

Grappling with a post-colonial challenge: A critical analysis of Shona writers' vision of the HIV and Aids epidemic

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Abstract

The post-colonial era has witnessed many African writers embarking on, among many activities, decolonisation, cultural regeneration and nation-building through their works of art. Whilst they have striven to reclaim the African's dignity, integrity and humanity that s/he has lost through colonialism, the post-colonial era has again presented to the same writer, new challenges posed by life, among them; the HIV and Aids epidemic. Whilst many writers have been quite eloquent in conveying the experiences and effects of HIV and AIDS on the affected, what has remained elusive is the root causes of its transmission as well as ways of dealing with the epidemic. Blame has largely been shouldered on patriarchy, men and 'their' promiscuous behaviour on one hand, and Shona traditional customs on the other, both of which are largely victims of a new socio-economic order. The paper thus is an exposition of the social vision of selected Shona writers concerning the HIV and Aids epidemic. It seeks to establish if they have moved away from the popular yet mythical victim-blame to accord the epidemic a more holistic and informative gaze. It also seeks to ascertain whether the writers have suggested realistic and humane solutions in their works of art or they have adopted the popular but less realistic defeatist stance. The paper uses the socio-historical approach to ground its observations and arguments.

Introduction

This paper discusses selected Shona writers' representations of the HIV and AIDS epidemic as well as the suggested ways of dealing with it. Although focus is on writers of Shona fiction, the researchers feel that the observations made can still apply to other genres of literature. To be analysed are Mukwazhi's *Zvibaye Woga* (1996), Chitsike's *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999) and the female writers' short story collection, *Totanga Patsva* (2005). HIV and AIDS are serious disabling factors in national development. Society is robbed of robust, able-bodied, experienced and knowledgeable personnel. As sensitive points of society, writers have joined the group of teachers on this burning issue, disseminating information on how society can shrug off the challenge of this epidemic. The paper discusses whether the

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writers satisfactorily identify the root causes of the spread of the HIV epidemic as well as whether they suggest practical ways of empowering people against it.

Theoretical framework

The paper employs the socio-historical approach in its analysis of the given texts. The approach allows for the analysis of popular myths about human behaviour as well as other common points of view like victim-blame which are prevalent in many post-colonial works of art on the HIV and Aids epidemic. It situates people's problems, in this case, their behaviour which leads to the spread of the HIV and AIDS virus in the correct social and historical contexts.

Causes of the spread of the HIV virus

Shona writers view different reasons for the spread of the HIV and AIDS virus. Whilst some blame circumstances as the cause, others see individual weaknesses in people, or Shona traditional customs as the reason for the spread of the virus. In *Zvibaye Woga* (1996), unemployment is shown as one of the root causes. In a soliloquy, the main character, Cephas testifies that, despite the prevalence of HIV and AIDS, prostitution is rampant, "*Izvi pfambi dzinozviziva asizve ndiwo munda wadzo wadzinowana upfu nokudaro neavo vasina mhosva vave kutsvairwa nacho chirwere cheshuramatongo*" (Mukwazhi, 1996, p. 13) (Prostitutes know this very well but this is their way of earning a living and hence even innocent people are perishing through HIV and AIDS).

The writer links the spread of the HIV and AIDS virus to prostitution and immorality that have also come because of innocent citizens trying to earn a living in an environment where they have failed to find employment. He feels there is great need to create employment opportunities for people as a way of reducing prostitution which is largely behind the spread of the HIV and AIDS virus. This way, the writer absolves the individuals of any blame. He presents circumstances as weakening people's resistance against the spread of the HIV virus.

At a school where he is employed as a teacher, Cephas also discovers that even the headmaster is in love with female students. As the writer's eye and mouth-piece, he does not blame the headmaster for what many would largely label as a very punishable offence, "*Asi chete anenge ane meso, kuda imhosva yokuti munhu anogara oga mudzimai ari Harare kwaanosevenzera ... asiwo dzimwe nguva haisi mhosva yake nokuti pane vana vakanaka kunyange mutaundishipi macho hazvibviri*" (Mukwazhi, 1996, p. 25) (He seems to be immoral; maybe it is not his fault because he stays alone whilst his wife is in Harare where she works ... Maybe it is not his fault because there are very beautiful girls, both at school and in the townships).

