Onai turns to Chipo, Gari's sister, expecting assistance from her as a sister-in-law. However, Chipo is scornful and harsh. She accuses Onai of killing Gari through witchcraft. It is obvious that Gari is a reckless man with several mistresses besides his wife, Onai. His girlfriends, Sheila and Gloria, both die of AIDS. Upon his death, Chipo dares Onai, "'One day you will tell me what you did to the son of my mother. How can a man vomit blood? [...]' Chipo's words suggest that Onai has murdered Gari using witchcraft" (2006: 240). This translates to othering, and, for Onai, cultural marginality and societal exclusion. Adam Ashforth (2012) observes that an illness or complicated symptoms matched to a reading within the wizardry hypothesis than AIDS would be difficult to imagine. He explains the indicators of HIV- diarrhea, tuberculosis, and thinning - are the typical signs of poisoning via sorcery. Therefore, where individuals acknowledge that AIDS is instigated by a sexually communicable virus, fears of wizardry could be maintained as possible justifications for the fundamental cause following the transmission.

Horne (2010) conveys a similar perspective of the phenomenon of witchcraft in the discourse of HIV and AIDS infection. She comprehensively explains that endorsing illness and fatality to the wickedness of others who employ mystical powers to take on vengeance is an apparent tactic of displacement. She further notes that such views are linked to compelling psychological rationales. The belief in black magic as the root cause of AIDS holds even if a person is well-educated about

HIV-infection and recognises that there is an instantaneous bodily cause of infection of the virus. The above view is endorsed by Ngcobo (2007) who asserts that the allegation concerning witchcraft is a popular strategy intended to trigger the women's social devaluation. He further argues that this strategy is habitually used against a robust woman when the actual objective is to demean her socially or to yet have her tangibly detached from her in-laws and send her back to her kin.

Tagwira argues that the notion that AIDS is instigated by HIV, and that it is obtained mostly via sexual interaction, gives a leeway for the minimum likelihood that African traditional sorcery is the root cause. It is through the lens of culture and tradition that these deeply rooted cultural beliefs cause characters like Chipo in the novel to perpetuate further the dissemination of HIV.

In Onai's case, the family fails to be a compassionate shelter. The narrator details the following:

After a considerable silence, she launched into a lengthy speech, "you must have done something to make my brother throw you out. Frankly speaking, I am not surprised. Things get around, you know. I heard that our brother vomited blood before he died. That was very disturbing. I also heard something about the second wife he had decided to take because he was not happy with you. His death was very convenient for you, wasn't it?" Onai looked at her sister in-law, dazed. She had at least expected a word of sympathy, not another accusation about Gari's death. (Tagwira 2006: 255-256)

Chipo's hatred, her narcissism and lack of respect make her a startling domestic tyrant to other women. Her assault on Onai is an emotional and mental shock. It does not provide any key answers to Onai's concerns. The violence also contests the sistership that is anticipated from womenfolk. In fact, it glues the perception of nasty associations by matrimony in its assessment of women's involvement in the misery of other womenfolk. Ngcobo (2007) validates this viewpoint by noting that the main flaw of this daunting task of motherhood is that women can merely exert it from outside, for they stay side-lined at their new-found spouse's homes. At her in-laws, she does not step in to achieve autonomy or gain a position of significance, instead, she is downgraded to a perpetual condition of dependency and alienation.

Consequently, from a traditional viewpoint, anyone is bound to perceive marriage as a threat, because the woman will in no way fit into the new home. The guidance that Onai gets from her mother is not helpful either. She instructs her daughter never to confront her spouse's relatives, even after Toro takes Gari's bank card and chases her sister-in-law away with her babies. She claims that a woman ought to be docile and agree to any manner of ill-treatment since she deems that men should not ever be questioned. According to an African feminist interpretation, whilst Onai's mother thinks that she is assisting Onai, she is in reality aiding in the persecution of her own child by means of the male-controlled structures.

Ultimately, Tagwira, through this narrative, suggests the necessity for women to assist each other in the challenge against repressive male-controlled inclinations. She echoes Florence Stratton's (1994) philosophy that adopts women inclusive of women's emancipation and freedom, noting that modern-day African literature ought to introduce a fictional resolution approach that counters partialities in the masculine literary norm, comprising the predisposition to categorise women with tradition and to solve narrative stiffness with topics as redemption through nuptial and/or motherhood or through deportation to the village. Stratton argues that such stories are counteractive to the representation of women which male authors valorise, for it is the revolutionary not the traditional friend or sister, the individual who opposes male-controlled power, who is rewarded in the story.

Tagwira gives tribute to the determination of persistence, to the influence of women and the prospect of social transformation. It is in the same cultural context that the novel features Katy's husband, John. The narrator notes that he used to sleep with prostitutes prior to the arrival of AIDS. And in his thinking, that rendered him superior to most people (Tagwira 2006: 243). Tagwira reveals issues that affect women's sexual decision making when Katy encounters challenges due to her culture, as she is afraid to ask her husband to use condoms within their marriage because it is a taboo. According to Katy, this would imply a breach of trust (244). The above issue is effectively articulated in Jenny Robson and Nomthandazo Zondo's (2004) short story "Baba's Gifts". In this narrative, the protagonist is Ma Ndlovu, a lady who anticipates the arrival of her long-missing mineworker-spouse, Baba. The reason for her nervousness is her understanding that she has to make her husband put on a condom when they have sex together. Ma Ndlovu has been in a group of women trained at the nearby health centre by Nurse Margaret who has counselled

them explicitly regarding the risks of HIV and AIDS and displayed what to do to avert infection. While the children anticipate their dad's arrival with enthusiasm, knowing that he will bring them gifts from the city, Ma Ndlovu fears to talk to her husband, as the nurse had directed her. Ma Ndlovu waits for bedtime and produces a condom. Her husband's reaction is:

“Nurse Margaret! Why do you listen to Nurse Margaret? She is an ugly woman who will never be married. So now she tries to destroy the marriages of other women. You throw that nonsense away, Ma Ndlovu. And then you join me here in bed”. And even though he is laughing, Ma Ndlovu knows she must do what he instructs, no matter what Nurse Margaret has explained. Dlamini has turned the lamp off now. In the darkness, without her small square package of protection, Ma Ndlovu gets into bed beside her husband [...] He still smells of the city, despite his bath. (Robson & Zondo 2004: 98-102)

The above narrative demonstrates that knowledge and information are impractical in such a circumstance. Women like Ma Ndlovu in “Baba's Gift” and Katy in *The Uncertainty of Hope* have been socialised never to defy masculine power.

A vital aspect of this research, which is acquired in the above assertion, is the necessity for agency and liberation. It also highlights the crucial position of writers and other honoured African women who can articulate apprehensions in the place of associate women who are incapable of speaking for themselves. Attree (2010a) elucidates the importance of fictional representation of HIV and AIDS by noting that when the connected cultural and social inferences of contamination with HIV are reflected, imaginary depictions contribute meaningfully to our understanding of the influence of HIV and AIDS on individuals and societies and offer a considerable and desirable foundation for ‘humanising’ a pandemic that is unthinkable statistically.

Moving more deeply into Attree's idea, Tagwira's novel notes that women should protect themselves from the AIDS virus. She places emphasis on cultural norms surrounding the use of condoms and their acceptability within sexual relationships. As a woman, Katy yearns to discuss with Onai issues related to HIV and AIDS, but despite their closeness she confesses that they do not confide in each other about what goes on in the bedroom with their spouses. Katy points out that sexuality is an unmentionable subject. She sadly acknowledges that this lack of transparency

does more harm than good, especially where communicable diseases, like AIDS, are concerned (2006: 244). Here, Tagwira provides her readers with a thought-provoking voice on multifaceted, taboo issues in the society. She declares that culture is a big component of the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Consequently, Tagwira puts into perspective relatives who are deeply rooted in their cultural norms by giving advice on marital life and home management. Katy's father's sister, Tete, explains to Katy upon getting married to admit that men have desires that will not be satisfied by a single woman, arguing that men have animalistic cravings which force them to look for other women (2006: 244). The above references reflect the gross emotional torture inflicted on women by their culture. Notably, Katy plans to do an HIV examination, arguing that all women are at risk (244).

Wife inheritance is another affliction that has crippled the African society. This is a cultural practice where a widow is inherited by relatives of her late husband, most often his brother. This topic is similarly observed in the movie *Neria*, edited and directed by Tsitsi Dangarembga (1993), and brought to life in song by the Zimbabwean melodic genius, Oliver Mtukudzi, which portrays the difficulties that widows in Zimbabwe encounter. Consequently, some African men like Toro in *The Uncertainty of Hope* misuse masculine power and participate in property-seizing. Upon Gari's death, his family unanimously agrees that Gari's brother, Toro, will take over Onai and the children. The narrator notes:

Turning to Onai, he went on, "that is what we have decided, Mai Ruva, muroora. Everything else will be resolved next year, including mhaka. We have all agreed that we want to keep you in the family." Onai was dismayed by the murmurs of agreement that accompanied his words. She could already see that she would never be free. Toro's lecherous eyes swept over her, a suspicious half-smile on his lips [...] "Maiguru, now that my brother is buried, we need to plan how we are going to live [...] I cannot baulk my responsibility, so I will move in here, with my wife and children, and we can all live together as one big family. I cannot run two separate homes in this difficult time." (2006: 245-246)

The swift spread of HIV and AIDS in the African continent is ascribed to the presence of harmful traditional measures. These practices consist of widow cleansing and wife inheritance. McFadden (1992) notes that ever since the inception of patriarchy, the social institutions, via ceremonial and ritual observance have offered the socio-cultural pretext within which women have been bartered to men on grounds of labour and sexual services. The presence of compulsory marriages, prearranged marriages, teen marriages, and the like, which is observed in essentially all African communities, signify to this structure of sexual enslavement (1992: 189-190).

The Uncertainty of Hope reveals that most rituals seem to favour men and position women, whose place is worsened by cultural practices of widow inheritance after the passing of the husband. Widow inheritance plays a pivotal part in the dissemination of HIV and AIDS. This narrative is rooted in two cultural worlds as Tagwira portrays women, for instance Toro's wife, Shungu, and Onai to be against this barbaric practice. Onai reassures Shungu that she is not interested in being inherited (2006: 245). Creatively, through imaginary voices, it is of importance to react to destructive traditional approaches in a bid to halt the rise of HIV and AIDS. The call for any single woman to be in control of her life is a call out for women to discard patriarchy, and the aggression which it relates to. Margie Oxford (2013) notes that violence is imbued with anguish, disgrace and anxiety, beliefs that suppress the victim, constraining the victim's potential to that of the offender with an intolerable intimacy.

Similar views are expressed by Arndt (2002) through which, though admitting the lasting influence of the history of racism and slavery in the US, she does not absolve black patriarchy from the culture of violence against women. In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Onai is imprisoned in a cruel marriage because of the philosophy of protecting motherhood inspired to her by her mother. Consequently, Onai is ready to hit back and defend herself. This is a perfect example of women fighting a negative cultural practice that infringes on their rights as women. However, she is aware of the consequences of not blindly following her culture, which is why when Toro asks her for her husband's bank card, she does not fight back but rather takes it from her handbag with ease and hands it over to him. Onai displays survival in the face of turmoil when her brother-in-law Toro confronts her that he is the one with the death certificate of his brother and that she should never dare to fetch any money at the late Gari's workplace. The narrator notes the following:

Onai nodded silently, resigned to this sudden turn of events. She knew that there was no way Toro would spare any money for the children when he was throwing them out of the only home they'd ever known. She had lost everything. Although Gari had paid a full bride price, their marriage had never been registered [...] The Moyo family had made it clear that as a woman, a widow, she had no rights to take any independent initiative. (Tagwira 2006: 248)

Onai's secondary position as the "second sex" is apparent in the story. Her life is characterised by suffering and subjugation. She experiences negative encounters with the Moyo family as she is not recognised as the next of kin. She does not have a marriage certificate. The only security she has is her children. She becomes extremely vulnerable upon her husband's death. Her life and those of her three children are turned into a living hell, as Katy agrees that losing a husband and a home is hard (250). She is subdued and overwhelmed by her husband's kin because she opposes their ideas of being inherited by Shungu, her brother-in-law. Regarding the position of widows in Nigeria, Justina Damap (2007) details that in many African societies, families make every attempt to absolve the residence the moment the husband passes away. The widow is left with nothing except pots and pans. Bank valuables are snatched away with no discussion with the bereaved wife. This takes place under the pretext that this is our tradition (2007: 32). Culture is therefore perceived as complicit in this state of affairs (Tagwirei 2014: 218).

Tagwira identifies her character, Onai, with Damap's portrayal of the encounters of bereaved wives in Nigeria. Her predicament resonates with many widowed women in Zimbabwe and Africa at large. This intensifies their susceptibility to HIV and AIDS as the women are left to look for alternative means of survival. Lerner (1986) examines the bearing of the undervalued women in her discourse on patriarchy. She notes that women have over time undergone the experience of community and self, shared and understood it, along with one another. However, settling in a place where they are degraded, their familiarity holds the disgrace of irrelevance. Consequently, they have learnt to distrust and degrade their personal experience (1986: 4). Lerner's examination echoes Onai's disillusionment.

Kate Millett's (1977) *Sexual Politics* illuminates the consequences of living in a patriarchal society with stereotypical views about women. She contends that several global traditions are masculine

in nature, with the family being a representation of patriarchy in the community. She notes that the subjugation of women is not merely financial, but rather emotional and psychological repression. Millett further demonstrates that patriarchy works like a charm. From infancy each female baby is meticulously trained that she is to be incapable of every single realm of meaningful social pursuit during her lifetime, hence she ought to adapt herself into a sexual entity (1977: 8).

It is obvious that Zimbabwean women have frequently been exposed to undesirable patriarchal structures. Onai's mother is depicted in the narrative as a patriarchal barrier to her daughter's quest for liberation from her in-laws. The narrator offers the following:

She probed gently, "My daughter, I know something terrible has happened. Why are you here so soon after the burial? It is not right for you to leave home just after your husband's burial. It shows lack of respect to your in-laws, and indeed to your dead husband. Have the Moyos finished all the rituals?" (Tagwira 2006: 258)

Home is deemed as an area of solace but also of horror. However, for Onai and her children, the concept of home is miserable. Rosemary Marangoly George (1999) underscores the vague description of the notion of home. The impression of home determines the distinction because it is placed on the concepts of exclusion and inclusion. George further highlights that the additions are justified in a learned feeling of a relationship that is stretched to individuals who are identified as sharing similar race, gender, blood, religion or class. She additionally notes that homes are a manifestation of psychological, material and geographical levels. These are spots that are distinguished by those without and within (1999: 6). George's concept of home is that it is a spot where an individual flees to; nonetheless, it is additionally a location one escapes from. This stresses the ambiguity of home. In the text, Onai and her children go through cultural isolation and individual segregation in their homeplace. To them, home is not a spot of solace, support and safety. Rather, it is a location of deprivation, devastation and vulnerability as Onai is deemed an outsider. Millett (1977) further asserts that it is a moment we recognise that the entire structure of female and male individuality is subjectively enforced by a societal conditioning which has held all the probable attributes of human character. She argues that we ought to start to understand and to reorient ourselves to imagine that intellect and adoration for life are human virtues (1977: 8).

Millett offers a valuable theoretical connotation of patriarchy. Her crucial remark that patriarchy's main foundation is the family, it is a connection of and mirror of the society at large; a masculine unit in a patriarchal entity, is relevant to Tagwira's representation of the Zimbabwean family. In the story, the pain of losing everything is evident as Toro wants to further take Gari's house and pension contribution, leaving Onai's family without anything. In another context but applicable to this one, Izumi Kaori's (2007) research on gender-based violence offers the following insightful information:

Women in Southern and East Africa have never enjoyed the same statutory rights to property as men, but under customary laws and practices they have had limited rights to use and benefit from property belonging to their male family members. For instance, while a widow had no formal inheritance rights, she could remain in her family homestead, and continue farming and grazing livestock after her husband's death for the remainder of her life, in her capacity as guardian of their children. Widows could also depend on the protection of their sons, once they grew up. But these practices have gradually been eroded, and increasing numbers of widows are facing evictions and property grabbing after their husbands die. (2007: 1)

Onai is portrayed as a victim of a weak customary culture. It is similar issues that makes Dr Emily Sibanda in the narrative acknowledge that nothing will change, as long as vulnerable women find themselves entirely dependent on abusive husbands. Arguing that "even where economic dependence is not an issue, cultural practices that glorify passivity and subservience to one's husband, despite personal suffering, will not help" (Tagwira 2006: 187). It could appear at the initial glimpse that her mistake is that she avoids obtaining an option to her predicament and stays with a family that offers nothing to help her, but there is no alternative. Instead, Onai fails to submit to patriarchy. She opts to protest against these forms, which points to a deeper awareness of how she can authenticate an autonomous identity.

Onai's revolution shoots from an intellect of profound bitterness over her dilemma, and her family associates. She does not concede loss, and her agitation centres on her ethical and moral bravery in taking on her culture that ridicules women. Onai is exemplified as an autonomous, forthright and resilient woman as she displays toughness and strength. Despite Onai's indefensible position,

it is notable at the onset that her enduring performance in the male-defined realm on her own conditions is apparent (Lerner 1975: 6). Displaced by her family, Onai is willing to move away from her matrimonial home to a peaceful place, but swears to take up the case with the court. On the other hand, her mother Ma Musara believes that the approach that her daughter wants to take will have negative repercussions. She vehemently objects, arguing, “That is not the proper way of solving such issues. That she will create bad feelings between her children and their relatives. And that they will be outcasts from the Moyo clan” (Tagwira 2006: 258-259).

The word “outcast” emphasises the aftermath of the experiences of women after losing their spouses to HIV and AIDS. Contrary to the author’s depiction of Onai, Tagwira portrays a powerful condemnation of women trapped in negative cultures and traditions through Steve Makoni’s song “Handiende”. In this song, an abused woman vows not to leave her marriage because of her children. Such cultural belief systems end in the rejection of women’s freedom and safety, leading to a catastrophic end. It is on the same note that Faith, one of the characters in the novel, argues that “cultural beliefs serve no purpose except to worsen the suffering of women and children” (Tagwira 2006: 303).

3.2.2 The Burden of Oppressive Culture: *Secrets of a Woman’s Soul*

The rampant spread of HIV and AIDS in southern Africa has been ascribed to the presence of negative traditional practices. These consist of widow cleansing, wife inheritance, “blesser” and “blessee” types of relationships (this is whereby rich old men have sexual relationships with young teenage girls and others). This section illustrates oppressive culture disclosed in the story through a discourse of sexual manipulation and coercion of girls and women. I offer an exhaustive analysis of how culture and tradition are used as instruments to oppress women in *Secrets of a Woman’s Soul*. This subsection also recognises patriarchal views and values which are disclosed in the text. Shaba exposes the male-controlled supremacy in traditional Zimbabwean cultures. In the novel, she uncovers the stifling and repressive nature of African philosophy on women, as they hopelessly struggle to pursue their hearts’ wishes in a culture burdened with skepticism and masculine prejudice. As Patricia McFadden notes it eloquently:

In many African communities such women, when they are older, are banished to isolated villages where they live as pariahs, inscribed with the status of exiles in their own societies, simply because the husband died; these are practices which make it possible for fathers to sexually violate and rape their daughters under the claim that they are preparing them for marriage and increasingly, because women and girls fall outside the civic protections of their societies, they are vulnerable to rape for purposes of curing HIV and AIDS and also to ritual murder. (2005: 189-190)

There is a relationship between literature and society. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* depict women who anticipate to break the stillness of isolated practices and to voice the unspeakable. Shaba's background influences her literary text. She explores her life history in literature to demand that society review risky cultural practices. It is a miserable, emotional narrative of contempt and unfulfilled hope. Shaba narrates the lives of two characters crippled by HIV and AIDS. She pursues answers from the historical destructive culture, while suggesting ways to forge ahead. She recounts the story of traditional limitations that place a load on women that weighs them down. It is the women who tolerate the force of patriarchy as everything appears to be tilted towards their discontentment. Beata opens the window into her tormented world of hopeless culture that seems to favour men through a sequence of her life experiences as a mother. The narrative echoes and joins with all the narratives that capture the fundamentals of sex, parenthood and womanhood. Such is the essence of motherhood that Shaba fascinatingly examines in her novel, as Linga sews on the pieces of clothes of her survival in a domain that gives little attention to the weeping of the weak and helpless. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* seeks to fight sexual difference. The story reveals the patriarchal dominance in Zimbabwean society. The narrator notes:

Daudi and Beata had their good times and their bad times. It turned out that Beata was not the first woman Daudi had married. He had two children by a woman who, when she heard that he was now cohabiting with another woman in the city, came with her children to stake her claim. The women had a fight. Both of them were sent away. The other woman was dispatched to her parental home where she had long since been banished and where she had come from. Beata was sent to Daudi's home to cool off. (Shaba 2006: 34)

In the above extract, cultural oppression is brought to light. It is of crucial importance to respond to destructive traditional practices in order to curb the spreading of HIV and AIDS. Daudi is portrayed as above the law although he is sexually and physically molesting the women in his society. Nevertheless, no one perceives it as exploitation. After some time, Beata hears that he still cohabits with another woman, and it is her chance to go and reclaim her entitlement. The narrator notes that even after marrying Beata “he never stopped looking at other women or taking them to bed” (34). Daudi is a cheat for he is adulterous and betrays his wife; still, he does not reflect on his behaviour as being wicked. Additionally, he deems his women as objects that he uses and rejects whenever he has the urge. In this context, women are rendered vulnerable as Daudi exploits his authority as a man to exonerate his behaviour. The author’s reference to Daudi’s sexual appetite emphasises the burden of oppressive culture in the novel. The narrator aptly comments that they wrestled, and Beata got battered and her attires thrown out of the door, when they were not happy with one another (34). The quotation above is visibly heart breaking as Shaba underscores how culture is used as a tool to subjugate women.

Another illustration of patriarchal exploitation is in the portrayal of Linga’s brothers, Zondwayo and Mayola. They are severely beaten by their father Daudi, and Beata resorts to taking them to live with their maternal grandmother in Malawi (22). Furthermore, patriarchal behaviour is evident when Daudi traditionally marries a younger woman whose age difference is visible (37). The above example underscores the patriarchal view that men hold the privilege, moral authority and power in society.

Still on the same note Shaba highlights how the Shona culture is oppressive towards women when Beata meets the local councillor to get assistance with the local municipality. The councillor takes it upon himself to verify her claim of destitution and arranges for Beata to get a job. He also offers Linga a job at his office as a ‘Person Friday’ (69). But all these come with a price of sexual exploitation. McFadden observes the following:

This for me is one of the greatest challenges we face as feminists and as Africans. We have to find ways of removing this impediment to women’s dignity and rights; an impediment which presents itself in the garb of culture and which has become institutionalized as ‘an authentic cultural system which is appropriate to African women’. Worst of all, it is

defended by certain anthropologists and ‘feminists’ like Greer (1999) who claim that there are some good things in it and African women should not throw out the baby with the bath water, so to speak. (2005: 68)

The depiction of men’s individual socialisation arises as a risk and impediment to women’s development. For instance, the councillor’s manipulation of authority results in him getting HIV. As the narrative notes, men’s self-centered quest for prompt satisfaction results in the quick dissemination of HIV and the high rise of the mortality rate. Shaba claims that some men are ill-armed to offer guidance. The councillor, Daudi, Simba, Zondwayo, Mayola and other men are not outstanding cases. Whatsoever, they are portrayed as signifying the contests of male guidance and leadership. Shaba notes that men have not engaged their communities and families to advanced heights. Conspicuously, they have hindered advancement by mishandling women and girls.

Within the boundaries modelled by the economy, tradition, politics and religious convictions, women strive to get along with their livelihood. Chandra Mohanty (1984) recognises the consistency and worth to Western feminist authors, but contends that understanding of the diverse backgrounds, history is critical noting that Western feminist scholarship will not evade the task of positioning itself and probing its role in such a worldwide political and economic background. To do any less would be to overlook the multifaceted interconnectedness between third and first world economies and the philosophical consequence of this on the lives of women in these nations (Mohanty 1984).

There is a cultural and social uniformity to the subjugation of females in that women transversely in most African traditions have customarily been placed as dependents, putting women together in their collective subjugation, and therefore rendering a feminist literary lens relevant. *The Uncertainty of Hope* contributes to the envisioning of womenfolk in Shona traditions, to demonstrate that in spite of patriarchal actions in Zimbabwean ethos, which is itself a miniature of African philosophy and ideals, women are able to shield the subjugation of fellow women. Linga succeeds in challenging patriarchy in several instances. She correspondingly manipulates men’s limitations, particularly around sexuality, to attain her anticipated objectives. She surpasses projections in an oppressively patriarchal Zimbabwe.

Shaba provides a social commentary on women's condition that is characterised by humiliation. In the narrative, she chronicles the story of Linga and her husband, Simba:

They both went for testing, and he was negative, and she was confirmed positive. They got tested again, with the same result. They were declared a discordant couple. [...] A year later, Simba told her that he had gone for a third and a fourth test at intervals of six months and was still negative. [...] Linga and Simba both tried to make it work, but the strain was to prove too much for both of them. They separated on Chiedza's first birthday and divorced a year later. (Shaba 2006: 89-90)

Simba's matrimony is characterised by turmoil. He fails to manage his marriage because his wife is HIV-positive.

Shaba's representation of Linga shows that Linga does not permit her position as a single parent living with HIV to coerce her dream. Linga's plights challenge the reader to consider the comments Shaba is making, not just about womenfolk, but correspondingly about the state of Zimbabwean ethos and culture at the period of narrating their stories. Anabel Alves (2017: 6) explains that women's literature is understood and taken as a progression of inspiring the controlling influences and generating oppositional deliberations so as to engender transformation.

Ultimately, Shaba presents Linga as an empowered and resilient African woman protagonist. She uses her literary fiction to critique and challenge the above notion. Lerner (1986) highlights that the parable that women are peripheral to the formation of civilisation and history has intensely affected the mindset of men and women. It has offered men a tilted and fundamentally flawed assessment of their position in the universe and human society. For women, as revealed in the circumstance of Simone de Beauvoir, history appeared for millennia to offer only undesirable teachings and no model for a substantial act of heroism, or redemptive example (Lerner 1986).

There is uniformity between what Shaba pursues to accomplish in life through Linga's empowerment and her women management training. She is a redeeming case through a substantial turn of boldness in trying to outline herself in a male-controlled climate. Conversely, Linga creates a position for herself in a culture that sidelines and rejects her because of her HIV status. Ultimately, Shaba has created another impressive female character like Linga who tries to look for

substitutes for her predicament, in spite of the odds being weighed against her, and this is her achievement. This is significant in the framework of African women evolving from the margin, into the middle arena. Linga is thus remarkable as she believes she does have alternatives and sets about trying to obtain these.

Shaba is therefore a radical advocate for the doctrines of feminism in Zimbabwean ethos, which are principles examined throughout this study. She levels criticism against the masculine constructions that suppress the women in the narrative. Shaba is a radical novelist because the predicaments of the women characters under discussion are presented in a woman-centred style. Lerner further argues:

To give the system of male dominance historicity and to assert that its functions and manifestations change over time is to break sharply with the handed-down tradition. This tradition has mystified patriarchy by making it a historic, eternal, invisible and unchanging task. But it is precisely due to changes in the social and educational opportunities available to women that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries large numbers of women finally became capable of critically evaluating the process by which we have helped to create the system and maintain it. We are only now able to conceptualize women's role in history and thereby to create a consciousness which can emancipate women. This consciousness can liberate men from the unwanted and undesired consequences of the system of male-dominance. (1986: 37)

Linga transforms the system by rejecting masculine oppression. This is seen in the narrative when she refuses to be subdued by her husband on grounds of her HIV status. This leads her to create her individual way in the world. Another key impact Shaba has yielded to the advancement of African writing, is her woman-centred standpoint that questions conventional portrayals of women.

3.3 Women's Vulnerability

3.3.1 Socio-economic Affliction: *The Uncertainty of Hope*

The HIV and AIDS plague is taking its fullest charge in the domestic realm and at societal level. The swift spread of HIV and AIDS in southern Africa is because of the social status of women in the society, especially their lack of control in negotiating sexual engagements and cultural perspectives to sex. Women's predisposition to HIV and AIDS occurs as a serious concern, as suggested by Leane Arckermann and Gerhard Klerk:

The degree to which women are able to control various aspects of their sexual lives is clearly a critical question for health promotion and the prevention of AIDS. It is evident that social factors such as the high rate of rape, the unfavourable economic position of women, and the inability to insist on condom usage make South African women unable to negotiate the timing of sex and the conditions under which it occurs. They are thus rendered powerless to protect themselves against HIV infection. (2001: 1)

The above presents a piercing analysis of socio-cultural structures of womanhood in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Tagwira (2006) brings to light the profound economic and social crisis in Zimbabwe that has a direct impact on the spread of the HIV pandemic. Turmen (2003), particularly writing from the perspective of HIV and AIDS, also points out the cultural and socio-economic aspects that place women in compromised situations:

HIV and poverty are inextricably linked. Poverty contributes to HIV and AIDS transmission and HIV and AIDS contributes to poverty. Women and girls are seriously affected both ways as they are among the poorest in society. Although women's economic situation has been improving, there are still significant inequalities between women and men, and there is evidence that these inequalities play a role in increasing vulnerability and exposure to HIV. (2003: 414)

Social and economic vulnerability is represented in the text through the characterisation of Melody, a college student who has an affiliation with Chanda, a married man of 45 years of age; as Faith argues, "he could be Melody's father's age" (Tagwira 2006: 79). Melody is not disturbed

with the reality that she is in a relationship with a married man; in fact, to her, it is a matter of survival. She argues that she would have contemplated prostitution were it not for Chanda. The narrator questions her motives, and offers the following explanation:

Had Melody also simply shackled herself to Chanda out of fear of aborting her degree programme, or did she really love him? Were they using each other? [...] The fragile strands of her thought were severed by Melody's voice, "he said he will leave his wife when the children are older. I know he is lying but it does not bother me. Right now, I am getting what I want. One day I will find a decent man to marry". (Tagwira 2006: 78-79)

Whatever manner, Melody is reliant on men. She argues that she has no other way than to vend herself in order to live. She declares that the economy is to blame for pushing her into a financial corner (80). Melody's life is characterised by subservience, subordination and dependency. The fact that she is pressurised into a transactional tie with Chanda mirrors the scope of the economic viciousness she has gone through; she does not enter willingly into the relationship but declares she is forced into it, noting that this is what she ought to do but not what she wants to (80). She is socialised into believing that disadvantaged women and girls have a right to be dependent on men for financial and social gains. As Melody states:

This is what I have to do, not what I want. For the first time since I came to varsity, I have not had to scrounge and get by on one meal a day or having you passing me your left-overs. For the first time, I have not had to worry about which 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 have not spent sleepless nights considering whether I should become a prostitute to finance my studies.' (Tagwira 2006: 80-81)

The above excerpt highlights how girls easily fall victim to the spread of HIV and AIDS, as what comes first before their health concerns are the financial benefits. This therefore brings to light how promiscuous men use women for their personal satisfaction irrespective of their age. This notion therefore puts girls like Melody under the risk of HIV infection. In a similar manner, Turmen highlights the fact that:

Young women tend to have older, more experienced partners who are more likely to have STIs from previous sexual activity. Moreover, girls and young women may willingly initiate relationships with older men to exchange sex for material benefit, especially if they are very poor. In a study in Malawi, two-thirds of sexually active young women reported having sex for money or gifts. (2003: 412)

The above passage draws attention to the biased socio-cultural belief system that strengthens patriarchal customs that negatively control women in society. Turmen supports the understanding that traditional and socio-economic structures place women in a challenging position:

The social and economic status and cultural expectations of both women and men can increase the risk of HIV infection. A woman's lower status can leave her more exposed to infection while men risk infection because of ideals of masculinity associated with risk-taking and sexual conquest. (2003: 412)

Melody epitomises the plight of girls in contemporary Zimbabwe. This points to the predicament in the state which touches the majority of Zimbabweans as a consequence of the resource shortages.

In circumstances where men are more authoritative than women, women become more susceptible to HIV. Some social norms render women defenseless to the plague of HIV and AIDS. For instance, *The Uncertainty of Hope* highlights the social marginalisation and oppression Onai is subjected to. Gari subjects himself to HIV infection. The text explains that Gloria, Gari's "small house", has no illusion about her own HIV status. Her former boyfriend had succumbed to an HIV-linked illness and it is just a question of time before the inevitable happens to her (Tagwira 2006: 39). Although Gari seeks pleasure from the "small house", Gloria on the other hand perceives the concept of "small house" as a sense of security and comfort. The narrator notes that "Gloria needs a gentleman to call her own, a man who would look after her when HIV lays its assertion upon her" (39). It is poverty that forces Gloria to get into such arrangements. However, as has been noted, Gari ultimately pays the price as he later dies of an AIDS related illness.

Tagwira's emphasis is on women who are in prostitution for livelihood. While these women carry on with their profession, they do so in the face of risks and numerous forms of aggression, of which

sexual brutality rates at the top. The text uncovers the untold narrative of prostitute women and mothers in Zimbabwean society. It offers a reflective glance into the kind of prostitution and discloses the instability of the individuals, as well as the makeup of women who engage in promiscuity as a way of survival. Tagwira exemplifies how women are obligated to participate in vending sex in order to survive. In the novel, Sheila struggles for economic freedom as a result of trying to curb hunger. She narrates to Onai that when she was a prostitute, she did not care about contracting HIV, arguing that she thought that she would die from hunger. Her justification at that time was that it was better to die as a prostitute with a full stomach. Sheila regrets her choice of action noting that dying of hunger was far better (62).

Sheila is a single woman, who is also a mother and a sex peddler. Tagwira is at pains to narrate the reasons why Sheila lives as she does. She also attempts to develop justifications for the choices that female characters make in turning to prostitution. Tagwira's narrative presents prostitution as a snare and a situation that women are forced into by circumstances. She draws attention to the reality that women engage in sex for survival. Sheila resorts to prostitution not for pleasure, but as a form of livelihood. In an interview, Virginia Phiri (2010) states that the entire industry of sex business holds a stigma that it is taboo and unthinkable for individuals to publicly speak about it, yet this business has assisted hopeless women to fend for their extended and immediate families (Hamid 2013: 22). When male customers refuse to use protection because they have monetary influence, female sex workers in several occasions have no option but to give in to unshielded sex since they are in need of cash.

Tagwira upholds Phiri's claim through her representation of Sheila whose sex business assists her to look after her family. In a similar manner, Virginia Phiri's (2010) *Highway Queen* narrates the same predicament that faces women in Zimbabwe. The text unravels the untold narrative of prostitute mothers and wives in Zimbabwe. Her main protagonist, Sophie, is a married woman, mother and a prostitute. In an interview, Phiri notes that *Highway Queen* was prompted by witnessing several common women striving to fend for their families and failing to obtain payment in official employment. As a consequence, these women end up trading their bodies in a bid to obtain cash in spite of the endangerments such as STIs including HIV and in some occasions, brutality and violence. The entire text commonly concerns day to day difficulties and delights of

everyday citizens but with emphasis on financial adversities, lack of proper housing, criminality and other aspects of life (Mushakavanhu 2014).

Phiri's postcolonial feminist preferences are evident in the above comments. She is alarmed by the persistent misery and tenacity of the black woman in the after-effects of violence and brutality. She expresses her apprehensions about common women striving to fend for their families without payment from conventional employment. This acknowledgement of women's failure to safeguard official employment mirrors the African feminist dispute that some limitations and inequalities arise in conventional cultures and that colonisation underpinned them and instituted others (Boyce Davies & Graves 1986: 10). Men exploit their positions of power to request sex from women.

3.3.2 Women's Struggle: *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*

The significance of women in postcolonial African nations continues to conjure up profound views. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* unfolds the tragic experiences of daughter and mother after the death of Daudi when both Linga and Beata face economic insecurity, and are abused and exposed to HIV and AIDS infection. It is this dreadful experience that propels Shaba to construct the identities of women struggling to make meaning of their existence in an HIV and AIDS prevalent setting. The novel carries the reader closer to women's struggle in Zimbabwe. It brings to the fore the painful experience of women. The novel narrates the heavy odds that women face. Beata journeys a painful path of life. She has been socialised to believe that she is not worthy to live in an environment that ostracises persons living with HIV. She decides to disguise her HIV condition but finally loses the will to live, hence she succumbs to AIDS.

Society's attitude undermines the very humanity and confidence of the HIV and AIDS infected women by insisting that they carry the blame for being infected. Deborah Lupton (1994) notes that in the new integrity of proactive health those who become sick have habitually remained judged to be ethically responsible for permitting illness into their bodies by refusing to fit into the taboos and cultural guidelines (Kuate-Defo 2000). In this way women are in particular blackmailed into foregoing their life-long investments in marriage relationships on the pretext that they are the source of the disease.

In an environment that is characterised by social struggle and disgrace, Linga strives to make life meaningful. She projects the slow and painful demise of her mother, Beata, who quietly nurses a sexually transmitted infection for fifteen years, which later leads to HIV and AIDS complications. She seeks to resist death and strives to live. Shaba provides a reflective lens by noting that society is hopelessly out of control as to how it assists its vulnerable women and girls like Linga and Beata, who contract HIV from the same man, a city councillor and a married man who extorts sexual favours from them by posing as a support to them. The narrator highlights Linga's experience:

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 forever 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. (Shaba 2006: 74-75)

In the above excerpt, Linga engages in deep psychological probing. She has been forced to consent to sexual intercourse with the councillor, with the understanding that it is the only way she can pursue her ambition for advanced level studies and for her mother to keep her job. The councillor takes advantage of Linga's lack of information about HIV and AIDS, and limited knowledge on preventive measures. Barthelémy Kuate-Defo (2004) offers the following insightful observations:

Many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America tend to suggest that there are movements in and out of urban and rural areas and a great degree of fluidity in terms of where older people have their relationships with younger people. The economic crisis in many African countries, for example, has made many girls in rural areas very vulnerable especially those living with their grandparents, given in part the increase in orphanages triggered by the AIDS epidemic. These girls are often the prime target of older and affluent people living in towns who go on weekends in their home-towns in rural areas where they have built luxurious houses and where they get these girls to come and receive presents, money and favours for themselves and their families in exchange for sexual relationships.

Furthermore, because such transactional sexual relationships are expected to be cheaper in rural than urban areas, given the differential in level expectations and demands between urban and rural dwellers, rural adolescents may be particularly at risk of sexual exploitation by older people coming from town and travellers. (Kuate-Defo 2004: 23-24)

The economic, political and social structure is represented as ill-equipped to shield young girls like Linga. Ultimately, she boldly goes to the health workers for advice, and the innocence in her enables her to frankly open up to the nurses about her dilemma.

Unfortunately, Beata succumbs to AIDS. Shaba's narrative notes that women living with HIV struggle with shame and exclusion. The fate of Linga and Beata summarises the fate of womenfolk living with HIV and AIDS. Linga tries to direct her life despite the dreadful experience that she encounters. She learns just how to adore herself and get her own niche in the world, despite tremendous hostility. Her resilience is portrayed in the story when her mother dies from HIV and AIDS complication. She gains strength by overlooking the awful memories that colour her world and goes to her mother's grave to find peace and closure (Shaba 2006: 19). She echoes Alice Walker's assertion of womanism, that a womanist enjoys music, adores dance, likes the moon, appreciates the spirit, enjoys food and love and roundedness, appreciates struggle, welcomes the company of the folk, adores herself, regardless (Walker 1984). There are particular facts appropriate to both womanists and feminists, and any divergence is an issue of colour. Therefore, both womanism and womanpower are pertinent lenses for examining the black female characters in Shaba's narrative, particularly with respect to Linga, who exemplifies the description of womanism as she fits the profile of a responsible and grown up (Walker 1984: xi-xii), when she prospers despite her condition. Shaba therefore has authored a character who has refused to succumb to HIV and AIDS, even as she encounters a highly problematic situation.

3.3.3 Troubled Gender: *Beauty's Gift*

Beauty's story resonates with pain and suffering. In the beginning of the novel, Magona captures the suffering that comes with femininity. She puts the female gender in crisis. She notes at the start of the narrative that "God understood the African woman was going to have an extremely difficult life. That is the reason why He lent her a tough skin as the mother earth herself. The almighty

provided her that strong, ageless and timeless skin so that her miseries would not be transcribed all over her face, so that her face would not be a map to her tattered and torn heart” (Magona 2008: 9).

Here the author displays appreciation for women by providing social commentary on the strength of African women in the face of adversity. She draws attention to the reality that women’s femininity shapes their experience and destiny. Beauty is subdued and overwhelmed by her husband’s dictatorship. Hamilton limits his wife’s access to her friends and relatives while covering up Beauty’s sickness. The narrator points out that: “It is the same-day, and the day after that, and every time he says that Beauty can’t come to the phone, she’s in a meeting, they have visitors, she’s resting” (Magona 2008: 39). Beauty is innocent and vulnerable; however, Hamilton shows no remorse as he humiliates her to a world of silence. From a human rights perspective, Beauty’s confinement to the domestic realm confirms a harsh customary culture. It is apparent that South African womenfolk have frequently remained exposed to undesirable patriarchal structures. In the African context, divorce holds a symbolic value of disgrace, shame and dishonour. That is why women in the same predicament as Beauty’s opt to suffer in silence rather than come out of abusive marriages. Beauty’s relationship with her husband is characterised further by subordination; her friends

remembered how tight-fisted Hamilton had been with her, how all her money had been spent on her family’s needs, and how she had often gone without the things she had wanted or needed because he spent his own money on wine and women and other things a womaniser’s lifestyle demanded. They also remembered how, eventually, Beauty had learnt to make do without his money [...] While Beauty was sick, Hamilton sits by her bedside day and night and does not let anyone near her. He convinces Beauty that she should not tell anyone about the nature of their illness and that they should go to the grave with the secret. Beauty’s father sadly says, “Maybe he did not want us to know which one of them gave this terrible disease to the other.” (Magona 2008: 19; 96)

Hamilton embodies patriarchal ideals and displays shades of hegemonic masculinity. The dominance of the above problematic version of masculinity is challenged in the textual world, and the fact that the most negatively portrayed character, Hamilton, thrives in the novel, highlights the

injustice of culture in the society. The apprehension with culture signifies a denunciation of repressive traditions and cultures that license the subjugation of women. Far from implying that these should be applauded, Magona's repetitive undesirable positioning of Hamilton's personality implies a community that is deeply flawed. The novel inspires the reader to be critical of the culture in which these occurrences play out.

Through the description of the setting of *Beauty's Gift*, which foregrounds socio-cultural problems, Magona encourages the reader to see the textual world negatively, suggesting that such cultural and social systems result in the deprivation of women's safety and freedom, leading to a catastrophic end. Magona voices the reality of a hostile culture that bullies women in the domestic realms. Therefore, the representation of Beauty's plight encapsulates the battle that countless women in southern Africa encounter.

3.4 Gender Violence and Gender Inequality

3.4.1 Gender Hostility

Even though gender hostility is a universal issue, my research is not a social study, instead, it is a literary examination hinged on literary analysis. Gender discrimination adds to the extensive spread of HIV and AIDS. It increases contamination rates, and reduces the capability of girls and women to deal with the scourge. These women are faced with challenges to negotiate safe sex, because of imbalanced power constructions with men. Sexual aggression, an extensive breach of women's rights, intensifies the menace of HIV transmission. The novels *The Uncertainty of Hope* and *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* provide candid elucidation of the socio-cultural concerns and discrepancies inflicted on, and applied by, women in family and social spaces in the modern-day Zimbabwe. The novels focus on the lives of women characters. The two novels offer insights into several responses, encounters and opposition tactics of girls and women to cruelty in the family and other places. It uncovers the emotional, physical, sexual and psychological aggression that is inflicted upon women.