Here the author blames modern life where men are forced to stay away from their wives by circumstances. Out of the need to fend for their families in the trying economy, husbands and wives find themselves separated from each other, creating crisis to which they fall prey. As one cross-border woman remarked, "Staying together is a luxury enjoyed by those who have a secure job and salary at the end of the day" (1997, p. 5). Thus, despite having been brought up in a moral way, husbands who work away from their wives find themselves denied of the emotional gratification they are entitled to. Coupled with this, the situation is such that there are other female beings who may be in the same situation, some quite beautiful and who can act as immediate substitutes. This comes out clearly through Cephas who works in Kadoma whilst his beloved wife, Florina works in Gokwe. Cephas testifies that at first he visited her every weekend, then thereafter it became

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intermittent until at last he hardly visited her (Mukwazhi, 1996, pp.71-2). Ultimately, he started flirting around with other available women, impregnating some of them in the process. The narrator shows that no matter how responsible and chaste individuals may strive to be, economic situations always tie them down. Cephaz is firstly separated from his wife by the need to work for the family. Then he is unable to regularly visit her owing to the harsh economic environment. This is despite his love and commitment to the well being of the family. Owing to the great need to address his emotional needs, he finds alternative women close-by. Hence, it is unfair to blame him for not only failing to look after his family, but also for indulging in extra marital affairs whose ultimate effect is the spreading of the HIV and AIDS virus.

The same is true with his other affair with Miriro, who works as a temporary teacher at Romorehoto in Buhera whilst Cephaz is in Gokwe. Owing to the great distance that separates the two, they are unable to visit each other regularly, resulting in Miriro falling in love, and engaging with another man whilst Cephaz also falls in love with Florina who works in Gokwe. In agreement, Jackson states that, "many men and some women, are forced to travel because of their work, and many married couples are apart for the bulk of their lives. This provides ample opportunity and the need for other sexual partners" (Jackson, 1992, p. 61; UNICEF et al, 2001, p. 13). When Cephaz ultimately visits Miriro and discovers the new reality, he does not only terminate his affair with her, but her other affair with her new lover also ends. Miriro relocates to Harare but fails to get another job and she struggles to pay her accommodation rentals and to buy food. Out of frustration and anxiety, she turns into full time prostitution and ultimately gets infected by the HIV virus. This confirms Moses and Plummer's observation, that scarce opportunities for employment for women means that they must sell sex as a means for their livelihood (1995, p. 2). Hence, urban residence, low socio-economic status, mobile and transient partnership, forced segregation of sexes and alienation all point to the social and economic circumstances that underlie risky behaviour (Moses & Plummer, 1995). These factors avail platforms for behaviour that results in the transmission of the HIV virus. The author shows that people and African families are victims of the new economic set-up.

The author successfully shows that although prostitution and immorality are the chief causes of the spread of the virus, neither men nor women are necessarily to blame. Both are disempowered by circumstances. They will simply be trying to live in accordance with the dictates of the new way of life. This contradicts Chiota's thinking that men are the ones who cause prostitution because they are the ones who leave their wives at home, when they come to work in towns (as cited in Barnes & Win, 1992, p. 132). Rather, men are powerless victims of the new socio-economic order. Similarly, in *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999), Chitsike shows that immorality is chiefly responsible for the transmission of the virus. However, he shows that immorality is a result of both pull and push factors. Minister Mwaita, out of poor socialisation, is so irresponsible that he is pushed by both money and power into acts of immorality. As Palmer (1972, p. 73) notes, power corrupts. At the same time, the girls Mwaita sleeps around with are the unemployed, and are pulled by his money. They would be trying to earn some more money with which to sustain life and ultimately, the HIV virus infects the characters. As Tonhodzai rightly observes, where poverty is, AIDS is likely to be there too (2006, p. 10). This way, Chitsike (1999) blames neither of the characters for it is futile to blame individuals when they are all creations of society. He further demonstrates that, that society fails to socialise its citizens into the expected ways of conduct and also fails to avail opportunities for them to demonstrate their potentials and earn a living. Hence, he also does not blame individual characters for the spread of the HIV virus.

Such a perception and representation is different from that espoused by some female writers. In the women's collection of short stories, *Totanga Patsva* (2005), men, individual weaknesses and traditional practices are blamed as the causes for the spread of the deadly virus. Among the stories that blame men are "Ndofirei kunge ndini ndakajuruja?" (pp, 1-3) (Why should I suffer as if I am the one who looked for it?) by Gumbodete and "Munhu munhu" (pp, 4-8) (A human being is a human) by Ndlovu. "Ndofirei senge ndini ndakajuruja?" (pp, 1-3) blames the spread of the HIV virus on men who are presented indulging in extra marital liaisons without even taking any protective measures. Hence, having multiple partners is shown as a good breeding ground for the transmission of the virus, because "the more sexual partners, the greater the chance that one or more has of contracting HIV" (Jackson, 2002, p. 117). By demanding unprotected sex, men are shown as unsympathetic, uncaring, assertive and cruel beings whose sole desire is to satisfy their selfish but wicked ends. The prevailing power relationships in African societies makes it difficult for women to say no to unprotected sex (Moses & Plummer, 1995, p. 2). Women are therefore shown as victims of men's selfish chauvinistic tendencies. In this case, men's individual weaknesses are presented as weakening women's efforts against the spread of the HIV virus.

That men are the causes of the transmission of the virus is expected if it comes from female writers who are understandably representing members of their gender (Phiri, 2009). It also stems from the fact that men are the dominant partners in most social interactions and the main initiators of sexual activity (Jackson, 2002, p. 88). In addition most men hold the philosophy that, "A real man is not satisfied by one woman" (Jackson, 1992, p. 65). Although all this is true, the reasons for men's indulgence in such extra marital affairs are not alluded to. Recognising the role that men play in the spread of HIV should not justify their being blamed. Men are trapped in social expectations of gender roles and behaviour just as women are (Jackson, 1992, p. 89). In interviews with people in Masvingo and Harare, most men argued that they are usually pushed into extra-marital relationships due to being separated from their wives by great distances. Some cited lack of sexual gratification in their marriages and others stated failure to have children in their marriages as push factors. For some, it is also a requisite by their religious sectors to have more than one wife, while few conceded to the view that they are enticed by wealthy women. In all these cases, it becomes important to ascertain the push factors behind men's atrocious behaviour. In many cases, it is a result of poor socialisation. Failure to satisfy the other partner's sexual desire stems from poor socialisation that modern society accords its people. Again, the desire to have children stems from societal expectation on married people, which usually results in restlessness on the part of the childless couple. Society looks down upon childless marriages and this makes both the man and woman victims of expectation. In addition, numerically, women outnumber men, yet everyone unmarried is still looked down upon. Despite their numerical advantage, most of these women need men to satisfy their sexual needs. As such, it becomes unavoidable for men to be enticed by those who seek emotional gratification (Great Zimbabwe University HIV and AIDS Coordinator, 2009). To cap it all, Zimbabwean society has no tolerance for lesbianism, forcing many women to look for, and have men. This almost makes it practically impossible for all men to be in single-partner relationships suppose they had wanted. Therefore, contrary to what is presented by these female writers, society is largely to blame for such dangerous liaisons since people try to live in accordance with the its dictates.

Individual characters' promiscuous behaviour is also regarded as detrimental to the war against the HIV epidemic. Some stories blame such behaviour, together with seeking a life of sexual and materialistic pleasure as the main setbacks in the fight against the

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transmission of the HIV virus. Such stories include “Kuna sahwira Chipo” (p. 9) (To my dear friend Chipo) by Elizabeth Makasi, “Chakandidya” (pp. 19-20) (What ate me) by Dream Sithole and “Chaita musoro uteme” (pp. 21-9) (What has caused the headache) by Ruby Magosvongwe. The others are “Pfira mate pasi” (pp. 33-4) (Spit on the ground) by Snodia Mufukari, “Zvakatanga nekupindwa nechando” (pp. 40-4) (It all started with a cold) by Carona Chikwereveshe, “Dzinoruma” (pp. 53-7) (They bite) by Ellen Chiramba and “Tikaramba takadaro tinokunda” (pp. 58-65) (If we keep on like that we will succeed) by Pelagia Kaseke. As Moses and Plummer (1995, p. 2) note, men and women with rapid changes in sexual partners acquire and transmit the infection and sustain the pandemic. In all these short stories, individual weaknesses are shown as responsible for the transmission of the virus. Some characters are shown failing to control their sexual desires while others are presented as keen to live a life of pleasure and materialism.