Tagwira and Shaba present womenfolk as distinct persons in the social space; they do not concentrate on specific protagonists but centre their narratives on the lives of several women who have suffered gender hostility at different phases of their lives. Sally Engle Merry (2011) in *Gender*

Violence: A Cultural Perspective states that: “Gender violence occurs throughout the world, but it takes quite different forms in different social contexts. It is located in particular sets of social relationships, structures of power, and meanings of gender” (2011: 3). The antagonism that the female characters encounter contributes essentially to the new gender characteristics that they obtain by the conclusion of the narratives.

3.4.2 Violence and Belonging: *The Uncertainty of Hope*

Gender brutality, as a zone of alarm in postcolonial feminist discourses, advances from the conception of gender. It is important to bear in mind that gender-based aggression in this perspective is defined as a display of masculine power which establishes itself in different ways including emotionally, psychologically, economically, sexually and physically. Ultimately, all forms of violence are influenced by specific socio-economic and cultural forces. *The Uncertainty of Hope*’s characters’ personalities are instituted by the intricate crossroads of a number of indicators of variance, as well as their gender. This research consequently considers identity as being intersectional and brings all these aspects into consideration while examining the depictions of resistance and violence in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. Part of the aim of this study is to determine whether this novel’s representation offers positive approaches to those characters inflicted by HIV and AIDS and living with violence.

For one to comprehend the reality of violent behaviour in gendered relationship, it is essential to comprehend its nature. O’Toole *et al.* (1997) contend that “much of the violence in contemporary society serves to preserve asymmetrical gender systems of power” (1997: xii). *The Uncertainty of Hope* offers representations of real gender violence. Murray contends that gender violence spreads beyond physical cruelty: certainly, physical gender violence is aided by a much more pervasive problem, a kind of mechanical gender aggressiveness that positions our societies at institutional, informal and epistemic levels (Murray, 2017: 23). Gari exhibits violent behaviour. He is not an easy man to live with. He batters his wife, Onai, most of the time, in fact her face is marked with occasional facial bruising. The narrative displays hegemonic masculinity through the characterisation of Gari. In this regard, Tagwira’s narrative seeks to expose the kind of masculinity that renders women silent in the confines of the institution of marriage. Ultimately, Tagwira advocates for gender justice and fluidity of gender roles.

Despite all of this, the novel notes that the shell of pretense that Onai has twisted around herself has become her armour (Tagwira 2006: 4). Maureen Kambarami's (2002) article "Femininity, Sexuality and Culture: Patriarchy and Female Subordination in Zimbabwe" draws attention to traditional Shona culture: "In the Shona culture, once a girl reaches puberty all teachings are directed towards pleasing one's future husband as well as being a gentle and obedient wife. Her sexuality is further defined for her, as she is taught how to use it for the benefit of the male race" (2002: 2). The above statement resonates well with Onai's situation, although later in the novel she manages to set herself free from the restraints of patriarchy, albeit temporarily. Conversely, a woman's body has been positioned negatively. This account of violence traces the understanding of violent behaviour in both public and private realms, overlaying the route for an assessment of gender aggression that classifies womenfolk as casualties of violence. This interpretation of the nature of gender aggression is useful in my examination of the subjects in which violence is faced and the approaches in which both genders react to violence.

In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, women are characterised by violence and intimidation. Furthermore, Tagwira brings to light the challenges that women encounter in the midst of violence. Onai states that she is helpless, arguing that after all she is a woman. She complains that she cannot fight against fate (2006: 4). It is in this context that the narrative in *The Uncertainty of Hope* exposes masculine identities so as to demolish systems that subjugate women. Kambarami (2002) offers compelling insights with regard to masculine and feminine identities:

The patriarchal nature of our society has shaped and perpetuated gender inequality to the extent of allowing male domination and female subordination. This sad state of affairs has been fuelled by the socialization process, therefore, to amend the situation this calls for resocialisation. All those who are involved in mass teaching or any form of public lecturing should aim at highlighting how culture has created a huge gap between men and women. Lectures and seminars addressing the impact of culture should be encouraged. Furthermore, men should also be involved in these lectures so as to make great impact. In addition, patriarchy should be seen as it really is, that is, as a social construction and not a biological construction. Women should also be educated so that they understand how culture imprisons them since the majority of them have accepted the status quo to the extent that they worship male domination. (2002: 9)

Textually, Tagwira's narrative pays attention to the way in which the association between women and men should be regulated and consequently implemented in the contemporary society. Consequently, Onai has been socialised to believe that it is a man's obligation to be in charge of the household and to run it as he desires, with no commitment to any regulations and guidelines. Violence is deemed to be a socially acceptable means of settling disputes. This clearly explains how violence has been institutionalised as means to control women, hence they lack a sense of belonging. *The Uncertainty of Hope* offers captivating perceptions with regard to the way in which Onai's predicament could be employed to demolish pervasive male-controlled traditions. One of the female characters in the novel, Katy, questions Onai: "'Do you want us to take you out of this house in a coffin?'" (6). This confirms the nature of the brutality Gari displays towards his wife. Tagwira depicts Katy's sense of deconstructing masculine constructions in a bid to rebuild new ways of life for women trapped in gender-based violence. Chitando remarks that Tagwira presents to the reader an understanding of patriarchy and its control on women in Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, these women are resilient and their struggles materialise in different ways. Her unveiling narrative comprises a call to the women of Zimbabwe to work relentlessly and redefine their position in society in styles that stimulate their own emancipation (Chitando 2011: 129).

Tagwira, however, juxtaposes Katy with Onai's mother. Katy has overcome the entrenched patriarchal order in her community. She employs her feminine features to deal with her womanhood. Lerner supports the view that:

Tagwira attempts to correct the discrepancy induced by the inequality between the sexes in Zimbabwe through the representation of Katy. Katy belongs to a cluster of women that does not endure in silence. She seeks to subvert and change traditional customs in order to challenge the status quo, in spite of the immense force to abide by the practice. It is hard to contend that the female characters in *The Uncertainty of Hope* are not subjugated, nevertheless they are habitually depicted as tougher than their male colleagues, and this signifies their ongoing performance in the male-featured world, on their own specifications. (Lerner 1975: 5)

Onai's mother, however, is presented as a cultured woman who promotes women's subjugation. The novel provides a bleak view of womenfolk. They are epitomised as "second class" as they are

suppressed through the prescription of tasks and responsibilities. Moreover, they are accustomed to being obedient and submissive. Patriarchy forbids them particular positions and the capability to accomplish their maximum potential. Tagwira details Onai's predicament in a patriarchal Zimbabwe. The following excerpt further highlights the violence in the Zimbabwean society:

Her mother lay on the floor, a stream of blood-stained tears ran between her fingers as she held them protectively over her face. Ruva's alarmed gaze shifted to her father. He was lying at an angle across the bed, already blissfully lost in a drunken slumber. His mouth open, he was discharging thunderous snores and his feet were dangling carelessly over her mother's curled form. Her eyes filled with bitter tears. Her heart ached, and a hopeless pain filled her chest. (Tagwira 2006: 10)

Gari is full of violence. He represents the patriarchal oppression women suffer under. The above passage underscores the savagery men impose on their women when drunk. Moreover, violence against women is overtly endorsed and women are instigated to be sexually docile. Onai is aware of Gari's several mistresses, but she fears to tell her husband to wear a condom whenever they have sex. Consequently, by living with Gari and accepting the mistreatment, Onai is boosting her image in the neighborhood as a robust woman and a mother. Lerner (1975) discusses how women have a diverse understanding with regard to awareness, depending on whether their activity, their work, their interaction is woman-orientated or male-defined. Women, similar to men, are brainwashed in a male-defined value structure and carry out their lives accordingly. She points out that basically, treating women as casualties of subjugation once again situates them in a male-labelled theoretical framework: tormented, harassed by values and standards created by men. The proper history of women is the history of their continuing operation in the male-characterised world, on their own terms. The issue of repression does not prompt that story and is therefore an instrument of constrained suitability to the historian (1975: 5).

Tagwira depicts women as residing within male-marked boundaries. Onai is represented as the subaltern since she is stifled by the dominant male. Women are anticipated to be obedient, silenced, and answerable to men. Patriarchy in Zimbabwean society is also evident in the narrative. Gari is characterised as an authoritarian, egocentric, and aggressive character. He demonstrates

conventional masculine supremacy. He demands to be given food, yet he does not provide for the family (Tagwira 2006: 67).

Dr Emily Sibanda is a moral compass in the novel. She is a female character who disregards masculine brands and is symbolised as opinionated, resilient, autonomous and aggressive. The notion of womanpower is apparent in her, as she redefines her own boundaries in masculine controlled Zimbabwe. Regarding womanpower, Diedre Badejo (1998) observes the following:

Our femininity is an inclusive expression of power. For the sons and daughters of African deities, queen mothers, and community women, womanhood is power. It confirms that African women's power is feminine, mysterious, and beautiful, and it exists as a complimentary expression of the African man's power. (1998: 110)

What is stunning is how Dr Emily Sibanda embodies the feminine sense outlined in the definition above, as she demonstrates responsibility. Through the characterisation of Dr Emily Sibanda, Tagwira has produced an image of alternative womanhood outside the stereotypes of prescribed roles by men. She is depicted in the story as a principled woman who defies patriarchal dominance.

In addition, Tagwira shows a progressive shift in viewpoint on gender matters by presenting caring and rational male characters, for instance John. He takes an alternative way of life to the other male characters in the narrative as he is considerate and empathetic towards women. He additionally opposes the status quo and patriarchy. He rejects the patriarchal identity by handling Katy as a soulmate and companion. According to Kopano Ratele (2008):

For many centuries, men, masculinity and men's powers and practices were generally taken for granted; gender was largely seen as a matter of and for women; men were generally seen as ungendered, 'natural' or naturalised. This is now much less the case than quite recently, with the explicit naming of men as gendered people, and the deconstruction of men in politics and academia as well as social changes affecting men. (2008: 14)

There are some categories of masculinity that encourage accountability and responsibility. Naana Banyiwa Horne (2004) clarifies matters of hegemony, manhood and masculinity in Aidoo Ama's (2010) play, *Anowa*, noting that Aidoo impresses upon the interdependent nature of the association

between masculinity, femininity, manhood and womanhood — maleness and femaleness matching respectively and correspondingly like the feet, the right foot following the left foot automatically in a well-designed dance.

Horne further proposes that men and women ought to complement one another in her metaphors of the right foot following the left foot. It is imperative to note that Tagwira advocates that both genders should subvert and contest patriarchal models. Tagwira echoes the enactment of Chikwenye Ogunyemi's (1985) African womanism noting that it is rational, it needs meaningful combination between black men, black children, and black women. In a similar manner, Filomena Chioma Steady illuminates the interdependency of men and women noting that the man is not "the other" but element of the human same (1987: 8). She argues that each gender represents the crucial half that creates the human whole. Neither gender is entirely complete in itself to comprise a division by itself (1987). Steady's remarks on the inseparability of the sexes and marriage in strong African social cohesion can therefore justify why John and Katy would prefer to safeguard their family's affairs.

3.5 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been on analysing the representations of African traditions, women's vulnerability, gender violence and gender inequality in three literary texts, namely: *The Uncertainty of Hope*, *Beauty's Gift* and *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. Literature is deemed a product of society, therefore each of the novels explored in this study offers fictitious representations of the plight of women in their patriarchal and social realities. All three women authors provide insights into the tradition that positions women at the threat of the HIV and AIDS infection. They expose the dangers of patriarchy, arguing that masculine culture offers supreme significance to men, thereby limiting women's human rights. The analysis further reveals that women's vulnerability prompts them to become victims and thus they find themselves trapped, negotiating the scourge of the HIV and AIDS menace which they know little about.

Additionally, the analysis in this chapter leads to the conclusion that in spite of the battering and bruising that women experience at the hands of men, they still yearn for associations with them. For instance, in the novel, *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Onai's mother urges her daughter, Onai, never

to run away from her marriage on grounds that she cannot raise her children alone. This assertion is regardless of the resentment and betrayal they get from the male counterparts, for example, Onai in *The Uncertainty of Hope* and Beata in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. The study concludes that the female and male characters of the three texts cannot live separately of each other, as each sex comprises of the crucial half that makes the human complete. In both *The Uncertainty of Hope* and *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, the authors reveal and reinforce the social struggle and economic aspects that render women susceptible to HIV and AIDS. They suggest that due to poverty and economic insecurities, women are pushed to engage in prostitution, thereby finding themselves trapped in the web of HIV and AIDS.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: ADJUSTMENT OF GENDER DESCRIPTIONS AND NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITIES

4.1 Introduction

In the first analytical section of this chapter, I shift from a negative representation of women characters and focus on the strength of women living with HIV and AIDS as well as those affected by this disease. Newell notes: “that gender descriptions and principles continuously shift to account for their varying status. This has led to the advent of new perceptions which reformulate, interrogate and examine inherited, prevalent codes” (1997: 1). Newell articulates the effect of social modifications in society and how the culture itself reacts to these social changes. She explores how images are distorted in literature by suggesting that representations of gender are not constant as they differ with time. Newell’s claim is applicable to this research as I aim to explore how gender descriptions are built and adjusted in society to cater for the shifting moments, mainly in the present narratives in this research.

The chapter further explores how female characters negotiate their identities out of victimhood to subjects of their own stories. The thrust is to expose the disparate subjectivities experienced by women obtained within the contexts of gender, and explore their willingness to communicate about AIDS. Furthermore, I highlight how the texts provide representations of love and affection through the characters’ uniqueness as women in their encounter with HIV and AIDS. Finally, I analyse a shift of feminist awareness by demonstrating that women possess certain aspects of independence, by arguing that women have unequivocally embraced the challenge to liberate themselves from the scourge of HIV and AIDS.

4.2 Destigmatising the Disease

In the African region, the first two decades of the HIV and AIDS pandemic were marked by considerable mystery, disgrace and silence. Times have changed and so are societal values and structures changing. HIV and AIDS victims, especially women, still suffer the blow of this scourge, and thus there is a pressing need to destigmatise this disease through advocacy and open communication. Demonstrating the plight of women from recent history, Edwin Cameron, a former critic and judge of the Constitutional Court of South Africa and a gay-rights activist, in his

autobiographical book, *Witness to AIDS* (2005), foregrounds the occasion of Gugu Dlamini, a 36-year-old female from KwaMashu in Richmond Farm, in KwaZulu-Natal, who was stabbed and stoned to death in the year 1998 because of disclosing her HIV status on the radio. The assailants charged her for embarrassing her society by revealing her HIV status in public. The case was later dropped because of lack of evidence. This societal attitude is typified by a denial mode that borders on criminalising disclosure concerning HIV and AIDS infection. Drawing from the above disturbing example, the theme of HIV and AIDS remains relevant right from the time of its entry in South Africa and Zimbabwe, to the time of publications of these primary texts, and up to the present time; therefore, women's commitment to communicate about HIV and AIDS is a significant aspect in this section.

4.2.1 Women's Willingness to Communicate about AIDS

Imagining about women and how particular limitations and prospects of their time influence their response towards HIV and AIDS identities, the selected three women authors, Tagwira, Shaba and Magona, display in their novels understanding of the complexities connected to acknowledging the realism of the HIV and AIDS menace with candour in their conservative communities. Horne (2004) asserts that numerous views of African women presented in literature differ from illustrations offered by their male counterparts. She notes that by virtue of their gendered encounters, women authors are predisposed to portray female characters in more practical conditions, with a terrific deal of awareness and understanding, and in profound collaboration with their atmosphere. Women authors tend to establish a woman's world in which women characters live in their individual right, and not as ordinary members to a male realm.

A feminist reading of the novels of Tagwira, Shaba and Magona reveals that womenfolk are better placed than men when it comes to expressing the realities that shape the hopes and grievances of their lives. In this regard, one of the characters in Magona's novel, *Beauty's Gift*, Nomtha Langa, a member of Vukani, a local NGO, plays a critical role in speaking of her ten-year excursion of living with HIV by publicly disclosing her HIV status. The novel genders this narrative of advocacy of Nomtha Langa, as she attempts to distinguish her individual spot in a world that looks down on HIV-positive individuals. Her agency is shaped by her reaction when she tests positive for HIV. This lays a solid foundation for her aspirations to openly convey the message. Her

statements indicate that she is not scared of being ostracised by her people if her status becomes apparent to the entire community. There is an obsession with advocacy that Magona uses purposefully to promote voice and visibility. The novel's account of placing female characters, for instance Nomtha Langa, beyond accepted margins is therefore seen as representing solace to other HIV-positive women hiding behind the curtains of shame. The novel juxtaposes Nomtha Langa's physical appearance with her illness. It is evident that there is no way one can tell from her physical appearance that she is infected with HIV, because her picture displays the radiance of health. She points out that: "To test HIV-positive is not a death sentence" (Magona 2008: 85). Arguably, the thrust of Magona's writing presents women as agents rather than victims. The narrative reflects the deconstructive interpretation of the disease that was once thought a death trap as being manageable. This is a bold statement that displays optimism for women and the entire South African population at large.

The rejection of euphemism is a key concern in Magona's *Beauty's Gift*. Social matters, involving physical situations and material concerns, cannot be resolved or alleviated by medicine alone. Ultimately, the narrative emphasises the open discussion of HIV and AIDS in a bid to spread knowledge about it and hence lessen its dreadful impact. Magona's narrative lays a solid foundation in reflecting the realities of the society. She succeeds in portraying society's various reactions to HIV and AIDS, with prominence falling on women characters. The novel offers women living with HIV a chance to talk about their occasional trials and triumphs in dealing with HIV, from medical matters to family affairs. This can be read as the author's statement of hope in a quest to liberate the female gender from the bondage of this pandemic. In a bid to educate the public, Nomtha Langa admits that she is faced every day with a series of choices that spell life or death not only to herself but to others as well (84). From the above depiction of Nomtha Langa, the agency of women to live notwithstanding the odds is a crucial focal point of the narrative. This exposes some of the relevant apprehensions of women living with HIV. Despite presenting them as victims of HIV, Magona confers on them the capability to take control of their health. This may be regarded in the novel as the author's strategy to reinforce a proactive agency for improved living conditions for women infected and affected by the HIV scourge. This corresponds with an article by Cloete *et al.* (2010) that notes that despite the shame and embarrassment likened to HIV and AIDS in South Africa, some well recognised persons from both the homosexual and heterosexual

societies and from both white and black groups have tossed their efforts behind the battle against HIV by either advocating the cause or revealing their positive HIV condition. They comprise of Judge Edwin Cameron, a human rights activist, Zackie Achmat, a Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) activist and Simon Nkoli, a former youth activist against apartheid (Cloete *et al.* 2010).

Nkoli, Achmat and Cameron openly influence the way people get past HIV, by positively responding to the epidemic, thus shunning the prejudices and myths associated with HIV and AIDS. Similarly, in *Beauty's Gift*, Magona offers a rich base for re-constructing both space and prejudice of women living affected by and with HIV and AIDS. There is commendable unity amongst her female characters as they pursue to live, as articulated by Ogundipe-Leslie when she notes that women may differ about policies and approaches, but they do not differ on straightforward conventions that women are burdened as women and they are troubled as the mainstream members of minor classes which are also in the mainstream (2007).

Reflective of Ogundipe-Leslie's vision, Magona's *Beauty's Gift* offers women a convenient choice of stepping out of the shadows of fear. Likewise, Eldred Durosimi Jones *et al.* note that the task of an African woman author is primarily to get an objective therapy of womanhood and to grasp the challenges of womanhood to be able to correct the misunderstandings about women (1987). Magona does not deviate from Jones's concept of an African woman writer. She upholds a radically similar course illustrating the experience of women through her character Beauty, who achieves agency by refusing to be silenced by the confines of AIDS stereotypes. Understood this way, the representation of the prominent role of women is defined within the prism of activism, that translates to social awareness and empowerment. Mpine Qakisa (2002) observes that HIV spreads quickest in the environment of hopelessness, destitution, and absence of information. Therefore, it is important to note that communication with regard to embracing openness is an important theme common across this sub-chapter, with Magona indicating a new thrust of representation in the contestation embedded in her narrative.

Hazel T. Ngoshi and Juliet Pasi (2007) argue that fictionalised narratives redeem the subject in two ways. Firstly, the narrative does not pass judgment on the subject, and secondly it allows free exploration of the inner space by removing the kind of restraint that societal custom imposes on the individual. It is in this light that the narrative brings forth Beauty's extreme condition with HIV

and AIDS. Through self-positioning as a redemptive force, Beauty holds central the importance of open dialogue with her career-driven woman friends. Before she dies, she asks Amanda to tell the rest of her woman friends what she is ailing from (Magona 2008: 73). The identity of Beauty in the novel is consolidated around the various misfortunes that she lives through in her married life. She has a somewhat difficult relationship with her husband, Hamilton, and the ultimate string of events shaping her life is the discovery that she has contracted HIV within her marriage. She thus comes out to talk about her HIV and AIDS status. Her courageous deeds are measured in terms of what she achieves after speaking out about her HIV journey. The following interchange takes place between Beauty and Amanda:

Her voice emphatic, she speaks quickly, leaving Amanda not a moment to respond. “Live to a ripe old age!” [...] “Don’t die a stupid death, like I am doing! Live!” She says, “Live till every hair on your head turns grey. Earn your wrinkles and, damn you, enjoy them! Enjoy every wrinkle and every grey hair on your head. Tell yourself you have survived! Sur-vived!” Her voice drops. “Live!” She says. “Don’t die...” Slowly, she moves her head from side to side. “Don’t die like... this...this.” (Magona 2008: 74)

In the explicit circumstance of women in South Africa, this infers coming to terms with their willpower to confront the disease. This entrenches the notion that reveals that the survival of women depends on their willingness to speak out about HIV and AIDS, regardless of the shame in their culture surrounding the disease. *Beauty’s Gift* presents women who crack the silence of exclusive encounters and voice out the unspeakable. Ultimately, this makes it increasingly clear that the advocacy of women depends on their readiness to take responsibility to act with force and determination towards ending the scourge of this disease. As illustrated earlier, in the midst of her suffering, Beauty finds further bravery to talk so as to rescue her woman friends from a comparable outcome: “The low hushed voice is but a whisper. [...] ‘And tell the others. Tell them to what I say to you now. I have AIDS,’ Beauty whispers. ‘AIDS.’ She closes her eyes and draws in a long, long breath, then sighs and lets her body settle into the bed” (Magona 2008: 74).