These short stories however succeed in showing the behaviour that exacerbates the transmission of the virus without satisfactorily examining the root causes of such behaviour. As Moses and Plummer (1995, p. 2) note, the behaviours which cause the transmission of HIV, also have causes; which are social, economic and biological as well. They are a result of poverty, social inequity, employment practices and development policies rather than chosen by an individual. Prostitution is an attempt to solve the problem of poverty (Jackson, 1992, p. 61; Rurevo & Bourdillon, 2003, p. 52). A more successful short story is “Ndichiyeuka vabereki vangu”(pp. 10-13) (In remembrance of my parents) by Josephine Muganihiwa where the causes of promiscuity are shown as the people’s desire to eke out a living on one hand and to satisfy sexual desire on the other. Seeking a life of perceived happiness and materialism together with having multiple sexual partners undoubtedly heighten the transmission but are themselves not the causes. The reasons why characters opt to crave for a materialistic lifestyle are not explored. Yet it is an undoubted fact that modern life has largely become materialistic without being matched by the necessary morality or spiritualism to curb asocial behaviour. The writers do not dwell upon the fact that these characters are victims of reality. The reasons for men and women engaging in or having multiple partners is not explored. Yet promiscuity is a result of both push and pull factors. Moralising, condemning prostitutes and repression all ignore the root causes of prostitution and have little effect on reducing it (Rurevo & Bourdillon, 2003, p. 52). What is recommended is to move beyond emotional and moralistic consideration exuded by most of the female writers.

Again, the fact that some of the characters testify that they were warned as in “Chakandidya” (pp. 19-20), “Pfira mate pasi” (p. 33-34) and “Hazviitwe zviya vasikana” (pp. 36-9) but ignored the advice shows that there is something left unsaid by the writers. A closer analysis shows that their behaviour is shaped more by economic and social necessity than by individual choices. Despite the nobility of other people’s advice, socially and economically stranded people always find themselves indulging in anti-social activities. Hence despite the pleas by the authors and individual characters for people to desist from and resist immoral behaviour if the causes of such actions are themselves not satisfactorily attended to it becomes naïve to believe that people will refrain from them. Such will be an attempt to address the symptoms of a more complex system. Writers who fail to get to the root causes of problems often end up blaming characters whose behaviour is just an outward manifestation of an internally decadent social system.

In some cases, writers blame Shona traditional customs for causing the spread of the virus. Customs such as payment of *lobola*, inheritance and the *chiramu* (banter) relationship are castigated. In “Ndofirei senge ndini ndakajuruja” (pp. 1-3), the practice of paying *lobola*

is condemned for bonding and binding women to men's demands. This is in line with the view that a man who marries a woman and pays *lobola* develops the feeling that he owns not only the woman but also her reproductive organs which must be available as and when he demands their use (Gokova, 1996, p. 10). It means married women have very little sexual resistance to offer to their husbands. In "Mukore uno here?" (pp. 14-18) (In this era?), Kesia Chateuka is bitter about people who cling to the so-called backward and also dangerous custom of *kugara nhaka* (wife inheritance). The same custom is also an object of attack from Valeria Chaukura in another short story collection, *Masimba* (2004) where it is shown as the ultimate cause of Mai Maidei's immoral behaviour. The writers openly castigate the practice by presenting it as not only risky to the two who would have been intimate but also to the male's other innocent wife. They view the custom as obsolete and as serving no purpose at all except to cripple society. This is a case where it is believed that those infected by the HIV virus should not indulge in sex as this might heighten the spread of the virus (Motope, 2006, p. 3). Although such observations are valid, the continued existence of the custom shows that there is something noble in it that modern society fails to acknowledge. Here is another case whereby society blames tradition for being anti-developmental. Inheritance is believed to exacerbate the spread of the HIV virus and so it is believed if the custom is abolished the spreading of the virus would be limited. Superficially, this appears true.

However, the nobility of the customs even in contemporary society is downplayed. Traditionally, the inheritance custom guaranteed emotional, biological and socio-economic gratifications to either the deceased's wife or husband. Through this custom, society acknowledged that death could sometimes rob one of his or her partner in the nascent or prime stages of marriage. Being a young man or woman, the person still had human feelings that badly needed attention from a member of the opposite sex. The individual also desired to be helped economically, including having some domestic and other social chores done for them. This custom thus bound either a man or woman to a new partner for the rest of their lives and such a man or woman had rights to the body of the other. Unfortunately HIV and AIDS have ravaged modern life and so, society warns against inheritance showing it as one of the wicked customs that result in transmission of the virus. Although this sounds true, it simply shows that society tries to address superficially a more complex situation. At one level, society is no longer worried about widowed young men and women. They cannot be inherited, and cannot easily have their biological desires and their economic challenges attended to. The young man or woman is cursed twice. Apart from enduring the pain of losing a beloved and hence being denied emotional and sexual gratification, he or she is also stigmatised and branded as a hazard to society. Even though he or she may have great desires or feelings, cursed as he or she is, the feelings do not deserve anyone's attention. Again, being single exposes the widow to worse economic challenges should she have children to look after. This might ultimately lead her to prostitution. It is true that society can never win the war at this level and it is the reason why in "Mukore uno here?" Chengetai and his brother's wife become intimate, "*Chenge aimunetsa achiti mukoma vakarwara kwenguva refu saka uri kuona nei?*" (pp. 17) (Chenge was troubling her saying his brother had been ill for long and so how was she managing sexually?).

As shown through the above case, it is by nature that people need a member of the opposite sex satisfy emotional and physical gratification. Yeukai gives in to the call for sexual intimacy by Chenge despite the fact that she is a member of the Home Based Care, an organisation that teaches people on the spread, symptoms and care to be accorded to the victims of AIDS. Despite the fact that she is well aware of the dangers of such intimacy, she does not resist much to the surprise of other family members. This simply shows

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the naivety of trying to do away with human feelings which are just natural. No one can completely control or suppress human feelings through legislation. Instead, we live in a society in which the law carries little moral status (Rurevo & Bourdillon, 2003, p. 56).

Legislating against inheritance helps free a woman or man from being intimate with a member of their husband or wife's family but does not stamp out their sexual desires. This gives the individuals the 'freedom' to associate with multiple partners in search of sexual gratification. In fact, conversely, abolishing inheritance exposes society and individuals to greater risks of the spreading of HIV as people will be at liberty to associate with whomever they so wish. It actually makes the partner-less individual more marketable and easily accessible to all and sundry. Instead of condemning the custom as one of the chief culprits in the spread of HIV, it can actually be adapted to become a source of control of the virus. This is so since its abolishment makes the widowed prone to infection or re-infection since they will seek gratification from a variety of clients (Great Zimbabwe University HIV and AIDS Coordinator, 2009). It is therefore mythical for modernity to hope to solve such problems by condemning such cultural practices which could help curb disaster by binding individuals to definite partners. In fact, the so-called risky cultural practices like inheritance arise out of important traditions which are often very caring (Jackson, 2002, p. 135). What is important today is not to abolish the custom but to modify it so that it suits contemporary times. There could be need for people to have their blood tested so that should they be found positive they practice safe methods that limit the transmission of the virus. Again in cases where women do not wish to be inherited it would just be prudent to guarantee them legal and human rights support and make sure they have continued economic security (Jackson, 2002, pp. 137-8). The attempt by modernity to try and limit the transmission of the virus from mother to child shows that society is failing to totally do away with intimacy between infected people. Hence, some writers seem unable to identify the underlying factors that incapacitate society and individuals against the HIV virus.