For this matter death due to AIDS is separated out from other ordinary deaths and what marks its separation is the silence that accompanies it. Here the narrative notes that it is shame that puts a

stop to open dialogue about the disease. Because it is predominantly sexually transmitted it becomes associated with the social constraints and criticisms that apply to sex.

Magona does not duplicate a problematic gender dynamic which is repressive to women, and disputes the notion of gender by establishing a female character who exemplifies agency and whose courageous confession acts as an object lesson to her community of supportive woman friends. This reason explains why Beauty consciously embraces disclosure despite the fact that, as her father observes, “she was forced by her husband to be silent about the nature of her illness” (96). The experience of HIV and AIDS mandates that women safeguard themselves from infection. Helplessness in negotiating safer sex in the marital framework has suggested that husbands have caused devastation to their spouses on most occasions. Similar to the above depiction of the fate of women in the marriage institution, Turmen observes the following:

It is evident that although the prevalence of HIV infection is highest among women and girls not enough is being done to reduce women’s risks, to protect them from sexual aggression and violence, to ease their burdens or to support their coping and caring efforts. Both women and men are put at risk of infection as a result of societal gender ideals and norms but women and adolescent girls are affected disproportionately. It is vital to integrate gender into HIV programming to curb the epidemic. (2003: 7)

The culture of silence surrounding HIV and AIDS dictates that womenfolk are anticipated to be oblivious about sex and submissive in sexual relations.

In *Beauty’s Gift*, the tone of the story is deliberately meant to underscore Magona’s redemptive strategy. It is this stance that fortifies the novel to raise awareness through Beauty to mobilise her woman friends to take good care of themselves; an act that is interpreted as a call for strong resolution and determination to influence others to embrace life and live positively. Beauty represents the novel’s objective view of women uniting purposely for the fight against HIV and AIDS by disclosing their positive HIV status. It is in this sense that South African society can be said to be in the throes of a collective conscience. The title of the text is substantial as it denotes the central theme of women’s willingness to communicate about AIDS. As the title of the novel

suggests, Beauty's revelation of her HIV status is perceived by her friends to be the best gift bestowed on them (Magona 2008: 75).

As observed in *Beauty's Gift*, the novel assigns societal duties to women like Mrs Mazwi who displays self-actualisation and social awareness of the surrounding world. Arndt (2002) observes that drastic elements of liberal societal protest will continue to act as an ideological support structure offering an essential crucial and critical incentive for the conservation of liberalism that seeks to award women better equality of opportunity (2000: 22). Mrs Mazwi is bestowed with a celebrity status and presents herself as a liberated woman. She is a retired teacher demonstrating her willingness to communicate the menace of HIV and AIDS. She is actively involved in the affairs of her community and greatly respected (Magona 2008: 84). Mrs Mazwi is not hypercritical or contemptuous towards those who are distinct from her. Her encounters permit her to gain greater understanding and a broader viewpoint of reality and life. Her position as a retired teacher in the novel is therefore interpreted as a position of trust that extends beyond the heart of the community. Magona does not restrict women to domestic spheres. During Lungile's funeral, one of the Sonti twins, Mrs Mazwi articulates her concerns, explaining:

“That is how it is going to be with AIDS. Very soon, all our families will have at least one person infected with HIV. One, if we are lucky. What has happened to the Sonti family will happen to many others. The same way a family may have two or three daughters who become mothers before they are married, or sons who become fathers before they are married, so it will be with AIDS. Our families will be affected, in exactly that way!” (85)

The African womanist leaning of the narrative discloses an evocative confidence and courage of women's imperative role in engaging both men and women towards taking a liberating step. Mrs Mazwi's identity is socially constructed by many factors. Through her utterance, from the perspective of the family, the psychological and emotional scars suffered by most families due to HIV and AIDS cannot be overstated. She discusses a distinct pattern of the spread of HIV and AIDS at the family level. From her utterance, the novel's reader gains a wider understanding of the prevention, treatment, and reduction of vulnerability. The narrative notes that Mrs Mazwi raised up her hand in gesture, similar to the anti-apartheid kingpins of old, urging them to fight

back and not to let the busy-tongued gossip monger prevent them from testing and accessing the much-needed medicine (85).

The above action symbolises a strong advocacy of activism. Contrary to traditional representations of stigma, the novel actively captures the redeeming aspect of the need to live positively and freely. One explanation for this perception lies in engaging the novel's audience in changing its attitudes towards renewing hope and shunning a self-limiting view of life. The narrative exposes the impact of the environment and the social realm on women's individual identity and development. In view of this, the success of women's willingness to communicate about AIDS lies in the radical challenge in fighting the disease that cripples the society's wellbeing.

Similar to Magona's literary involvement in the HIV and AIDS campaign, Nape Motana's poem "Arise Afrika, Arise!" in *Nobody Ever said AIDS: Stories and Poems from Southern Africa* offers encouragement and hope. In the verse, struggle discussion is induced in an incredibly straightforward, explicit and inspirational sense. In the poem, the present battle against HIV and AIDS is placed steadfastly within the discourse of previous struggle against imperialism:

Yesterday Afrika ran red

with freedom fighters' sacrifice.

Today, under the jaws of man-eater AIDS, red

As vicious viruses colonise black blood.

The black South African race, then the sufferers under Apartheid, are nonetheless regarded as subjects, but now the tormentor is not the Apartheid supremacy, but HIV and AIDS, represented as a brutal monster. Horne contends that the emancipation battle and the formation of the new autonomous dispensation in the South African state have been immensely influential. It is not shocking, consequently, that they have encroached so powerfully on HIV dialogue, especially when it is deemed that the birth of the democratic system and the advent of the AIDS pandemic arose more or less instantaneously.

Further, the novel uses the second Sonti twin's memorial service as a manifesto for HIV and AIDS education. Unlike the preceding two burials, silence and denialism have been substituted with frank action and discussion regarding HIV. This is apparent in the manner the funeral is organised: three boys and three girls line up at the entrance to the humble family home. Everyone holds a basket of red ribbons, which they hand out as people walk in (Magona 2008: 77). Communication occurs not only in the act of verbalisation, but is similarly expressed in the deliberate campaign against the spread of HIV. Read this way, coming out in the open society to talk about HIV and AIDS assumes a redeeming element, where the ultimate objective is to galvanise the South African society from its blind pretence in the face of the pandemic.

The narrative through Doris denotes the concerns, transformation and understanding of the individual characters in the novel with regard to their fears and concerns over the spread of HIV and AIDS. She desires a meaningful communication. She shakes her head emotionally, acknowledging that, "AIDS will continue to kill people as long as they refuse to take responsibility for their actions" (72). Doris exemplifies a caring attitude and behaviour; she carries the shadows and fears of people who fail to take responsibility as she brings to light lack of advocacy. Ultimately, Magona through her novel, *Beauty's Gift*, reveals the challenges facing South Africa with regard to HIV and AIDS. She uses her literary work to reflect the crisis and realities of this epidemic.

Finally, through Cordelia's conversation with Gabula, Magona reveals the homophobic dominance in traditional South African society. Her novel exposes the crisis of the lack of communication and the high level of ignorance by calling for open communication: "'Homosexuals?'" asked Cordelia, her eyebrows arched. 'And that gives them AIDS, in your opinion? Because heterosexual people do not die of AIDS? But irony is often lost on people blinded by their own brilliance'" (44). The terrain of HIV and AIDS has shifted from infection to societal attitudes and prejudices. Women are anticipated to live up to a principled and ethical standard in their community or they will be disdained. Gabula constructs his arguments on women by painting them negatively, as he states that everyone understands that is how men contract HIV. This interpretation of humiliation illustrates Parker and Aggleton's (2003) view that:

In our view, stigma plays a key role in producing and reproducing relations of power and control. It causes some groups to be devalued and others to feel that they are superior in some way. Ultimately, therefore, stigma is linked to the workings of social inequality and to properly understand issues of stigmatization and discrimination, whether in relation to HIV and AIDS or any other issue, requires us to think more broadly about how some individuals and groups come to be socially excluded, and about the forces that create and reinforce exclusion in different settings. (2003: 17)

The discourse of stigma of HIV-positive persons in the state of South Africa has to be viewed in its historical and cultural perspective, as Parker and Aggleton suggest: it cannot be separated from the political and social framework out of which it has expanded.

Textually, Gabula's representation highlights the masculine viewpoint that men carry the central authority, moral authorisation and opportunity. This emphasises that the female gender is innocently subjected to unjustified stereotypes and further robbed of dignity and humanity. Cordelia's steadfast dedication prompts her to articulate the crisis of motherhood crying out that "African mothers, devotedly married women, are killed by men who will not stop sleeping around!" (Magona 2008: 70). She casts a wary eye upon this idealistic conception that puts women at risk. The above extract therefore tends to underscore the realism of the condition that is encountered by women widowed by HIV in South Africa. It is on such grounds that characters like Cordelia in the novel advocate for the concept of awareness in order to confront the stigma placed on women.

4.2.2 Hopeful Future: *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*

A critical textual examination of Shaba's narrative, *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, raises a discussion which focuses on the plight of women in Zimbabwe. As mentioned in the first paragraph of this chapter, Southern African women bear a disproportionate burden of HIV. Therefore, there is an urgent need to overcome the barriers that prevent open conversations about HIV and AIDS, as it is no longer a new and emerging disease. In spite of Shaba's narrative being fictional, the anguish of the women in Zimbabwe is by no means an imaginative description. The novel's author, Shaba, expresses the reactive response towards HIV and AIDS by placing her attention on the aftermath

of the acquisition of HIV and AIDS through her characters, Linga, Beata, Tari and Rufaro. The rejection surrounding the existence of HIV and AIDS dominates the cultural and societal reaction in the entire southern African space, thereby bringing about distinct negative responses to the epidemic. Shaba interrogates the ideology that women are the most vulnerable beings in society. Through the portrayal of Linga, the novel represents women as the most marginalised and subaltern individuals in society. Linga goes to the Voluntary Counselling and Testing Clinic to get tested for HIV, but the outcome is not pleasing. Numbness takes over her whole body when she is told the results (Shaba 2006: 87). The novel notes that most women had a narrow option of double humiliation: HIV inside their marriage or separation as the only avenue to remain healthy (87). Linga does not hide her status from her husband (88). The ideal trait in her, from a woman's feminist perspective, is in her standing for the truth irrespective of the outcome. Her purposeful, active, and conscious participation is reflective of her agency. She, however, chooses illumination to HIV and AIDS in order to dissipate misinformation and myths, which in this case includes denial, shame and intolerance against individuals living with HIV and AIDS.

Shaba presents the women as demonstrating social power. Ultimately, Linga's bravery to publicly announce her HIV-positive position to her husband confirms her intervention and willingness to communicate about AIDS. Ogunyemi discourses the influence of representation employed by African women authors, remarking that the African womenfolk frequently appear not only as casualties but also as fighters of a brutal geography and a harrowing past. African women writers as a component of a privileged alliance that has evaded their sisters' predicament, consider it incumbent upon them to be a voice for their shattered sisters (Ogunyemi 2007: 56). The novel's protagonist echoes Ogunyemi's sentiments. The character demonstrates toughness as she is able to get better than her mother, Beata, in the narrative. Furthermore, Linga contests the undesirable prejudice that African women are docile. Shaba therefore uses a subversive approach, in which the protagonist in the narrative is portrayed in a constructive note. However, Linga's willingness to share this information elicits a negative reaction from her husband (88). The novel notes that she "felt annoyed that he believed in creating despondence rather than hope" (89).

Following this scene, having been culturally socialised to regard marriage as a woman's first home, Linga is disoriented and frustrated by her husband's negative response to her HIV-positive status. She is equally angry regarding the negative view that society has of HIV-positive women. This

ultimately leads Linga to expand her perception and foresight of life. She learns to appreciate and acknowledge life. The presentation of Linga's husband's attitude is Shaba's way of admitting openly that gender conditioning in African tradition makes confession for women problematic. Therefore, a penetrating analysis of Linga's husband's action creates a depiction of lack of agency on the part of men in the battle against the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The emergence of this episode is therefore valuable in the expression of Shaba's vision that the concept of open communication in this era of HIV and AIDS should be all-defining in a marriage as well as the public sphere.

Linga further portrays self-confidence and positive psychological adjustment. Monica Bungaro examines women's change from marginalism to centrality. She notes that women's negligible stance regularly becomes a basis of power inside and between which they vary, as the action of analysing truth makes them no longer dependent (2004: 95). One of the intricacies of the womanist dream, as Shaba proves to the reader, is that society is far from being educated; independence implies that all creatures do not think equally. Linga opts for treatment, whereas Beata chooses to keep silent about the nature of her illness, which ultimately leads to the development of AIDS (Shaba 2006: 79). Linga does not permit her position as a mother living with HIV to restrict her dream. In spite of her predicament and the adverse stances towards single mothers in her culture, she is resolute to carry on relentlessly.

Shaba recognises the tangible truth of African feminism that applauds the admiration bestowed on women as mothers and the reverence stemming from self-confidence. It is remarkable that Linga has a more pragmatic stance towards HIV than her mother, Beata. Beata is entangled in denialism, while Linga has accepted her condition and realised that an HIV-positive outcome does not translate to fatality. While her society deems womenfolk as feeble and irrational, Linga arises as a robust and prudent mother. Agency is essential in concerns of feminism as it is linked to the matter of independence. Linga is determined to triumph over the virus by seeking to obtain life-saving expertise and treatment. While contrasting the lives of Linga and Beata, through the representation of Beata, Shaba is alarmed by the constant denial of some of the black women in the aftermath of HIV and AIDS. This failure of disillusioned women like Beata to relate meaningfully to life is viewed as a threat to successful advocacy.

Shaba calls for new identities that will be embraced and welcomed in society instead of being persecuted. Linga's friend, Rufaro, functions as the voice of reason within the novel. Rufaro is one of the characters in the novel who highlight the positive aspects of disclosure. She is convinced that it is a good thing, noting, "You may want to consider disclosing your condition. To whom and why? People, your friends [...] Anyway, it is the right thing to do" (91). Rufaro in the text operates as a symbolic instrument of advocacy that exists in society. Her reasoning revolves around the notion that disclosure increases access to care and support. She further states that "disclosing helps to destigmatise it and helps others to deal with it better" (92). It is on such grounds that Rufaro notes the importance of talking to someone in order to get support when distressed, arguing, "It is not good to be alone" (93). The novel functions through restoring voice and agency to the women-victims, thus it is from a position of power and independence that the narrative declares the importance of disclosure. Metaphorically, confession diminishes the virus as its peculiar nature is destabilised when a person comes out publicly.

McFadden incisively observes that the unfriendly attitudes of many health personnel have formed an instance where the majority of women admit that they are carriers of the disease, and/or fear that if they go to clinics and hospitals to report symptoms of STD, they will be embarrassed or humiliated by service personnel (1992: 160). The above argument by McFadden differs from Linga's experience; she goes to the clinic to see the doctor when she gets infected with gonorrhoea. The doctor's open communication leads him to advise Linga to "use condoms every time she has sex" (Shaba 2005: 76). He suggests that she "uses condoms with her boyfriend" (76). In the framework of HIV and AIDS, the act of using protective measures is essential in taking care of oneself. The conceptualisation of the use of condoms creates a sense of responsibility on Linga's part. The narrator notes that on Linga's closet she had "a caricature of a condom head with a mischievous smile and a bubble reading, 'I do away with AIDS. Can you?' Even if it is a man's residence, she takes pleasure in removing a condom out of her purse" (86). Nevertheless, as Elaine Maane renders it evident in *Umzala: A Woman's Story of Living with HIV*, bargaining condom usage is a key contest for women living with HIV. She implies that most men suffer from condom fear (2009: 121). McFadden (1992) emphasises the significance of sex education for women as a tool for emancipation in frameworks of HIV and AIDS.

Ultimately, readers are energised when characters in the story living with HIV do not wait to perish. Linga is proactive in taking her anti-retroviral therapy. After she gets pregnant, she takes bold measures to safeguard her unborn child. By doing so, Linga goes against the negative depiction of persons living with HIV as devastated, flawed, and incapacitated by the scourge; they are usually abandoned, hopeless, but submissive to their inevitable fatalities (Crimp 1992: 118). Shaba's story subverts the assumption in the major discourse that African black women generally are incapable of recounting, much less exploring, the world, themselves, or their position in the globe.

Tagwira's narrative resonates with Shaba's novel, *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. Sheila, one of her characters in the novel, is not afraid to talk about her ailing condition. Upon Onai asking her regarding her whereabouts, she openly tells her landlady that she had gone to the hospital to register for HIV drugs (Tagwira 2006: 61). She is a victim in a structure that is dictated and dominated by corrupt health government officials and she is caught up in a depressing and disheartening predicament. As the novel notes, "Sheila is a fighter, but now she is a lost soul" (2006: 156). Given the plight of women that has an apparent long-lasting space in the lives of the female characters in *Uncertainty of Hope*, these women have to deal with new femininities. Through the characterisation of Sheila, Tagwira uses her literary work to reflect and capture the real issues and struggles that many women in southern Africa face. Sheila's tale is therefore intimately linked to the struggle in Zimbabwe and its influence on womenfolk.

4.3 Feminist Awareness: *The Uncertainty of Hope*

This section shifts the emphasis to demonstrate that women possess certain aspects of independence with regard to their feminist awareness. It centres on a range of women characters who have been portrayed as having accepted explicitly, the need to liberate themselves. Women are represented as more aggressive and dedicated to self-assistance. They have also engraved their views in different styles to demonstrate that they can strategise and re-organise and live by themselves. In a speech presented before an audience of women, playing an active role in feminism as an element of the deconstructionism of the existing associations of power and women's condition within literature, Anna Cooper impressively voices the black female's standpoint on feminism noting that females' assertion can be as wide as the ocean and solid as the abstract. She

urges that we take our stance on the unity of humankind, the togetherness of life, and the injustice and the unnaturalness of all unique preference, whether of race, sex, condition or country - when one particular connection of the sequence chain is broken down, then the chain is ultimately broken (1992: 59).

Cooper directly challenges the place of black women by interrogating female subordination and calling for a more radical female liberation. This is best understood as a good understanding of what constitutes the ability of women to be aware of their rights, thereby questioning their gender roles, attitudes and beliefs in the framework of HIV and AIDS. This explains why an understanding is needed of what works to prevent further spread of the AIDS epidemic in bearing pain and loss. Women characters in Tagwira's novel portray an extensive body of knowledge leading to a successful awareness campaign. Ogundipe-Leslie underscores the responsibilities of intellectual womenfolk, observing that women academics ought to engender awareness and participate in investigation and accomplishment concerning their interests as women in the background of the genuine liberty of womenfolk in Africa as the continent unshackles itself economically (1994: 160).

This involves taking action and identifying the most effective strategies to end the scourge of the AIDS pandemic. The concern of being overruled generally leads to women being incapable of looking after their reproductive and sexual wellbeing. This unfairness towards women is ingrained in their everyday lives. In other words, through the act of writing, this calls for women to grow stronger and more independent. A network of women serves as an important tool in changing the perception of womenfolk. Notably, in the novel *The Uncertainty of Hope* and globally in the context of HIV infections, truck drivers are categorised as a high-risk group. As Katy watches the news, she views a report about HIV awareness campaigns being launched to target high-risk groups. The narrator details the following:

The reporter gave a list of vulnerable groups. It included long-distance truck drivers. She felt her heart sink, right down to the pit of her stomach. What about John? While she trusted him, one could never be sure about how men behaved when they were away from home. She knew enough about HIV to feel very unsettled. One encounter with an infected person was enough to destroy several lives. She remembered Onai's brothers and other people

whose funerals she had attended. She found herself needing to sit down at once. (Tagwira 2006: 31)

Later in the novel, as John plans to leave for South Africa after Gari's funeral, he is surprised when his wife, Katy, tells him abruptly that she had packed for him some condoms: "I do trust you, but I also know that you meet a lot of young women on your trips. I am sure that they throw themselves at you in droves" (242). From the excerpt above, Tagwira depicts a full consciousness of the framework of women's rights and issues, which translates to feminist awareness. The above expression qualifies the narrative as a radical feminist text as it deliberately moves away from that which is considered the norm by prioritising the liberation and independence of women in the story.

Tagwira portrays an assertion of agency and survival of women through Katy. In addition to everything that Katy has heard on the news regarding truck drivers, she has been inclined to believe that men are promiscuous; however, packing condoms in her husband's bag gives her a sense of security (243). The fact of this action in the novel is interpreted as a call for resilience and individual agency. Katy's feminist beliefs about being a woman are strongly moulded, as she eventually rejects any kind of influence that is put on her. This is to be realised within the context of observing women's proactive engagement in the fight against AIDS for their own benefit. HIV-activism, centering on women's own enterprises and cognisant choices, has formed a political awareness amongst women about their health rights, and ultimately a political consciousness regarding global politics (Arnfred 2004: 101). Likewise, Tagwira allows her women characters for instance, Dr Emily Sibanda and Katy, to utilise the domestic space to prescribe female awareness and identity to contest male power. Thus, the representation of Katy and Dr Emily Sibanda resonates with women's pursuit for personal independence and dignity.

The notion of feminist awareness is understood for its ability to permit women to trespass on male-controlled dictates. Consequently, Onai is not sure if she wants her husband Gari to come back early in case she finds herself under the detrimental commitment of intimacy. Her greatest disappointment as a spouse lies in denying Gari his marital privileges, unless he agrees to use protection. The novel notes that in a rare moment of rebelliousness, she boldly tells her husband that no protection, no sex. The narrator notes:

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? While she had no proof, her instincts and a host of tantalisingly suspicious incidents told her that there were other women in his life. It would have been reckless to gamble with this evidence. She was consumed by a burning desire to stay alive for her children, and stay alive she would, so she made sure that there were always condoms in the house. (69)

The Uncertainty of Hope authorises new identities that women sense they own in order to influence their health status. Tagwira clarifies the fact that women have been forced to endure lengthy and sustained real threats of the HIV pandemic from their male counterparts. Yvonne Vera (1999) establishes the mood of women's authorship in Zimbabwe and pre-emptes the atmosphere of writing accomplished in the chosen novels of this research. Vera, in favour of Zimbabwean women writing, declares that if talking is nonetheless complicated to reach a deal, then writing has generated an open room for a majority of women, much freer than speaking. The novel is accorded its tenderness, its formation of a sphere, its propositions, its distinct characters, its suspension of skepticism. Writing presents an instance of intervention (1999: 3).