Solutions offered by writers

With the exception of "Dzinoruma", "Tikaramba takadaro tinokunda", "Mhindo, mhindo, mhindo", "Goremucheche" and "Taemurwa", all short stories in *Totanga Patsva* end pessimistically as the writers present characters in hopeless situations. It appears the writers see no hope for those infected by the HIV virus. In "Kuna sahwira Chipo", "Chakandidya", and "Neniwo, ndinokudawo futi", the narrators, who are themselves dead characters (in the graveyard) write to the living regretting what they did. In "Hazviitwe zviya vasikana" and "Zvakatanga nekupindwa nechando", the infected characters pathetically wait for their death, viewing it as inevitable and unavoidable. Such is also the ending adopted by Chitsike in *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999) where Mwaita painfully waits for his death upon hearing that he is HIV positive. This stems from the conclusion that the wages of sin is death; a philosophy also popularised by Matavire in his song AIDS (Tonhodzai, 2006, p. 10). Such a defeatist vision, although it serves to warn society about the dangers of infection does not help give it the hope it badly deserves and needs. This way, the writers stigmatise the characters' HIV status. They disempower people against the virus, showing it as invincible. Yet it is no use to sit and mope (Moyana, 1996, p. 55). As Hove observes, writers should "be able to say to the depressed: the sun will rise again even if it seems the night is long" (n.d., p. 2). In agreement, Ngugi remarks that a writer is, and should be a pathfinder (1987, p. 85), meaning s/he must help society find ways out of existing problems and challenges. Since life is a struggle, one must gather courage and push on in whatever way possible. In reality, "HIV is not the end of life" (Mazodze, 2006, p. 7). Although it will be scary to learn that one is HIV positive, but it is not a death sentence (Chimedza, 2006, p. 10). That being

HIV positive is synonymous with dying was a popular myth of the early 90s. Although it reflected popular opinion and reality then, it is a weakness on the part of a writer whose duty is to help society find solutions to a crisis. The writers should have striven to show that being HIV positive is not really an end but the beginning of a new life which has its own challenges and expectations. They should have given people the hope that doctors might find a cure soon and those infected might still live longer through positive living. In fact today one can actually live positively with HIV. The given short stories thus go against the title of the book *'Totanga Patsva'* (We start afresh), whose pre-occupation is to show that being infected by the virus is not at all an end, but a beginning of a new life with its own challenges and expectations.

On the contrary, stories like "Dzinoruma" (pp. 53-7) (They bite), "Tikaramba takadaro tinokunda" (pp. 58-65) (If we keep on like that we will succeed), "Taemurwa" (pp. 30-2) (We have been admired), "Goremucheche" (Ever young) and "Mhindo, mhindo, mhindo" (pp. 80-94) (Darkness, darkness, darkness) together with Mukwazhi's *Zvibaye Woga* (1996) strive to show that though the epidemic is causing many deaths, there is still hope for the future.

In "Ndichiyeka vabereki vangu" (pp. 10-13) (In remembrance of my parents) and "Mhindo, mhindo, mhindo", the writers see the future as lying in the union between men and women. In "Ndichiyeka vabereki vangu", the narrator, Sarudzai says she chose to be a doctor so as to help society with knowledge and medicine to fight the HIV virus. In doing so, she does not lose sight of her male partner and the role he can, and should play, "Murume wangu achandibetsera sezvo atova chiremba" (My husband will help me since he is already a practicing medical doctor). In "Mhindo, mhindo, mhindo" both men and women accept the reality that AIDS is real and so they agree to join hands to fight the darkness, which is a symbol of the gloom brought by the epidemic. Unlike other female writers who see and consider men as enemies who need to be fought and defeated, if not exterminated, these writers see men as important allies in waging a successful war against the epidemic. As Jackson observes, men need to be actively involved in the fight against the pandemic (2002, p. 91). Men therefore cease to be the causes of women's problems but become part of the solution. A careful analysis shows that not only do we find good men in society, but that we indeed also find good in men. Such is a crucial step towards empowering society against HIV and AIDS. As these writers show, fighting men is not a solution at all. Instead, the whole society, men and women together need to be educated so that they are fully aware of the causes, symptoms and ways of dealing with the HIV virus. Although in "Mhindo, mhindo, mhindo" Hwede advocates for unified efforts between men and women, she is silent on what form those collaborative efforts should take. Muganhiwa urges these joint ventures to focus on research into traditional medicine as a way of minimising the effects of the epidemic. This is quite handy, especially owing to the accessibility and affordability of this medicine compared to western form of medicine. In agreement, Nyazema (2001, p. 8) remarks that there is a lot we can learn from traditional medicine and it is time we started to talk about it publicly. Whilst this is plausible, it seeks to help the infected only but what then remains as mystery is what society should do to prevent any further infections. As a matter of fact, prevention has always been better than cure.