Vera expresses the influence of writing and the independence it gives female representation even in male-controlled conditions. What she argues for at this point is the liberatory effect of women's writing and its intervention in the battle against masculine control. Vera's motivation for black women authorship echoes satisfactorily with Tagwira, whose act of writing is considered as a contestation and subversion.

Further in the novel, in recent months, Onai had taken to collecting free condoms from the family planning clinic at Spilhaus, just a stone's throw from Harare Hospital. The novel highlights that "Female condoms were a blessing" (Tagwira 2006: 70). She is pleasingly amazed by the autonomy they give her. They make her feel farther in command of her sex-life and undeniably less susceptible to her husband's needs. During his numerous points of drunkenness, the novel notes, he frequently fails to detect when she has a female condom on. This suggested that the battles regarding him putting on a condom are less frequent than in the past (70). The narrative in this case probes women's possibility of a new beginning in self-conception, a beginning that is

threatening to refuse to be contained by the reckless demands of masculinity. Arndt's analysis of African feminism examines and expresses the relationship between African feminism and feminist African literatures. She highlights that African feminist literature is defined as oral or written art that gets to the base of African gender interactions and the challenges of African women illustrating their consequences, causes and criticises them. In so achieving African feminism seeks to upset the current pattern of supremacy and conquering it, hence enhancing the condition of African women (2002: 81).

Tagwira therefore fundamentally suggests that the construction of women's feminist cognisance involves multiple choices from which individual women can choose in order to acquire liberation. This is in view of the fact that, as the novel notes, many menfolk were absent from home without telling their spouses and it was "a man's privilege to operate his household as he desires, with no allegiance to any guidelines and regulations, particularly the ones dictated by a female" (Tagwira 2006: 121).

Onai's husband is no exception. This implication of tradition in Tagwira's narrative corresponds with an African feminist viewpoint, which is markedly prenatal, heterosexual, and concerned with butter, bread, power and culture issues (Ogunyemi 2007: 4). The apprehension with culture additionally suggests a denunciation of repressive traditions and cultures that approve the subjugation of the female. Onai is depicted as a conqueror of cultural coercion, as she refuses to fit into an endorsed culture in African tradition that a woman ought to uphold tradition and suffer badly for it. Consequently, Onai is ready to compromise, if Gari consents to an HIV test, because for a long time she has denied herself the basic needs of her womanhood. Therefore, sharing the intimacy willingly again, and without fear, would be good for her, as the novel illustrates that "she is fully prepared to meet Gari halfway" (212). Tagwira tactically positions women to obtain an advantage in their sexual interactions with their men. Onai's construction of significant self-awareness in the framework of HIV and AIDS is situated right at the centre of her physical and psychological journey that seems to place her in a position of control. Certainly, Tagwira through her narrative suggests that the potential of women to get to the highest level of development is tied to the engagement of men as well. Tagwira's womanist depictions correspond with Ogunyemi's claim that African womanism is accommodative and encourages coherence between black women

and black men. Instead of merely displaying subjugation, the African womanist stories offer resolutions that seem to be workable for the African woman.

The novel reinforces the idea of sisterhood. In her eagerness to promote this bond, Faith worries that her friend Melody has exposed herself to the risk of HIV, although Melody insists that she has been using condoms to protect herself. But Faith is still worried about her, as she occasionally is about herself. In the novel, there is a rich assertion of an African womanist viewpoint when the girls concur that womenfolk ought to care for one another (Tagwira 2006: 174). Their closeness is obviously articulated. One distinguishing feature of these girls is clear: they do not crave for anti-male opinions to unite them. Here, Tagwira portrays a critical aspect of women's participation towards seeing fellow women evade the risk of HIV. It is at this stage that we see Faith suggesting that it would be prudent for Melody and Tom to go for an HIV test before they become intimate (174).

Faith, a trained lawyer, represents the force behind a balanced femininity that exhibits women's awareness and self-emancipation. Ogundipe-Leslie's (1995) style to women's collective and social revolution complements this research. She discourses female eccentricity and emancipation. She asks what empowerment means to black women of the diaspora and Africa? She argues that it implies dignity and social gratitude; it implies freedom to communicate, live and act with responsibility and happiness (1995: 17). Ogundipe-Leslie further contends that one of the obligations of the woman author ought to be to the amendment of untruthful descriptions of the women in Africa (61). She supposes that this method will alleviate the weight of African women. She expresses the emancipation of African women, contending that it is not a gentleness to be accorded by concerned men. She acknowledges that: It is not the consequence of compassionate or humanitarian approaches. It is an essential prerequisite for transformation, the assurance of its steadiness and requirement of its triumph (1994: 161). Tagwira inherently encapsulates a crucial thematic apprehension of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. In one episode of *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Katy is represented sitting alone and making a deliberate decision to go for an HIV test. She also thinks that she should persuade her friend Onai to go for one as well, after the dust has settled in her life (Tagwira 2006: 244). This deliberate choice of going for an HIV test highlights women's efforts towards negotiating new femininities.

On her way home, Onai passes by the New Start Centre offices, and she notices a bright orange sign depicting the rising sun inviting people to come forward for free HIV tests. During this time, she knows that being married to Gari has put her at considerable risk; and, deep in her heart, she knows that she should go for the HIV test (304). Symbolically, the colour orange signifies a brighter future. This exemplifies the author's envisioning of a world that is free from HIV and AIDS. Ardnt (2002: 110) maintains that, to be honestly farsighted, we need to stem our creativity in our tangible realism whilst concurrently envisioning prospects beyond that truth. Ardnt additionally notes that radical components of a liberal collective and social objection will persist to operate as an ideological assistance structure offering the essential analytical and critical incentive for the conservation of liberalism that intends to award women better opportunity (22).

The novel notes that in a year's time, Onai would name her eldest son, Fari, as her protector. She is forced to adopt a new social standing and identity because she does not want to be subdued by her culture. According to the Shona culture, it is customarily accepted for any woman who does not want to be passed on to one of her husband's relatives, in the case of death of her own husband (Tagwira 2006: 245). Onai vocalises her mistreatment by refusing to be blinded to subordination and subjugation. Barbara Berg in her expanded definition of feminism notes that feminism is an autonomy to determine one's individual fate; independence from society's repressive constraints; liberty to convey opinions totally and to transform them easily to actions. Feminism calls for the approval of female's right to personal judgment and conscience. It hypothesises that a female's crucial importance stems from her universal compassion and does not rely on the other connections of her life (Berg 1979: 260). The thrust of this narrative succeeds in portraying a bold statement for the existence of toughness and feminist awareness in women during the time of HIV and AIDS.

4.4 Love and Affection: Beauty's Gift and Secrets of a Woman's Soul

Susan Sontag, in *AIDS and its Metaphors* (1988), argues that individuals should dialogue about HIV as an illness instead of an ethical problem. Her book points to the dangerous untruth about HIV and AIDS: the conviction many share that, like the plague and tuberculosis, AIDS is a highly contagious disease which can be contracted from the most casual contact, such as coughing and sneezing. This erroneous assumption has created enormous physical, economic and psychological hardship for individuals living with HIV and their loved ones, and is one of the major false beliefs

literature on AIDS has tried to correct. These female authors through their literary representations in different settings attempt to bring home to many people the truths about HIV and AIDS.

Women's solidarity is key, particularly in this time of HIV and AIDS. They get strength through supporting one another, thereby overcoming difficult times in life when they come to one another's rescue. Ogundipe-Leslie contends that watching women in their different places, giving interest to women closeness which lacks in the African literature authored by men, would generate an appropriate epistemology for African women (1994: 11). In response to the AIDS pandemic, the three women authors have conceptualised the theme of love in their literary works. It is worth noting that the novel, *Beauty's Gift* (Magona 2008), is inscribed within the framework of the HIV and AIDS epidemic at an era when countless of the affected and infected were never prepared to admit their state. The story starts with Beauty's memorial service and afterwards narrates her short life. Mamkwayi offers a shoulder of support to her daughter when she falls sick. She displays empathy towards her and through the eyes of a mother, she embraces love and care for her daughter as she stands with her through thick and thin the entire time Beauty is sick. It is interesting to note that the unconditional love is offered in the spirit of motherhood. The novel, therefore, represents a hopeful future for women in South Africa, as Mamkwayi is represented as a bearer of strength and humanity.

Beauty's Gift is centred on the development of Amanda's responsibility bound by love. Her togetherness with the rest of the woman friends is clearly articulated in their sense of friendship that highlights their zealous sense of devotion towards Beauty as they nurse her in her sick bed. Magona renders the chief impetus of the story clear: to make certain that black women are unified. These views are also mirrored in Amanda's agency as she swears that she will not leave Beauty alone, stating that quitting would be the last approval that she is gone (Magona 2008: 13). In the same way, Beauty's woman friends are empowered by their shared experience of blackness and, hence Beauty's life resides at the centre of the group of her four friends. Clearly, Amanda and Beauty unanimously share a particular sistership that has been developed socially, and, in my opinion, this is a positive declaration that transcends being biological siblings. Their sistership validates Chandra Mohanty's principle that the unity of womenfolk is best recognised not as awarded. It is one that has to be toiled for (1995: 77). In the same way, it is through this unification that Cordelia, Doris, and Edith share in common a solid line of support (Magona 2008: 14). In

essence, their actions result in hope for Beauty. Consequently, she is thrilled by this gesture, as their expressions of reassurance offer her a new tenancy of life. This unification of women is best identified as love born out of a deliberate attempt by all of them to support and unite in a time of crisis. The kind of bond they display therefore goes beyond mere friendship.

By finding a common ground across all the female characters in the novel, Magona's novel holds central the importance of love and affection in the time of AIDS for an African woman. Her literary task of bringing closure to Beauty's death suggests how society can contribute to the bold attempt to use women's voice to invoke women's commitment and devotion. Prior to Beauty's death, when her face swells, her woman friends get concerned. They urge her to go for medication. "'We owe it to Beauty to make sure she is getting the treatment she needs and deserves'" (61), says Doris. By uttering these words, she signifies the kind of sisterhood expected from women. This is read as a true friendship. As exemplified, Magona in her novel portrays the significance of sisterly unity in women's battles in both the public and domestic realms of women's lives. Therefore, Magona succeeds in depicting, for the reader, the importance of a network of women coming together in aid of one another, an act that is interpreted as love. This is seen in Beauty's friends when they demonstrate the purpose of empowerment and development of helping out their friend. Additionally, the narrative is rooted in the traditional African background; Edith reassures Beauty that nothing is going to change, that they will continue to visit her parents if she dies (48). This alludes to women supporting one another in the struggle against the pandemic. Read this way, women are capable of taking an honourable stance to go beyond social anticipations of what encompasses feminine roles.

4.5 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been on analysing the representations of women's willingness to communicate about AIDS, love and affection and feminist awareness in three literary texts, namely: *Beauty's Gift*, *Uncertainty of Hope*, and *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. Each one of the novels analysed in this chapter offers imaginary depictions of the shift from a negative representation of women characters and focus on the strength of women living with HIV and AIDS as well as those affected by this disease. The analysis reveals that female characters negotiate their identities out of victimhood to subjects of their own stories. Additionally, the analysis of this

chapter leads to the conclusion that a shift of feminist awareness demonstrates that women shunning the prejudices and myths associated with HIV and AIDS, and accepting the reality of the HIV and AIDS menace with candour in their conservative communities, leads to the deconstructive interpretation of the disease that was once thought a death trap. Lastly, by means of textual analysis this section argues that all three of the women authors provide insights of optimism. The study therefore concludes that the redemption of women from the scourge of HIV and AIDS is pegged on their candour and willingness to confront the disease by embracing open communication. Finally, the study concludes that key to feminist awareness is the construction of women's identities, which intensifies women's quest of regaining control towards survival in the perspective of HIV and AIDS through the concept of love and affection.

5. CHAPTER FIVE: RESILIENCE AND COPING MECHANISMS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines Trauma, Hope and Coping Mechanisms of women infected and affected by HIV and AIDS in three novels: *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* (2006), *Beauty's Gift* (2008) and *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006). The study demonstrates the characters' resilience and their agency in mitigating their traumatic experiences. Different forms of coping mechanisms employed by female characters in the specific novels under examination are captured. I argue that disclosure, writing, family unity, guidance and counselling, and Christianity are some of the ways of coping with HIV-related trauma.

5.2 Trauma, Hope and Coping Mechanisms

The study in this section examines the theme of hope and coping mechanisms. The research addresses the issues and concerns raised in fiction through analysing the traumatic realities of life and how women living with HIV and AIDS resiliently face these challenges. Different forms of coping mechanisms employed by female characters in the specific novels under examination are captured. Additionally, the research demonstrates the characters' resilience and their agency in mitigating their traumatic experiences. Over thirty years since the emergence of HIV in South Africa and Zimbabwe, for men and women living with AIDS, hope in traumatic situations has been difficult to find. According to Rodi Risberg, trauma is an occurrence that is extremely disturbing to be entirely disclosed upon occurrence. It is barely experienced belatedly. It presents encounters to conventional concepts of referentiality (2006: 33). Trauma is regarded from a negative standpoint due to its explicit link to a negative episode or experience. Echoing Risberg's definition of trauma, authors like Mpe, Magona, Tagwira and Shaba through their representations of HIV and AIDS in their works of art have come up with essential coping abilities of HIV-positive characters.

5.2.1 The Quest for Living: *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*

In *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, trauma is reflected through the characterisation of HIV-positive women, Linga and Beata. The novel highlights the representation of these two women characters

by capturing their societal connections, feelings, emotions, and obstacles intrinsic in their life calendar. The story presented in this text grapples with matters concerning affection, aspiration, tolerance, and loneliness of women characters living with HIV and AIDS. Linga is aware that her despair results from her mother's deteriorating health status. The narrative therefore takes Linga's traumatic journey back into her deeper past. Paul Marder (2006) defines a stressful occurrence as a peculiar nature or episode that cannot be situated within the restrictions of time and place, consequently literature is one of the channels through which we communicate proceedings about human involvements that cannot be confined by other regular styles of expression.

Beata wishes to be treated well by her friends and community. However, she gradually succumbs to the stereotypes and discrimination in her society. This leads to her losing interest in herself and developing a low self-esteem (Shaba 2006: 80). Linga experiences dark times and her show of trauma is painted through the concept that arises out of her mother's plight. Beata, a conventionally destitute character in the novel, represents a kind of idealised bleakness which is characterised by disillusionment. She is met with despair, as she selfishly escapes the harshness of reality. The novel highlights her inner struggles with her self-identity due to HIV and AIDS. She makes an assumption that one cannot survive in a society full of hatred and stigma towards people living with AIDS (80). Beata is essentially negatively situated, and for most of the narrative we are inspired to be exceedingly critical of the version of pessimism that she personifies. However, Shaba calls for a kind of femininity that is empathetic and considerate through Beata's story in the text.

In the novel, *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, there is a shift in the manner each of the characters reacts to HIV and AIDS. It is these distinguished reactions that allow Shaba to give a gallery of women characters who describe optimism and resilience in approaches that go beyond the distinctiveness of HIV and AIDS. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* is a semi-autobiographical novel. The significance of this narrative originates right away from its structure as a coping mechanism. Shaba reflects on the hardships endured by her female protagonist, Linga, and how she comes up with survival tactics that empower her to rebuild her life and desire for a healthier future prospect. In the novel, Linga is a teenager when she falls prey to HIV and AIDS. Later on, she experiences a period of peace as an adult. It is only after experiencing difficult times that she displays a semblance of womanpower. The description of hope and resilience is read through her characterisation and

portrayal in the novel. The narrative, therefore, becomes an illustration of how women redescribe and recreate concepts of gender and femininity when composing about HIV and AIDS (Attree 2010a: 65). Linga embodies key qualities of optimism as she does not play a victim, even though she has every right to believe like one following the sufferings she has endured from the time she contracts HIV in high school to the time she gets to know and accept her mother's HIV status. The source of her internal strength is based on her desire to grasp hope while maintaining her individuality.

A coping mechanism is a set of actions or beliefs in life that helps a person deal with a certain aspect or situation. Different people have different coping methods. The author contrasts Beata's situation with Linga's. Beata fails to realise that hope in itself is a healing therapy, whereas Linga accepts her predicament in her particular sense (Shaba 2006: 79). Her HIV condition is a valuable thwart to Beata's, as it regularises their stance in relation to one another, and eliminates the shame that could otherwise have placed them on an equal balance. However, Beata's position is direr, as her coping mechanism is triggered and defined by her internal consciousness; nevertheless, this study focuses on the constructive aspect. Linga becomes an anchor for Beata.

There are psychological, physical and emotional coping mechanisms. Women die silently for fear of disclosing their HIV status. The novel notes through its characters that the life of people living with HIV and AIDS lies with their capacity to cope with their condition to survive. Suniya Luthar notes that resilience is elucidated as an energetic process where individuals show positive variation despite practices of substantial trauma or hardship. This term does not signify a personality attribute or a trait of the individual, somewhat, it is a double-dimensional concept that indicates acquaintance to misfortune and the expression of positive modification results (2000: 858).

The novel notes that "One outcome of Linga's healing was that she acquired the calmness and coherence to start putting down the first words of the story of her mother's life. A story that for the two years since her mother's death she had wanted to tell, but she had not known how or where to start" (Shaba 2006: 14-15). The healing therapy is evident in Linga. She holds on to the memory of her late mother but ultimately tries to block the sombre thoughts that linger in her mind. This is a coping therapy that works best for her.

Often the process of disclosure is associated with feelings of shame and worthlessness and is experienced as a traumatic event for HIV-positive individuals. Linga's passion for life and her vibrancy captures the attention of the reader. Her character showcases toughness and bravery superior to that of her spouse as she courageously goes for an HIV test, and then faces the consequences of the results by disclosing her positive status to her husband (90). She knows and accepts her HIV status, therefore forging acceptance. Disclosure here is perceived as a coping mechanism, but not for all cases, for instance Sheila in *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006) faces rejection by her family upon disclosing her HIV status. Her family members who are perceived as a source of support withdraw from helping her when they discover her status. Through Sheila's case, the novel notes that disclosing one's status may sometimes carry the risk of altering family relationships.

Neville Miller and Donald Rubin note: "Disclosure to a partner is an even more complex process as HIV-positive individuals will face the possibility of a loss of intimacy, rejection from their partners as well as a disintegration to their well-being. Studies have also shown that disclosure can lead to the loss of intimate partners or personal intimacy" (2007: 24). However, ultimately in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, it is important to note that through Linga, Shaba holds disclosure as an important aspect that gives strength and freedom to her women characters living with HIV and AIDS. In fact, Linga does not only come to terms with her problems but additionally triumphs over them. This is component of her sail to deliverance and greatness, as she demonstrates that even with the subject of HIV hovering over her head, and her position as a female, she is able to go beyond her dilemma through disclosing her HIV status. She lives through the rest of her life happy, except when her dream is broken by her divorce with Simba. Although this divorce is ruinous, Linga succeeds to survive as she rapidly understands that she holds her own destiny. She could easily think that her life was malformed and cease to have any passion for living. Ultimately, Linga accepts herself as an independent woman who does not require any man for a companion. This is illustrated in the narrative when her husband filed for a divorce when he got to know of Linga's HIV status and their discordant situation. Luckily, Linga does not define herself fully through the walls of HIV and AIDS (Shaba 2006: 91).

Another critical aspect of resilience and coping strategy as the novel indicates is through writing. Writing is a healing process and a coping mechanism towards a sense of worth. Yvonne Vera

(1999), the Zimbabwean feminist author in the foreword to *Opening Spaces*, establishes the space for women's authorship in Zimbabwe. She defines the power of writing and the autonomy it accords the female gender. Vera advocates the expression of women's concerns and their agency in addressing the plight of women. Linga captures her sharp pains, deep shock and loss, and darkest moments through writing. Her encounter with her writing leads to a path of emotive self-finding where she wrestles with her new-found capability to convey and feel an expressive ground, whereas concurrently endeavouring to hide these feelings (Shaba 2006: 92). Ultimately, this expressive writing has a significant healing effect on Linga as she is able to find meaning in life.

There is a connection between fiction and the author's background. Shaba, the author of *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, takes a restorative journey from HIV and AIDS infection through autobiographical writing. Judith Coullie and Stephan Meyer (2006) contend that the collective personalities we generate through intertwining our auto/biographical interpretations into that of others are tangled to subjects of dissociation and association, social action, and supremacy. They argue that in positioning ourselves in relation to others, we connect ourselves with them or detach ourselves from them. Through auto/biographical interpretations we create and strengthen relations to friends, significant others, citizens, comrades and colleagues, and distance ourselves from opponents, strangers, enemies and adversaries. In this way we build social realism that closes or exposes off some aspects of shared existence (2006: 3).

Consequently, autobiography, similar to other genres of literature, develops an apparatus for social reform and transformation. HIV-positive authors, for instance Shaba, find comfort in the autobiographical interpretations of their characters in comparable settings. This autobiographical nature of writing unravels the scuffles in redeeming one's cognisance in coping with HIV and AIDS. Although the novel, *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, is transcribed as an imaginative writing, it is grounded on a factual story (Shaba 2006: 7). This means that Shaba aligns herself to the fictional character in the novel. Her personal experiences feed the narrative. Noting that Shaba is an activist author living with HIV, one can argue that *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* mirrors her own life experience. The technique of authoring about the self is imperative in reconstructing concepts of identity and individuality. Simon Gikandi claims convincingly when he notes that to write is to claim a narrative of one's personality; textuality is a tool of regional reclamation; since the other deliberates on us an identity that separates us from ourselves, story-telling is vital to the sighting

of our selfhood. The text is a reflection in which the subject will get itself mirrored (1992: 384). Thus, autobiographical writing serves as an instrument in marshalling and linking individuals through the commonality of their challenges and involvements.

In the novel, the influence of counselling plays a major role in the social life of Linga. Her interaction with Rufaro prompts her to meet Ayesha the counsellor. Rufaro refers Linga to her, saying, ““This woman is a healer, so go there with an open mind”” (Shaba 2006: 14). Linga responds to the theme of hope in the narrative, and the purpose for this is elucidated in the text after she converses with Ayesha, to whom she is appreciative for directing her to a more tolerant worldview. Her greatest confrontation comes from battling with herself, and so her journey is mostly a journey into herself, and it is counselling that instils her with a sense of strength. The author expresses her thoughts and feelings by offering the strongest voice of hope through Linga. Alois Mlambo makes some noteworthy observations regarding resilience. According to him, resilience underscores the influence that the individuals have, rather than their susceptibility, through exploring the surviving approaches that they showcase (2014: 39). Ultimately in the novel, Ayesha offers facilitating new ways of conceptualising desire for hope and identity through guidance and counselling. As such, her embodiment of restoration through counselling becomes a place of consolation for Linga. She gradually experiences a change in consciousness, and this actively brings about her stability. To the readers, Linga possesses hope, a symbol of coping with adversity. Ultimately, this confidence is commendable in what the readers might view as a death sentence.

Shaba highlights that women’s education is an important step towards their deliverance. For Shaba, an educated woman owns more opportunities than one who is uneducated. Her character Linga is a good example. Unlike Beata, Linga’s education empowers her to acquire hope and regain control of her life. She lives positively, accesses therapy and upholds a clear visualisation of her life (Shaba 2006: 93). Linga is a representation of optimism, an embodiment of the idea that persons living with the AIDS virus could still live a normal life.

In the novel acceptance is characterised as a foundation of solace for persons living with HIV and AIDS. It is a road to emotional and psychological cure for HIV-positive individuals. Linga coming to terms with her HIV status signifies the acceptance of her self-dignity. She is no longer repressed

and manipulated by her community's prejudice and stereotypes. In the face of acceptance lies healing. Linga creates a new world by willingly embracing acceptance. The narrator notes "The acceptance that death is not the termination of life, and that in life there are cycles and lessons that we have to go through and learn from to become better people" (2). The most positive element of Linga is her commitment in engaging with self-acceptance and in so doing, refusing trauma to thrive over her. A whole episode of her life begins to unfold upon acceptance. This act ultimately makes Linga rise above her fate. While navigating through challenging experiences, she takes a major step of accepting her HIV condition, switching from denial to acceptance. This is well illustrated in the story when Linga is initially confronted with the reality of her HIV status and later in the novel she embraces acceptance. She realises that being infected with HIV does not translate to death. The hope in her provides insights into the way in which HIV individuals should live. For Linga, the confidence that is inside her continues to stay present and she never loses hope. She showcases that hope can become strong in a storm. The novel therefore makes Linga an archetype of countless women who are determined to make peace with their enigmas. The narrator details that Linga knew her emotive existence depended on her capability to gain strength from the good memoirs, and to try and ignore the awful things that tainted her present. The narrator further notes:

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)

The focus on agency by Shaba is an enthusiastic act. She firmly refuses to depict women as sufferers. Instead, she projects them as focused persons willing to go beyond cultural and social guidelines in a bid to survive. Linga draws power to live from her happy memories. The novel's message is that even if women like Linga in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* contract HIV, they persistently reject to let the virus destabilise their determination to live, thus disregarding the common belief that when one contracts HIV, it becomes a fatal sentence. These womenfolk dig deep within themselves and obtain spiritual nourishment to live constructively with HIV. Linga is a good example, as she authorises a new identity of resilience in the face of HIV and AIDS.

5.2.2 Voice of Courage: Life after Testing HIV-positive: *Beauty's Gift*

The novel *Beauty's Gift* corresponds to Ogundipe-Leslie's contest that the African woman writer has dual tasks: to narrate the story of being a female first, and secondly to portray the world from an African female's standpoint, instead of being chained by destructive self-image (1994: 10). The novel was written at the time HIV and AIDS prevalence was rife, and at the time the South African nation had a mentality that HIV equals death. Therefore, a conceptual shift in attempting to empower HIV-positive women to discover and develop their own resilience and strengths in the difficult time is key. Magona's passion for hope takes centre stage. Through her narrative, she believes that focusing attention on women's strengths in this perspective reduces the negative consequences of HIV and AIDS.

Beauty's life is filled with abandonment in her married life. In her battle with HIV and AIDS, she takes the opportunity to speak out about her plight to her friends, Edith, Amanda, Cordelia and Doris in order to caution them about HIV and AIDS. She goes out to have fun with them and she musters up boldness to speak up so as to prevent them from a comparable outcome. Ultimately, this outing with her woman friends is marked with relief on Beauty's part, as her wellbeing is matched with her effectiveness in speaking out about her ailing condition. Elaine Maane argues that women gain power through helping each other, through meditating for each other, through weeping collectively and nurturing each other's family when down and out (2009: 186). Echoing Maane's sentiments, Beauty's woman friends do not cut her out of their lives, instead they offer her their friendship, support and love without fear. They have shown that women can achieve optimism by supporting one another. Consequently, Beauty's woman friends allow her to suppress the emotions and trauma associated with her illness through their light chats and laughter. This simultaneously allows her to partake in the act of forgetting her stress related illness. Laughter is anarchic, anti-authoritarian and cathartic. Therefore, laughing becomes one of her coping mechanisms, as she is not intimidated by fear anymore.

Contrary to Magona's representation of a coping mechanism through a network of friends, Tin Myint and Bob Mash hold a different view. In their research work, they report that patients largely used dynamic coping approaches including emotive support, recognition, positive planning and reframing. Evasion coping approaches, such as withdrawal, denial and drug use, remained

common. The majority of patients turned to religious conviction to cope, which may possibly have assisted them to obtain spiritual support and meaning. Most of the patients had unveiled their status after two weeks and recounted emotive assistance as their most common surviving approach (2008: 277).

Further in the spirit of coping with HIV and AIDS, Beauty never allows her predicament to clog her vision of what needs to be done, instead she uses it as a way to push forward. She faces a lot of hardship before embracing hope. Ultimately, she is able to draw the strength to live from her family, especially her mother who displays heroic qualities when she stood and took care of her when she was ailing. Family endorsement is vital for persons living with HIV. John Macionis and Ken Plummer provide a classification of the word family, noting that the family has been a societal establishment, observed in all groups of cultures, that connects persons into supportive groupings that administer the producing and raising of children. Many families are established on a social bond, kinship, centred on blood, adoption or marriage, that connects persons into families (2008: 580).

In this collaboration, the family unit performs a crucial task as the principal organisation of formative care and support. The novel notes that family units are examples of the structures of a coping mechanism. In this time of HIV and AIDS, families are called upon to respond and manage the unpredictable HIV related illness. As a stay-at-home-mother, Mamkwayi is fully dedicated to the role of a mother. She has sacrificed herself for the sake of her children. She is a prime example of a caregiver. She is viewed as a centre of meaning and a field of care. She shows the greatest affection, which is directed toward Beauty, as she expresses concern for her. With no specialised training and guidance, Mamkwayi is subjected to perils and struggles as she strives to become a pillar of hope and a strong support to Beauty during the time she falls sick. Ultimately, Beauty's recovery seems to attract an optimistic stance for the accomplishment of her emancipating journey. Even though she dies, she dies a fulfilling death, and she is able to bring hope back to the individuals infected and affected by HIV.

In a related manner, Tracey Farren's short story, "The Death of a Queen", foregrounds the final weeks of a woman plagued with HIV and AIDS:

Two days were all she asked. Two days to show her baby to her mother, to prove that her death would not be in vain. A life for a life, is what she wanted to say, and then she could return to Cape Town. Armed with soup for the journey and a gift of tea for her mother, Cecelia took a long-distance bus to her grave. (2004: 113)

The above depiction showcases the special attachment and comfort women get from their mothers, especially in the time of illness and bereavement. This demonstrates a unique bond that girls have with their mothers.

Beauty's death is a major setback for her friends and family. As a result of her death, Amanda and the rest of Beauty's friends are subjected to feelings of loneliness, alienation, depression and estrangement. The woman friends display a profound sadness, but they find solace through a Christian song:

Hymn 100 poured out of her throat. In the entire world of the hymnary, Beauty had adored that hymn best of all

Ndakugqala umnqamlezo,

Afa kuwo uMsindisi,

Sendilahla yonk' indyebo

Ndilidele ikratshi lam! (Magona 2008: 12)

In the context of the above hymn, Christianity opens doors and offers comfort for Beauty's woman friends who have just been bereaved. Cheryl Stobie (2010) notes that dedication to the Virgin Mary has for a long time been relevant in Catholicism, and her veneration as mother of Jesus is endorsed by the Second Vatican Council, putting importance on her capability to give comfort and hope (2010: 430). Notably in *Beauty's Gift*, Christianity is depicted as providing a way of coping with death. It is a religion that holds out the promise of resurrection. Magona identifies some positive aspects of spiritual interventions. It is evident at this point that Magona imagines that women's participation in a spiritual context is therapeutic. Amanda sings the initial line on her own, but by the time she begins the second line, the rest of the woman friends sing along with her (2008: 12).

In the text, Magona uses music as a platform to provide an effective means for dealing with the aftermath of the traumatic event of Beauty's death. Similarly, spiritual healing is a powerful tool towards reclaiming agency. This is another approach that the author uses to reconstruct resilience in the era of HIV and AIDS, as a spiritual path creates a sense of wholeness. It is remarkable to note, nonetheless, that Magona amalgamates Christian faith to demonstrate the role of devotion and piety in expressing hope when facing death.

In society, women are empowered to shape their destiny, despite the difficulties they face. Equally in the novel, Nomtha Langa's reaching out to her community is interpreted as a special therapy of coping with stress related to HIV and AIDS. Expressively extending the principle of womanist philosophy, Ijeoma Nwajaku opines that womanism requests dialogism and pursues interactive opinion whilst renouncing dogmatism and absolutism (2004: 56). The narrative reveals that despite the challenges faced by these women, they still remain resilient, hopeful and find other ways to continue living with a dreaded illness. Therefore, coping strategies help womenfolk to tackle their illness and come to terms with the disease.

5.2.3 Representations of Hope: Conceptualising Gender and Hope in *The Uncertainty of Hope*

This sub-chapter focuses on womenfolk and how they deal with their survival in the context of HIV and AIDS. The section discusses the survival and coping strategies of Zimbabwean women at the height of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, socio-economic and political crisis in the Zimbabwean nation.

Resilience theory in literature can consequently aid in opening informative openings for expounding the exemplification of the inspirational survival strategies of Zimbabwean urbanites as a literary case study (Mlambo, 2015: 49). Through Faith, the author summarises the effect of the economy on womenfolk noting that Faith had thought of her mother participating in an illegal foreign-currency trade to educate her through university and construct a dream home. She remembered Onai straining to bring up her three children in an obnoxious marriage: of Melody, swapping her naiveté for university groceries and fees. She remembered Onai's tenant, Sheila, a self-declared former flesh peddler whose concern for starvation had been larger than her worry of

HIV infection (Tagwira 2006: 82). This represents an outline of Zimbabwean women's strivings in the face of HIV in a disintegrating financial system and economy. Tagwira contends that womenfolk in distinct situations grapple with severe encounters but are constantly circumnavigating their path in order to survive. These women characters for instance, Katy, Onai and Melody, articulate specific as well as combined harrowing events that characterise their lives in the time of HIV and AIDS.

Tagwira advocates for a further practical method that recognises women's struggles to remedy the tasks they encounter in their community. Livelihoods are vital to people's physical and cultural wellbeing, as well as to their social uniqueness, created and still under construction. The intensely engrained cultural sensibilities which have been passed from generation to generation and the built identities of the people, are vulnerable in times of crisis as individuals embrace several approaches in the quest of workable livelihoods in response to the constrictions effected by the crisis (Mlambo 2015: 50). Over three decades since the emergence of HIV, for individuals living with AIDS, hope has been difficult to find. In the novel, hope comes in many forms, and a support group is one of them. Trauma is usually observed in families struggling to cope with a family member's HIV and AIDS status. Involvement in a support group enables some women to cope better with their illness. Resilience thus stresses the strengths that the individuals have rather than their susceptibility, through discovering the coping approaches that the people unveil (Mlambo 2015:49). Through the Kushinga self-help group, Tagwira expresses the ability of the support group to destigmatise the disease and provide joy and laughter for women in light of their HIV and AIDS burden. Ultimately, the lived experiences and resilience of the normal persons in conveying, responding to and coping with the core political calamity is what Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* exemplifies (Mlambo 2015: 50). Correspondingly in the text, Sheila confronts what rests in front of her as an HIV victim. Her attitude to her HIV condition is also logical as she wholeheartedly admits her situation noting that she was once a prostitute. Ultimately, the future seems to be incredibly depressing when she is threatened with the shock of her own condition, which she acknowledges. Eventually, she takes responsibility for having contracted HIV. Tagwira, through Onai, also discourses about the Zimbabwean predicament and how resilient, optimistic and hopeful people are to be able to soar above the waters. Nonetheless the message has a collective appeal, therefore the importance of imaginary works in Africa (Mlambo 2015).

5.3 Conclusion

The novels analysed in the second section clearly capture the different forms of trauma and coping strategies for HIV-positive individuals. It reveals that the healing therapy as the novels indicate is through disclosure and writing. The analysis further reveals that counselling and acceptance of one's status is therapeutic. Consequently, Christianity is epitomised as a coping influence that presents womenfolk with a background in which they can heal from the wounds of the discovery of their HIV status. Additionally, the research observes that friendship bonds between women in the time of HIV and AIDS is therapeutic. Moreover, the analysis of this chapter leads to the conclusion that laughter is anarchic, anti-authoritarian and cathartic for coping with stress related to HIV and AIDS. This is illustrated in *Beauty's Gift* when Beauty goes out together with her woman friends. While having meals they engage in hearty stories and laughter and by the time she gets home she is already refreshed and has forgotten the stress and pain inflicted by her husband. Lastly, the research concludes that disclosure and spiritual therapy, and switching from denial to acceptance, are examples of stress relievers that exemplify resilience.

6. CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

My main focus in this thesis has been to analyse the authors' depictions of socio-economic and cultural burdens suffered by HIV-positive women and girls in the selected southern African texts published between 2004 and 2008, as well as providing a close reading of women's plight and their coping mechanisms. Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001), Lutanga Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* (2006), Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006) and Sindiwe Magona's *Beauty's Gift* (2008), all published after 2000, fall within the exponential phase of the rise of HIV in southern Africa. Along with the three female authors of my primary texts, I chose one male author so as to cultivate an awareness of the representation of the plight of women from the perspective of a progressive member of the male gender.

6.2 Synopsis of Chapters

Chapter One focuses on the purpose of the study, background to the study, historical contextualisation of HIV and AIDS in South Africa and Zimbabwe, Literature review, theoretical framework, research objectives and chapter overview.

Chapter Two focuses on Magona's fictional representations of social realities of the plight of HIV-positive women characters in *Beauty's Gift*. Magona draws our attention to a country whose women and girls are the most vulnerable and abused in her society. Demonstrating a thorough understanding of the socio-political and historical landscape of the prevalence of HIV and AIDS in South Africa, Magona carries the theme of illness with a positive mind. Her character, Beauty, meaningfully confronts HIV by fusing resilience and illness. She exploits her own sickness and refashions it into strength. Beauty helps the reader to acknowledge that people living with HIV and AIDS are not beyond the social pale.

A fictional story is a channel that encapsulates the distinctiveness of a character's participation and that of the imaginary world in which the novelist locates her. The novel's title points to a dominant topic in the story, which is the connection between Beauty and her woman friends. The title provides an authoritative gauge of the interdependent link between Beauty and her woman

friends that is deeply rooted in the time of sickness. This engagement of friendship reinforces the importance of constructive ties as they all find points of connection through Beauty's illness. With this observation in mind, the analysis demonstrates the overarching concern of Magona which is to link the individual to the collective. Through *Beauty's Gift*, Magona considers the role of women in a troubled HIV-epidemic prevalent country. There is much to be gained from Magona's contributions, especially with regard to the primacy of women's relationships during sickness. For instance, Beauty, who is strikingly portrayed as the star in the narrative, engenders authority despite her illness. She assumes agency, and also represents an appealing character whom readers are encouraged to identify with.

A significant representation of shame and humiliation shapes the imaginary trajectories underlying several structures of mutual affinity in Zimbabwe today. The sheer exposure of stigma that characterises Shaba's writing affects the incorporation of the impression of indignity and mediocrity that it engenders. In *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, culture defines disease which ultimately attracts public stigma. Shaba brings to question public and internalised perceived stigma. Beata has serious concerns over her deteriorating health, while secrecy takes a centre stage in her life. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* offers salient factual representations of stigma in Zimbabwe. There is a crucial reality that culture and disease have been taken to a complex level. Culture acts as a catalyst. Shaba actively seeks to cultivate new structures of engagements and new conceptual procedures, through which the stigma and discrimination can be appropriately understood and negotiated. Her subject testifies to the powerful creative combination of stigma and discrimination. The narrative encapsulates in concrete terms Shaba's understanding of transformation of public and self-perception of HIV and AIDS. The characterisation of Linga plays a significant role in the story. Her ability to change perceptions has significant implications for my reading of Shaba's novel. Linga's survival in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* concludes the narrative on a promising tone, with the vow for the liberation of HIV-positive individuals.

The global contest for the right to medication for persons living with HIV can be perceived as a significant measure in the empowerment of women. The South African Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), alongside other HIV-activism, is raising the question of HIV from the personal to the political level of the global fight. Access to health care and medical treatment is an essential part of this battle, but the social empowerment that such 'medicalisation campaigns' mean for

women also poses a challenge to other forms of social imbalances (Arnfred 2004: 100). In *Beauty's Gift*, the author's challenge to the version of stigma and discrimination conventionally celebrated in traditional societies in South Africa is complemented by the way in which Magona influences the characteristics of the prototypical woman character. For instance, her character, Mrs Mazwi, takes the responsibility of campaigning against HIV and AIDS in her community. Magona does more, nonetheless, than simply challenging the existing informative forms of stigma. She enthusiastically seeks to create new structures of engagement, new imaginative counter-procedures, through which the various susceptibilities of the post-apartheid society might be suitably discussed, recognised and appreciated.

For example, Mrs Mazwi discusses a distinct pattern of the spread of HIV and AIDS at the family level. From Mrs Mazwi's activism, the novel's reader gains a wider understanding of the prevention, treatment, and reduction of vulnerability. Magona therefore, through Mrs Mazwi, emphasises the need for individuals to transcend their negative and adopted prejudices. Magona chooses enlightenment to HIV and AIDS in order to dissipate misinformation and myths, which in this case include denial, stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS. Shaba's narrative serves as an illustration of a lucid definition of stigma. Her narrative is appropriate for representing forms of social inequality and spaces of differences. HIV and AIDS stigma is handled differently across societies. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* makes the crucial point that captures a rich socio-cultural context of stigma. Imke Van Heerden offers a definition of stigma, noting that stigmatisation encompasses a simple effort to keep infectious persons at bay (2017: 13). Shaba uses her literary work to reflect the realities in Zimbabwe. Her work of art is remarkably valuable in that it exposes the role of literature in probing discrimination against HIV-positive individuals while raising awareness of social justice and equality for HIV-positive women. Furthermore, in this chapter, a close reading of *Beauty's Gift* shares the idea that Magona activates readers' active sympathies by her poignant representations of bereavement and grief in the narrative. In the description of the close ties between Beauty and her woman friends, Magona highlights the intensity of loss and grief that women endure. She evokes sympathy for feminine subjectivity by revealing the intensity of loss and grief that women bear. The readers' alignment with grief is encouraged through Magona's depiction of Mamkwayi, who displays pity and sorrow. The study thus notes that the author believes that women bear the social and economic burden of

the death of their children due to AIDS. The discussion in this research therefore concludes that coping with the loss of a family member or a close friend is one of the hardest things to deal with as it leaves emptiness and pain.

In Chapter Three, the focus has been on analysing the representations of African traditions, women's vulnerability, gender violence and gender inequality in three literary texts, namely: *The Uncertainty of Hope*, *Beauty's Gift* and *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. Tagwira's novel, *The Uncertainty of Hope*, is rooted in the African communal experience. Ogunyemi postulates that what is decisive in feminist writing is the philosophical matters that confront patriarchy, which feminist factions bid to do because feminist writing is still progressing. Ogunyemi further contends that for a story to be classified as feminist, it should not just deal with female and women's matters but must also postulate some facets of a feminist dogma (1985: 64).

The actions of brutality experienced in the novel take, in variable levels, the distinctive footprints of the ethos of hypermaleness commonly located back to unemployment and poverty. In engaging directly with culture and tradition, in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Ma Musara represents African women who promote gender violence and gender inequality. This is evident in the text when she begs her daughter Onai to stay in an abusive marriage, arguing that she also persevered despite the brutality of her husband, Onai's father. Ma Musara further contends that it is a shame to be branded a divorcee in the society that they live in. Ultimately, her patriarchal and sexist beliefs mirror similar practices of the African traditions. It is apparent that Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* provides insights into the nature of African philosophy and tradition that place women as the vectors of HIV and AIDS infection. Her story exposes the dangers of patriarchy, arguing that patriarchal society gives priority to men, thereby limiting women's human rights. Ma Musara's quest is inextricably bound to her quest for the African identity that endorses the manner in which women are constrained by their own undesirable self-representation and culture (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 10). The concern with culture is read as a marker of denunciation of repressive traditions and practices that license the subjugation of womenfolk. However, progressive fictional representations have played a considerable part in shaping perceptions.

Through the creative display of the characterisation of Dr Emily Sibanda, Tagwira upholds the possibility of change within the Shona community and the Zimbabwean nation. *The Uncertainty*

of Hope certainly demonstrates interest in women leadership, and Dr Emily Sibanda's depiction conveys a sense of a brave and heroic character. She advocates ideals such as forbearance and respect in the form of culture and gender roles. Dr Emily Sibanda becomes more open to alternate worldviews by coming up with a support group. Support groups provide a platform to connect and interact with people sharing similar problems. The group is tasked with sharing encounters and assistance that is restorative to the spirit, mind and body. There is a sense of connection to the group which relieves isolation. Judith Johnson and William McCown's *Family Therapy of Neurobehavioral Disorders* notes that while self-help and support groups differ significantly, all the factions share one issue in common: they are locations where individuals can share intimate narratives, convey feelings and sentiments, and be heard and understood in an atmosphere of encouragement, understanding and acceptance. Members share resources and information. By assisting others, individuals in a support group empower and strengthen themselves (Johnson & McCown 1997: 7). It is in this fictional support group that Dr Emily Sibanda believes that women like Onai would assist in conquering patriarchal structures in their families.

The Uncertainty of Hope inherently encapsulates an essential thematic matter of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. Gender disparities and discriminations affect female sexuality and susceptibility. Drawing awareness to the analysis of women's vulnerability in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, the analysis validates that prolonged essential encounter with representations of the vulnerability of women is important. Tagwira's text evokes the inescapable link between sexuality and vulnerability. Through Onai's textual wounds, the reader feels the harsh realities of the exposed lives of Zimbabwean women. Ultimately, Onai's agony and misery act as a conduit between reader and character, enabling identification, compassion, and interconnectedness. As a powerless female amidst ruthless relatives, Onai's battle for existence is shaped by vulnerabilities that affect her wellbeing. Tagwira's overarching emphasis challenges the centrality of African hegemonic masculinity in the novel. She questions why aggression against women continues to be a valid subject in modern times, implying that it points to a masculine structure in crisis. After Onai's troubling experiences in her married life, the novel sympathetically demonstrates the destructive impacts of masculine control and bigotry in the family. Having experienced violence, Onai moves beyond this point to search for meaning and redemption. Nonetheless, *The Uncertainty of Hope* also validates women escaping their oppression with the support of men who do not ascribe to the

conventional concepts of hegemonic virility. Nonetheless it is evident from the analysis that men are largely the culprits of gender brutality both in domestic and public spaces; it is just as evident that there are a few men who exercise a form of masculinity that is empathetic to the concerns of womenfolk. They do not embody the African hegemonic norm of masculinity.

Furthermore, there has been a conceptual shift in attitudes and behaviour in prevention of violence against girls and women over time in the intervening decade, since the four-year publication span of the primary novels. Dean Peacock and Andrew Levack in their research article “The Men as Partners Programme in South Africa: Reaching Men to End Gender-based Violence and Promote Sexual and Reproductive Health” offer the following insightful revelation from one of the participants:

What has kept me going is the philosophy that says, our own liberation as men, as black South Africans, cannot be removed from the total liberation of women in this country. That has been a driving force. It would be very hypocritical to talk of liberation when you know that a large section of the society is still in bondage. They still face violence, still face death, they still face rape on a daily basis, as if it is business as usual. (2005: 177)

The above changes are due to a number of factors, but progressive fictional representations have played a considerable role in influencing views and perceptions. For instance, in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, John together with Katy his wife sympathise and provide shelter to Onai when she gets beaten by her husband Gari.

With reference to the subject of vulnerability, gender-based and sexual violence are among the defining characteristics of the exponential rise of HIV and AIDS in women. This involves portrayals of suffering and adversity, thus arousing a sense of injustice that fuels a literature of engagement. Imaginative writing is a tool for expanding social understanding, tackling social problems, and facilitating communal and individual ambitions to societal transformation and mobility. Consequently, the analysis in *Beauty's Gift* highlights that women's vulnerability prompts them to become victims and thus find themselves trapped in the scourge of the HIV and AIDS menace. Nonetheless, Magona provides alternative representations of women to prevailing discriminatory hegemonic views. Through her female characters, Magona explores the position of

creative writing in tackling stiffness and exploring alternative creative styles by advocating for an empowered version of femininity. Her female characters, for instance, Beauty, her woman friends and Mrs Mazwi, are assertive and robust, with the agency to oppose gender aggression and to survive.

Chapter Four focuses on the imaginative representations of women's willingness to communicate about AIDS, love and affection and feminist awareness in three literary texts, namely: *Beauty's Gift*, *The Uncertainty of Hope*, and *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. The chapter explores how female characters negotiate their personalities out of victimhood to subjects of their individual tales. The analysis in this section demonstrates that women are the most vulnerable social category, and as a result, their position in combating the epidemic is crucial. Through the idea of women's willingness to communicate about AIDS in *Beauty's Gift*, this chapter draws the reader into the deeply entwined domains of feminist awareness. The novel offers women an alternative choice of stepping out of the shadows of fear. The representation of the prominent role of women is defined within the prism of activism, that translates to social awareness and empowerment.

A feminist reading of the novel reveals Magona's view that women are better placed than men when it comes to expressing the realities that shape the hopes and grievances of their lives. There is an obsession with advocacy that Magona uses purposefully to advocate for voice and visibility. The novel offers women living with HIV a chance to talk about their occasional trials and triumphs in dealing with HIV, from medical matters to family affairs. In illustrating change in South Africa in terms of advocacy, and embodying Beauty as an agent of transformation, Beauty achieves agency by refusing to be silenced by the confines of the AIDS stereotype. There is admirable solidarity among Magona's female characters as they seek to survive. The novel's account of placing female characters, for instance Nomtha Langa, beyond accepted margins is seen as representing solace to other HIV-positive women hiding behind the curtains of shame. This is one of Magona's strategies to reinforce a proactive agency for improved living conditions for women infected and affected by HIV and AIDS.

Tagwira in *The Uncertainty of Hope* demonstrates that women possess certain aspects of independence with regard to their feminist awareness. The narrative provides fictional representations of the shift from a negative representation of women characters and focuses on the

strength of women living with as well as affected by HIV and AIDS. Tagwira portrays an assertion of agency and survival of women through the characterisation of Katy. Fundamentally, the narrative challenges the place of black women by interrogating female insubordination and calling for a more radical female liberation. The novel authorises new personalities that womenfolk believe they hold and influence, regardless of how conflicting some of them are. Tagwira offers an appropriate reminder that there are numerous aspects to life: cultural, historical, psychological and social, and that these elements impact fictional representation. Tagwira allows her women characters to use the domestic arena to prescribe female awareness and identity to contest male power. This is to be realised within the context of perceiving women's proactive engagement in the fight against AIDS for their own benefit. In the novel, women characters in Tagwira's novel portray an extensive body of knowledge leading to a successful awareness campaign. Through the representation of her women characters in the novel, she inscribes the thought that women demonstrate that they can strategise and re-organise themselves and survive on their own.

Subsequently, the analysis in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* notes that women have the capability to be self-reliant, and to influence resistance and overcome the oppression they face. In this connection, Shaba advocates for the intellectual and financial emancipation of womenfolk so that they can ascertain their fortunes and avert sexual manipulation by men. This will minimise their probability of contracting HIV. Shaba's agency in the novel is made explicit to the readers. She reveals an awareness of the need for women's rights. Ultimately, Shaba conceives an enrichment of love and affection in the time of AIDS for an African woman.

The novel *Beauty's Gift* is centred on the development of Amanda's responsibility bound by love. The novel portrays the significance of sisterly unity in women's efforts in both the public and domestic realms of women's lives. Magona's literary task of bringing closure to Beauty's death suggests how society can contribute to the bold attempt to use women's voice to invoke women's commitment and devotion. Beauty's woman friends are empowered by their shared experience of blackness, hence Beauty's life resides at the centre of the group of her four friends. Beauty and her woman friends share a particular aspect of sisterhood that has been obtained collectively and socially, and, in my opinion, this is a strong assertion that transcends being biological siblings. This union of women is greatly recognised as love born out of a deliberate attempt by all of them to connect and encourage each other in the time of crisis. Magona succeeds in depicting, for the

reader, the importance of a network of women coming together in aid of one another, an act that is interpreted as love.

Chapter Five focuses on coping mechanisms. A coping mechanism is a set of actions or beliefs in life that helps a person deal with a certain aspect or situation. With respect to trauma, hope and coping mechanisms in this chapter, Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* provides fictional representations of the different forms of trauma and coping strategies for her female characters. The novel offers a narrative of hope. One critical aspect of resilience and coping strategy as the narrative indicates is through writing. Writing is a healing process and a coping mechanism towards a sense of worth. Linga captures her sharp pains, deep shock and loss, and darkest moments through writing. Her encounter with her writing leads to an excursion of emotive self-finding where she wrestles with her new-discovered ability to understand and navigate an emotional landscape, whilst concurrently trying to conceal these sentiments from others (92). Ultimately, this expressive writing has a significant healing effect on her, because she is able to find meaning in life. As the study notes, another key aspect of coping mechanisms in Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* is through guidance and counselling. It is out of the counselling therapy from Ayesha that Shaba triumphs in permitting her character Linga to live optimistically and constructively after testing positive for HIV.

In holding with African feminist activism of hope and coping mechanisms, education is accorded great importance in a female's life, ahead of other social aspects of life. Arnfred (2004: 101) observes that grass roots women's agency, demonstrates that the matter of sexuality and supremacy are solid reality that ought to be addressed. For instance, education in *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* is acclaimed as being of crucial importance to women's liberation. It is viewed to open new opportunities of awareness and endurance. Consequently, in the novel, *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, there is a shift in the way each of the characters responds to HIV and AIDS. The research notes that the life of individuals living with HIV and AIDS lies in their capacity to cope with their condition to survive. Linga learns to come to terms with her own trauma. An engagement with trauma invites the HIV-positive individuals to confront, rather than conceal, their status, and this according to the analysis proves a useful method to cope better with the disease. It is these distinguished reactions that empower Shaba to offer a gallery of women characters who describe optimism and resilience in techniques that surpass the identity of HIV and AIDS. The assessment

of *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* notes that disclosure is linked to acceptance of one's reality. Disclosure is another aspect of a coping mechanism. In the novel, Linga's passion for life and her vibrancy captures the attention of the readers. Her character showcases greater heroism and gallantry than her companion displays as she boldly goes for an HIV test, and then faces the consequences of the results by disclosing her positive status to him (90). She knows and accepts her HIV status, therefore forging understanding. Finally, switching from denial to acceptance is another example of a stress reliever that exemplifies resilience. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* notes that acceptance is a source of solace for individuals living with HIV and AIDS. Linga's acceptance of her HIV status exemplifies the approval of her self-exceptionality. She is no longer repressed and manipulated by her community's prejudice and stereotypes.

Magona's *Beauty's Gift* heightens public understanding and awareness that Christianity is a coping force that offers women a context in which they can heal from the wounds of the discovery of their HIV status. Here Magona is enthusiastic to offer Christianity as a religious conviction that gives profusion to its devotees. Magona depicts Christianity as a crucial place that extends consolation and optimism to the women who have been burdened by the HIV and AIDS pandemic, an answer to society's difficulties, and a feasible means of liberation and freedom, particularly for womenfolk. Finally, the analysis of coping mechanisms of HIV-positive characters in *Beauty's Gift* notes that laughter is anarchic, anti-authoritarian and cathartic for coping with stress related to HIV and AIDS. This points to a reconstructive narrative of hope that offers solace to HIV-positive women who have been trapped in the sequence of despair.

6.3 Recommendation and Conclusion

The present work intends to contribute to the understanding of HIV and AIDS from the standpoint of creative voices which have the ability to disclose meaning and signification to the experience of HIV-positive individuals. One of the commonalities of the literary turn of the novels under this study is that they were published within a few years of each other, so they give a historical slice. However, it is worth noting in this research that notable changes have occurred after the publications of the primary texts in this thesis. According to the gazetted report of UNAIDS 2020, in the recent past with respect to HIV and AIDS infection, high testing acceptance rates and disclosure of HIV-status have transformed the face of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe and South

Africa. In this sense, notable shifts of a lower proportion of new infections today are attributed to free access to anti-retroviral therapy and HIV-care as compared to the earlier times. Consequently, of striking development is an enhanced accomplishment of community service of individuals living with HIV and AIDS, as they no longer face intensely entrenched cultural and social impediments. Ultimately, social views and predispositions towards persons living with HIV and AIDS, gender inequality and sexual restrictions are some of the very essential factors that have undergone transformation, thus creating space for positive change and living. The above milestone authorises a further nuanced commitment with concepts of distinctiveness and belonging in creative writings of the present and past decade. The study recommends the need for art, and in particular novels, to have a role in the representations and conceptualisations through the empowerment of the female gender, with the intention to challenge patriarchy and gender-based violence so as to control the spread of HIV through readership.

REFERENCES

- Abdool-Karim. Q. 2000. Trends in HIV/AIDS Infection: Beyond Current Statistics. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10220460009545310?casa_token=rCnTQRlb8q0AAAAA:Moj6xvOPF_3nwFM1oXkTWcsKeHPI2ltLHXlPgPl4xe_-MjbKIFtH11LZba6dC-Sb_umEhG2orzLcc. [2021, January 24].
- Aidoo, A. 2010. *Anowa*. London: Howard University Press.
- AIDS Foundation Report. 2020. Available at: <https://cdn.solvergloab.com/external/2020+Solver+Case+Study+-+Pediatric+AIDS+Foundation.pdf>. [2021, July 15].
- Akujobi, R. 2006. Gender, Literacy and Society. A Discourse of Disparity in some Selected Schools in Sokoto Metropolis, Nigeria. (Unpublished PhD Thesis). Ahmadu Bello University.
- Alves, A. 2017. Can Minority Voices be Heard and do Their Stories Matter? Available at: https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=Alves%2C+A.+%282017%29.+%E2%80%9CCan+Minority+Voices+be+Heard+and+do+Their+Stories+Matter%3F%E2%80%9D+Available%3A+Google+Scholar+%5B2017%2C+June+14%5D.&btnG=. [2019, May 27].
- Arbrah, H., Kalichman, C. & Simbayi, L. 2017. HIV Testing Attitudes, AIDS Stigma, and Voluntary HIV Counseling and Testing in a Black Township in Cape Town, South Africa. *Social Science & Medicine*. 68 (12): 279–287. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1744787/>. [2018, February 12].
- Arckermann, L. & Klerk, G. 2001. Social Factors that Make South African Women Vulnerable to HIV Infection. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/073993302753429031>. [2021, January 09].
- Arndt, S. 2002. *The Dynamics of African Feminism*. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- Arnfred. S. Re-thinking Sexualities in Africa. 2004. Sweden: African Collection.

- Ashforth, A. 2012. *An Epidemic of Witchcraft? The Implications of AIDS for the Post-Apartheid State*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.
- Attree, L. 2010a. Women Writing AIDS in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Rites of Passage in Postcolonial Women's Writing 65-90. Available at: https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=IEwaBwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=Blood+on+the+Page:+Interviews+with+African+Authors+Writing+about+HIV/AIDS+si+ndiwe+magona&ots=3mxXds2N_F&sig=UCUeTzQEgXYfXzmngZdY-0VFy7U. [2019, January 26].
- Attree, L. 2010b. *Blood on the Page: Interviews with African Authors Writing about HIV/AIDS*. London: Cambridge Press.
- Avert. P. 2010. Mass Orphanhood in the Era of HIV and AIDS. Available at: <https://www.bmj.com/content/324/7331/185.short>. [2022, April 3].
- Badejo, D. 1998. African Feminism: Mythical and Social Power of Women of African Descent. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3820724?casa_token=jGneQ0fLnZ0AAAAA:EMRMLCkvoAbJER4WBL7L6gUWXELkZoTN3iff-8WN_aq4hH1jK5nXJGpu7vM3XKi6lfiVYAkIA4JS1ipnPk5-oV9hg8sCImZqm6_b1gZH85Vb2xtG-Q. [2021, February 17].
- Bennett, J. and Chigudu, H. 2012. Activist Leadership and Questions of Sexuality with Young Women: A South African Story. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44508124>. [2022, May 12].
- Belsey, C. 2013. Textual Analysis as a Research Method. In *Research Methods for English Studies*. Griffin, G. (Ed.) Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Berg, B. 1979. *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Beresford, L. 2001. Alternative, Outpatient Settings of Care for People with AIDS. Available at: <https://europepmc.org/article/med/2494629>. [2022, May 19].

- Betony, A. 2012. Rhyming Youth with Death: What We Might Learn From Africa. (Unpublished PhD Thesis). University of Cape Town. HIV/ AIDS Fiction in South
- Boersema, J.R. 2013. Afrikaner, nevertheless: Stigma, Shame & the Sociology of Cultural trauma. [Online] Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam. Available from: <https://dare.uva.nl/search?identifier=07b10f0c-6d67-4d90-845d-bc16f7500c3c>.
- Boyce Davies, C. & Graves, A. 1986. *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- Brandt, A. 1988. AIDS and Metaphor: Toward the Social Meaning of Epidemic Disease. *Social Research*. 55 (5): 413-432. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40970512>. [2018, July 10].
- Bungaro, M. 2004. From Liminality to Centrality: In *New Women's Writing in African Literature*. Available at: <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9783319738505>. [2018, July 18].
- Cameron, Edwin. 2000. Human Rights, Racism and AIDS: The New Discrimination. *South African Journal on Human Rights* 9 (1): 22-29.
- Cadwel, J.D. Jirikowski, G.F, and Greer, E.R. 1989. Medial Preoptic Area of Oxytocin and Female Sexual Receptivity. Available at: <https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037/0735-7044.103.3.655>. [2022, June 3].
- Cameron, E. 2005. *Witness to AIDS*. Cape Town: Tafelberg. Print.
- Chingandu, L. 2007. Multiple Concurrent Partnerships: The Story of Zimbabwe-Are Small Houses a Key Driver? *Harare, Southern Africa HIV and AIDS Information*. 7 (4): 31-47. Available at: https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cites=2737504854409778208&as_sdt=2005&sciodt=0,5&hl=en. [2019, March 26].
- Chitando, A. 2011. Narrating Gender and Danger in Selected Zimbabwe Women's Writing on HIV and AIDS. (Unpublished PhD Thesis). University of South Africa.

- Chitando, E. 2004. The Good Wife: A Phenomenological Re-reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 in the Context of HIV / AIDS in Zimbabwe. *Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and Theology in Southern Africa*. 1 (86): 151-159. Available at: <https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/sabinet/script/2004/00000086/00000001/art00002>. [2019, August 30].
- Cooper, A. 1992. *A Voice from the South*. Xenia: Ohio Press.
- Coullie, J. & Meyer, S. 2006. Introduction. In *Selves in Question: Interviews on Southern African Auto/biography*. Coullie, J., Meyer, S., Ngwenya, H.T. & Oliver, T. (Eds) (p. 100-115). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Crimp, D. 1992. Portraits of People with AIDS. *Cultural Studies*. (1): 117-131. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3178271>. [2018, September 10].
- Challenges Faced by People Living with HIV and AIDS in Cape Town. Available at: <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/art/2010/420270/>. [2018, September 16].
- Damap, J. 2007. *Widowhood: A Challenge to the Church*. Bukuru, Nigeria: African Christian Textbooks.
- Dangarembga, T. 1993. *Neria*. Seattle: College Press.
- Gqoba, D. P. 2015. *Rape: A South African Nightmare*. Johannesburg: Jacana.
- Doubt, J. 2015. Digitising and Archiving HIV and AIDS in South Africa: The Museum of AIDS in Africa as an Archival Intervention. Available at: <https://journals.co.za/doi/abs/10.10520/EJC185866>. [2022, June 26].
- Douglas, M. 2002. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge.
- Downing, R. 2005. *As They See It: The Development of the African AIDS Discourse*. London: Adonis and Abbey.
- Eli, J.J. 2004. Thabo's Tongue. In *Nobody Ever said AIDS*. Rasebotsa, N., Samuelson, M. & Thomas, K. (Eds) (p. 180-182). Cape Town: Kwela Books.

- El Sadaawi. N. 2007. *Woman at Point Zero*. Available at: [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=gn9l5vEpjYUC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=Nawal+El+Saadawi%E2%80%99s+\(2007\)+&ots=jf5aAVAXXb&sig=58NO-CFj_dFU482De90igUjkLd0](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=gn9l5vEpjYUC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=Nawal+El+Saadawi%E2%80%99s+(2007)+&ots=jf5aAVAXXb&sig=58NO-CFj_dFU482De90igUjkLd0). [2022, May 3].
- Emecheta, B. 2006. *The Slave Girl*. New York: George Brazillia Publishers.
- Farren, T. 2004. The Death of a Queen. In *Nobody Ever said AIDS*. Rasebotsa, N., Samuelson, M. & Thomas, K. (Eds) (p -) Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- Fee, E. & Fox. D. 1988. *Introduction: AIDS, Public Policy, and Historical Inquiry*. California: University of California Press.
- George, R.M. 1999. *The Politics of Home: Post-colonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gikandi, S. 1992. The Politics and Poetics of National Formation: Recent African Writing. In *From Commonwealth to Post Colonial*. Rutherford A. (Ed.) (p. 377-389). Sydney: Dangaroo Press.
- Gilbert, L. & Walker, L. 2002. HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Available at: https://www.scielo.org/article/ssm/content/raw/?resource_ssm_path=/media/assets/csp/v18n3/9293.pdf. [2019, November 19].
- Grünkemeier, E. 2013. *Breaking the Silence: South African Representations of HIV/AIDS*. Hanover: Leibniz University Press.
- Hamid, I. 2013. Writing about Sex Work. *African Perspective*. 4 (1): 22–23. Available at: <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0147587>. [2018, February 15].
- Hoad, N. 2006. *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization*. Minneapolis: Minnesota Print.

- Holy Bible. 2015. HBNIV. Available at: https://dir.sermon-online.com/english/Bible/The_Old_Testament_Modern_Literal_Version_20151029.pdf. [2022, March 10].
- Holzemer. W. 2007. A Conceptual Model of HIV/AIDS Stigma from Five African Countries. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04244.x>. [2022, March 17].
- Horne, F. 2010. Discourse, Disease and Displacement: Interrogating Selected South African Textual Constructions of AIDS. (Unpublished PhD Thesis). University of South Africa.
- Horne, N.B. 2004. Sexual Impotence as Metonymy for Political Failure: Interrogating Hegemonic Masculinities in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa*. In *Masculinities in African Literary and Cultural Texts*. Mugambi, H.N. & Allan, T.J. (Eds) (p. 178-199). Oxfordshire: Ayebia Clarke Publishing House.
- Irvine, Janice M. 2009. Shame Comes out of the Closet. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 6 (1): 70–79.
- Jackson, E. 1999. Progression to AIDS. The effects of Stress, Depressive Symptoms and Social Support. Available at: https://journals.lww.com/psychosomaticmedicine/fulltext/1999/05000/progression_to_aids__the_effects_of_stress,.21.aspx. [2022, May 11].
- Javangwe, T. 2011. Contesting Narratives: Constructions of the Self and the Nation in Zimbabwe's Political Auto/biography. (Unpublished Thesis). University of South Africa.
- Johnson, J. & McCown, W. 1997. *Family Therapy of Neurobehavioral Disorders*. Available at: <https://books.google.co.ke/books?id=WpL4x8ObwIYC&pg=PA322&lpg=PA322&dq=Johnson,+J.,+%26+McCown,+W.+Family+Therapy+of+Neurobehavioral+Disorders.&source=bl&ots=13cfZL2j4H&sig=ACfU3U0nFRtkf0ltfWY9HZ4Qkae1TjSPA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi0h4DYq73lAhUTi1wKHWb-CncQ6AEwBHoECAgQAQ>. [2018, November 19].

- Jones, E.D., Jones, M. & Palmer, E. 1987. *Women in African Literature Today*. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- Kakura, D and Paradza, G. 2007. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13552070701391581>. [2022, May 27].
- Kambarami, M. 2002. Femininity, Sexuality and Culture: Patriarchy and Female Subordination in Zimbabwe. Available at: [2021, March 19].
- Kaori, I. 2007. Gender-based Violence and Property Grabbing in Africa: A Denial of Women's Liberty and Security. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13552070601178823>. [2018, June 2019 6].
- Kerkhoven. W. and Sendah, R. 2000. Water and HIV and AIDS. Some Strategic Considerations in Southern Africa. Availble at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Vasna-Ramasar/publication/267934561_Water_and_HIVAids_Some_strategic_considerations_for_southern_Africa_Water_and_HIVAIDS_Some_strategic_considerations_in_Southern_Africa/links/57592ec508aec913749f2e2f/Water-and-HIV-Aids-Some-strategic-considerations-for-southern-Africa-Water-and-HIV-AIDS-Some-strategic-considerations-in-Southern-Africa.pdf. [2022, May 20].
- Kirsten, A. 2014. Remembering Phaswane Mpe. Available at: https://www.google.com/search?hl=en&sxsrf=ACYBGNRVjNMY5KJjmHNJ25yOpm3SAC0VsQ:1571321059970&q=Kirsten,+A.+2014.+Remembering+Phaswane+Mpe.&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi_5-2Mu6PlAhWoA2MBHZw2DY8QgwMILQ. [2017, May 21].
- Kobia, J. 2008. Metaphors on HIV/AIDS Discourse among Oluluya Speakers of Western Kenya. Available at: http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/journals/cadaad/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Volume-2_Kobia.pdf. [2019, January 16].
- Kuate-Defo, B. 2004. Young People's Relationships with Sugar Daddies and Sugar Mummies: What do we know and what do we need to Know. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3583175?casa_token=tZ5moIbe09kAAAAA:W5L0hAowRw-_B--QpofpT-

RWriXkn4SxCeivavCivv0YtlZBinMTcZjp6mHYd_1qhQhNOHA06Jbiou9G3jxsuXFUP
SGUGBTuH3ea894zm05oMhTA. [April, June 23].

Leburu, G. & Phetlho-Thekisho, N. 2015. Reviewing Gender-based Violence against Women and HIV/AIDS as Intersecting Issues. *Social Work*. 51 (3): 399-420. Available at: [https://www.google.co.za/search?q=Leburu%2C+G.+and+Phetlho-Thekisho%2C+N.+\(2015\).+Reviewing+Gender+based+Violence+Against+Women+and+HIV%2FAIDS+as+Intersecting+Issues.+Social+Work.](https://www.google.co.za/search?q=Leburu%2C+G.+and+Phetlho-Thekisho%2C+N.+(2015).+Reviewing+Gender+based+Violence+Against+Women+and+HIV%2FAIDS+as+Intersecting+Issues.+Social+Work.) [2018, January 29].

Lerner, G. 1975. Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges. *Feminist Studies*. 1 (3): 5-14. Available at: <https://blogs.stockton.edu/hist4690/files/2012/06/Gerda-Lerner-Placing-Women-in-History1.pdf>. [2019, March 26].

Lerner, G. 1986. *The Creation of Patriarchy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Letseka, M. 2013. Anchoring Ubuntu Morality. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263465914_Anchoring_Ubuntu_Morality. [2018, September 23].

Lupton, D. 1994. *Moral Threats and Dangerous Desires: AIDS in the News Media*. London: Taylor and Francis.

Luthar, S. 2000. Vulnerability and Resilience: *A Study of High-risk Adolescents*. *Society for Research in Child Development*. 1 (62): 600-616. Available at: http://assets.cambridge.org/97805218/07012/frontmatter/9780521807012_frontmatter.pdf. [2018, November 19].

Maane, E. 2009. *Umzala: A Woman's Story of Living with HIV*. Cape Town: Openly Positive Trust.

Macionis, J. & Plummer, K. 2008. *Sociology: A Global Introduction*. Essex: Pearson Education Ltd.

Magona, S. 1990. *To My Children's Children*. Johannesburg: New Africa Books.

Magona, S. 1994. *Living, Loving, and Lying Awake at Night*. Cape Town: Interlink Books.

- Magona, S. 1996. *Push-push! and Other Stories*. Johannesburg: New Africa Books.
- Magona, S. 2004. Leave-taking. In *Nobody Ever said AIDS*. Rasebotsa, N., Samuelson, M. & Thomas, K. (Eds) (p. 124-141). Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- Magona, S. 2007. *Vukani*. Cape Town: Interlink Books.
- Magona, S. 2008. *Beauty's Gift*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- Marder, P. 2006. Trauma and Literary Studies: Some Enabling Questions. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/download/32504621/RO_-_2006_-_Marder.pdf. [2018, May 20].
- Mashiri, L. 2013. A Conceptualisation of Gender Based Violence in Zimbabwe. Available at: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1075.6046&rep=rep1&type=pdf>. [2019, September 22].
- Marks, S. & Andersson, N. 1990. The Epidemiology and Culture of Violence. Available at: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-349-21074-9_2. [2021, February 5].
- McFadden, P. 1992. Sexuality and the Problems of AIDS in Africa. In *Gender in Southern Africa. Conceptual and Theoretical Issues*. Meena, R. (Ed.). 7 (1): 47-64. Available at: https://repository.brynmawr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=soc_pubs. [2018, April 4].
- McGreal, C. 2000. *Guardian Unlimited* Mbeki attacked for HIV/AIDS doubts. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10646170490447584?casa_token=BK4ZF_pWdUUAAAAA:Z7l-i7xVmKfFYOlNx1ps2iino_tXLsm1LzmihEr310pf4TedXEgmw-leQScI9qgo3lDULm30Uu90O0. [2020, April 28].
- Merry, S.E. 2011. *Gender Violence: A Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Miller, A.N. & Rubin, D.L. 2007. Factors Leading to Self-Disclosure of a Positive HIV Diagnosis in Nairobi, Kenya. People Living With HIV/AIDS in the Sub-Sahara. *Qualitative Health*

- Research*. 17 (5): 586-598. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17478642>. [2019, September 14].
- Millett, K. 1977. *Sexual Politics*. London: The Anchor Press.
- Mlambo, N. 2015. Critical Reflections on Surviving against all Odds in Valarie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*. Available: <https://www.academia.edu/download/79123635/6.pdf>. [2022, May 17].
- Mlambo, A. 2014. *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-colonial Period to 2008*. Harare: Weaver Press.
- Mohanty, C.T. 1984. Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses. *Boundary*. 2 (12): 333-358. Available at: http://www2.kobe-u.ac.jp/~alexroni/IPD%202015%20readings/IPD%202015_5/under-western-eyes.pdf. [2019, June 27].
- Mohanty, C.T. 1995. Crafting Feminist Genealogies: On the Geography and Politics of Home, Nation, and Community. In *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*. (Eds) (p. 485–500). Mit Press.
- Motana, N. 2004. Arise Afrika, Arise! In *Nobody Ever said AIDS: Stories and Poems from Southern Africa*. Rasebotsa, N., Samuelson, M. & Thomas, K. (Eds) (p. 103-104). Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- Motsemme, N. 2007. Loving in a Time of Hopelessness: On Township Women's Subjectivities in a Time of HIV/AIDS. *African Identities*. 5 (1): 61-87. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14725840701253761>. [2019, February 14].
- Mpe, P. 2001. *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Murray, J. 2017. And they never Spoke to Each Other of It: Contemporary Southern African Representations of Silence, Shame and Violence. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10131752.2017.1333216>. [2022, July 22].

- Machera. M. 2004. Opening a Can of Worms. A Debate of Female Sexuality in the Lecture Theatre. Available at: [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=R_TkAmlCAwoC&oi=fnd&pg=PA157&dq=Mumbi+Machera+\(2004\)+sexuality&ots=a86LIp47a0&sig=u_pyGABK-HKHCZkxxpsilb5vQrM](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=R_TkAmlCAwoC&oi=fnd&pg=PA157&dq=Mumbi+Machera+(2004)+sexuality&ots=a86LIp47a0&sig=u_pyGABK-HKHCZkxxpsilb5vQrM). [2022, July 23].
- Mungwini, P. 2008. Shona Womanhood: Rethinking Social Identities in the Face of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Pan African Studies*. 2 (4): 203-214. Available at: <https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA192353399&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=08886601&p=LitRC&sw=w>. [2018, July 12].
- Mushakavanhu, T. 2014. Anarchies of the Mind: An Imaginary Conversation between Two Writers. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02690055.2012.714156?casa_token=D_83UaeGSeoAAAAA:A98V6Q_nHNYuU7jkaTjLwdxJNl1YBbyXhd19kODKDvY_iGmiabtn08TQXGFiHsJy-5VWHQsb7RjzJg. [2021, July 10].
- Mutangadura, G. 2001. Women and AIDS in Sub Saharan Africa. The Caze of Zimbabwe and its Policy Implications. Avaialable at: <http://www.africaknowledgeproject.org/index.php/jenda/article/view/58>. [2022, April 21].
- Myint, T. & Mash, B. 2008. Coping Strategies and Social Support after Receiving HIV-positive Results at a South African District Hospital. Available at: http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0256-95742008000400023. [2022, March 2].
- Nnamaeka. O. 2005. *The Politics of (M) othering: Womanhood, Identity and Resistance in African Literature*. Available at: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9780203981313/politics-othering-obioma-nnaemeka>. [2022, August 10].
- National AIDS Commision. 2004. Avaialable at. <https://onlinenattionalAIDCommision.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/jid.1167>. [2022, July 20].

- National AIDS Commission. 2007. Available at: <http://www.heart-resources.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/A-synthesis-of-Institutional-arrangements-of-National-AIDS-Commissions.pdf>. [2022, July 22].
- Nelson Mandela Fund/HSRC. 2002. Available at: <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=hShAKcJJu2wC&oi=fnd&pg=PA4&dq=nelson+mandela+fund+aids+2002&ots=ug1iHpEe3T&sig=AmGkdfWgYoN4MTULLXNq8BOmo0>. [2022, April 15].
- Newell, S. 1997. *Writing African Women: Gender, African Culture and Literature in West Africa*. London: Zed Publishers.
- Ngcobo, L. 2007. African Motherhood: Myth and Reality. In *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. Oyedepo, T. & Quayson, A. (Eds) (p. 533-541). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ngoshi, T. & Pasi, J. 2007. Mediating HIV/AIDS Strategies in Children's Literature in Zimbabwe. *Children's Literature in Education*. 38 (1): 243-251. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227309217_Mediating_HIVAIDS_strategies_in_children's_literature_in_Zimbabwe. [2019, January 21].
- Nwajiaku, C.I. 2004. Representation of the Womanist Discourse in the Short Fiction of Akachi Ezeigbo & Chinwe Okechukwu. In *New Women's Writing in African Literature*. Emenyonu, N.E. (Ed.) (p. 55-69). Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- Obiechina, E. 1990. *Language and Theme: Essay on African Literature*. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press.
- Ogola, M. 1994. *The River and the Source*. Nairobi: Focus Books.
- Ogundipe-Leslie, M. 1994. *Re-creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations*. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- Ogundipe-Leslie, M. 1995. Women in Africa and her Diaspora: From Marginality to Empowerment. In *Moving Beyond Boundaries: International Dimensions of Black Women's Writing*. Boyce Davies, C. & Ogundipe-Leslie, M. (Eds) (p. 15-20). London: Pluto Press.

- Ogunyemi, C. 1986. *African Womanism*. New York: Peter Lang Publishers.
- Ogunyemi, C. 2007. *Juju Fission: Women's Alternative Fictions from the Sahara, the Kalahari, and the Oases in Between*. New York: Peter Lang Publishers.
- O'Toole, L.L., Schiffman, J.R. & Edwards, M.L.K. 1997. *Gender Violence: Interdisciplinary Perspective*. New York: New York University Press.
- Oxford, M. 2013. The Grammar of Violence, Writing Crime as Fiction. *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*. 25 (2): 220-29. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1013929X.2013.833425>. [2019, May 11].
- Writer, S. 2009. Available at: <https://ourworldindata.org/life-expectancy>. [2022, August 20].
- Packard, R. & P. Epstein. 1992. Medical Research on Aids in Africa. Available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/gss/2835>. [2022, July 20].
- Paton, C. 1997. From Nation to Family: Containing African AIDS. Available at: [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=PaNdHqo-9wIC&oi=fnd&pg=PA127&dq=\(Paton+OTHERING+%E2%80%9CAfrican+AIDS%E2%80%9D+&ots=kTXEHbgzzA&sig=UUm9srDnAh5zj1YnfP73_MgOCqI](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=PaNdHqo-9wIC&oi=fnd&pg=PA127&dq=(Paton+OTHERING+%E2%80%9CAfrican+AIDS%E2%80%9D+&ots=kTXEHbgzzA&sig=UUm9srDnAh5zj1YnfP73_MgOCqI). [2022, June 1].
- Parker, R. & Aggleton, P. 2003. HIV and AIDS Related Stigma and Discrimination: A Conceptual Framework and Implications for Action. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953602003040>. [2021, April 24].
- Peacock, D. & Levack, A. 2005. The Men as Partners Programme in South Africa: Reaching Men to End Gender-based Violence and Promote Sexual and Reproductive Health. Available at: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.594.6803&rep=rep1&type=pdf>. [2018, November 19].
- Phiri, V. 2010. *Highway Queen*. Harare: Corals Services.
- Pillay, M. 2009. Reproductive Health: Rethinking Sexist Notions of Women's Bodies in the Context of HIV and AIDS. *Journal of Constructive Theology*. 15 (2): 41-54. Available at:

https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cites=9425922656747925948&as_sdt=2005&scioldt=0,5&hl=en. [2019, April 11].

Qakisa, M. 2002. *Stories of AIDS in Africa*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.

Rasebotsa, N., Samuelson, M. & Thomas, K. (Eds) 2004. *Nobody Ever said AIDS: Stories and Poems from Southern Africa*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.

Ratele, K. 2008. Studying Men in Africa Critically. In *Masculinities in Contemporary Africa*. Available at: <https://www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/Prelim-5.pdf>. [2019, March 24].

Ray, S. and Madzimbamuto, F. 2007. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(09\)61498-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(09)61498-7/fulltext). Available at: [2022, June 16].

Risberg, R. 2006. Writing Trauma, Writing Time and Space. Available at: https://www.univaasa.fi/materiaali/pdf/isbn_978-952-476-320-2.pdf. [2019, January 15].

Robson, J. & Nomthandazo, Z. 2004. Baba's Gifts. In *Nobody Ever said AIDS: Stories and Poems from Southern Africa*. Rasebotsa, N., Samuelson, M. & Thomas, K. (Eds) (p. 98-102). Cape Town: Kwela Books.

Shaba, L. 2006. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. London: Athena Press Publishing Co.

Shober, D. 2011. Women in Higher Education in South Africa. Available at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/S1529-212620140000019014>. [2020, October 20].

Sontag, S. 1978. *Illness as Metaphor*. London: Allen Lane.

Sontag, S. 1988. *AIDS and its Metaphors*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Sparks, Allister. 2003. *Beyond the Miracle: Inside the New South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball.

- Steady, F.C. 1987. African Feminism: A Worldwide Perspective. In *Women in Africa and The African Diaspora: A Reader*. Terborg-Penn, R. & Rushing, A.R. (Eds) (p. 3-21). London: Howard University Press.
- Stobie, C. 2010. Dethroning the Infallible Father: Religion, Patriarchy and Politics in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. *Literature and Theology*. 24 (4): 421-435 Available at: http://www.academia.edu/6963444/Dethroning_the_Infallible_Father_Religion_Patriarchy_and_Politics_in_Chimamanda_Ngozi_Adichies_Purple_Hibiscus. [2019, March 17].
- Stratton, F. 1994. *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*. London: Routledge.
- Sultana, A. 2011. *Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis*. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press. Available at: <https://www.banglajol.info/index.php/AFJ/article/view/12929>. [2020, September 10].
- Tagwira, V. 2006. *The Uncertainty of Hope*. Harare: Weaver Bird Press.
- Tagwirei, C. 2014. Lame Ducks? In the Time of HIV and AIDS? Exploring Female Victimhood in Selected HIV/AIDS Narratives by Zimbabwean Female Writers. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02560046.2014.906341?casa_token=KhqQv7_aSsMAAAAA:OjNKXG8mMvtp3CmrRTi2TN4KXUe_tcK4qguA0RfYlZqILm5VxE28dheBr7tCVB_BbTZcx2B8gBf3U40I. [2022, July 3].
- Tamale, S. 2004. Researching and Theorising Sexualities in Africa. In *African Sexualities: A Reader*. Tamale, S. (Ed.) (p. 11-36). Cape Town: Pambazuka.
- Tamale, S. 2011. *African Sexualities: A Reader*. Available at: [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=xSqIrrswbG0C&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Syivia+Tamale+\(2011:+sexuality&ots=R_Iq-vnxRj&sig=4P77PF-eoWHaKAXMjv6aVKb9afE](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=xSqIrrswbG0C&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Syivia+Tamale+(2011:+sexuality&ots=R_Iq-vnxRj&sig=4P77PF-eoWHaKAXMjv6aVKb9afE). [2022, May 24].

- “Time of the Writer”. 2009. University of Natal Press. Available at: <https://businesstech.co.za/news/general/118214/south-africa-has-the-lowest-life-expectancy-in-the-world/>. [2019, August 14].
- The National Library of Medicine, NCBI. 2020. Available at: <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0013901>. [2021, June 18].
- Treichler, A. HIV Infection in the Third World. 1999. Available at: <https://pesquisa.bvsalud.org/portal/resource/pt/his-8764>. [2022, July 12].
- Turmen, T. 2003. Gender and HIV. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0020729203002029>. [2021, July 7].
- Tyson, L. 2006. *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- UNAIDS 2020. Report. Available at: <http://www.unAIDS.org/en/regionscountries/countries/southafrica>. [2019, May 15].
- UNICEF. 1999. Available at: <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=pwWEvdSlxfMC&oi=fnd&pg=PA2&dq=UNICEF&ots=1PfVYuaApY&sig=cr9Sl2ktjNpoD1ASt2RpHJsXb3M>. [2022, April 10].
- Vambe, M. 2003. HIV/AIDS African Sexuality and the Problem of Representation in Zimbabwean Literature. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/scientificcontributions/2002536513_Maurice_Taonezvi_Vambe. [2019, March 30].
- Van Dyk, A. 2001. Traditional African Beliefs and Customs: Implications for AIDS Education and Prevention in Africa. In *South African Journal of Psychology*. 31 (2): 60-65. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232518469_Traditional_African_beliefs_and_Customs_Implications_for_AIDS_Education_and_Prevention_in_Africa. [2019, June 19].
- Van Heerden. I.V. 2017. The Vulnerable Body in Contemporary South African Literature. Available at: <https://theses.whiterose.ac.uk/10686/>. [2019, August 24].

- Vera, Y. 1999. *Opening Spaces: An Anthology of Contemporary African Women's Writing*. London: Heinemann.
- Visser, M., Makin, D., Vandormael, A. & Sikkema, J. 2009. HIV/ AIDS Stigma in a South African Community. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09540120801932157>. [2020, September 10].
- Vaughan. M. 1991. *Curing their ills: Colonial Power and African Illness*. Available at: https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=yfqkuCN_JuWC&oi=fnd&pg=PR8&dq=Megan+Vaughan+sexuality&ots=9SjK0tDycM&sig=g_GLPyg2qPhIsx3x4vcajlZYook. [2022, March 4].
- Walker, A. 1983. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. New York: Harcourt.
- Westerhof, T. 2005. *Unlucky in Love*. Macmillan: London.
- Wisker, G. 2000. *Post-Colonial and African American Women's Writing: A Critical Introduction*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- World Health Organisation/ UNAIDS. 2020. *AIDS Epidemic Update*: World Health Organisation. Available at: <https://scholar.google.co.za/scholar?q=World+Health+Organisation%2F+UNAIDS+%5B2015%5D+AIDS+Epidemic+Update%3A+World+Health+Organisation>. [2021, May 18].
- Yakubu. K. 2017. Statistical Analysis on Reported Cases of HIV/AIDS (A Case Study of Special Hospital Sokoto). Available at: <https://www.cenresinjournals.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Page-1-13-1117.pdf>. [2020, January 12].