In Mukwazhi's *Zvibaye Woga*, the main character, Cephas, highlights a number of things that people can do to surmount the HIV challenge. Firstly, it is important for them to have their blood tested so that they know their HIV status (p. 129). In agreement, Tonhodzai

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remarks that if AIDS is real, then people must also be real and get tested (2006, p. 10). In his dialogue with a doctor, Cephas also comes to the realisation that HIV positive people are just as human as any other and that these people need the support of their relatives. They need to be well-looked after, and to get the necessary and recommended foods. They can also use antiretroviral drugs to limit the effects of the infection. This way these people still have the hope to live longer. It emerges that being faithful to a partner is the best way to deal with the epidemic. As such Cephas reconciles with his wife and condemns multiple affairs. He offers to build a rural home and makes sure his wife goes there to help his mother work on the fields whilst he remains in Kwekwe.

Mukwazhi raises many issues meant to empower people against the epidemic. Firstly, his call for people to have their HIV status confirmed is quite in line with modern thinking as it helps people to know how they should live. Once tested, they also receive the necessary counselling depending on their HIV status. This is because, "the more you know about your situation, the more you can do about it" (Jackson, 2002, p. 179). It also helps society to be informed about the kind of assistance it can offer to the infected. Faithfulness to a partner is also quite handy in curbing the spread of the virus (Jackson, 2002, p. 105), especially taking into account that the virus is spread mainly through sexual intercourse with infected people. In fact, it is essential that people have, not only fewer partners, but safer partners to reduce the risk (Jackson, 1992, p. 58). This becomes the best preventive measure. The author also explains that it is not enough to condemn polygamous marriage of the traditional type but shows that having multiple partners even under the banner of modernity, whether in or outside marriage is quite risky. This way, he shows the futility of condemning polygamous marriage as bad yet modernity has several instances of people who have artificial polygamous marriages. It is therefore prudent that Cephas reconciles with his wife so that he does not engage in multiple sexual affairs as had been the case. Mukwazhi does well to show that to win the war against HIV and AIDS, the preventive programme must make use of many approaches known to be effective, rather than just implementing one or a few select actions in isolation (Chimedza, 2006, p. 10). The multiple actions can minimise the spread of the epidemic. This empowers society and gives it a glimmer of hope.

Although the above seem plausible, there is also a limit as to their authenticity as solutions to the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Being faithful to one's partner is deemed the best way to limit the spread of the virus. However, the reason why people fail to be faithful remains unscathed. One main reason is the separation of husband and wife owing to the nature of employment in modern society. This separation is worsened by the harsh socio-economic environment, which many contemporary Zimbabweans find themselves in which makes frequent visits between couples very expensive and unsustainable. As such, the challenges of forced separation which the author had successfully shown to be the reason behind infidelity, remains unresolved. To call for fidelity is to appeal for individual reformation in an environment that is more powerful than the individuals (Sikipa, 1997, p. 4). The HIV and AIDS coordinator at Great Zimbabwe University admitted that they face great challenges in trying to persuade distanced couples to abstain from sex until they meet their spouse because many of them complained that they could not go for two days without sexual gratification. As Jackson rightly observes, although avoiding sexual activity would help curb the epidemic, it is unrealistic to expect the majority of young, healthy, sexually mature males and females to live long without any sexual release (2002, p. 120). This is a clear indication that separation in a costly environment will make it difficult to curb the transmission of the virus. The other reason for the cause of the transmission is the

desperate desire by the unemployed to earn a living. People find themselves condemned to immorality for them to survive. Hence, until the unemployed find jobs that reward well, the problem of prostitution will not end. Thus solving the underlying causes of the transmission will do much more than the best educational and counselling programmes (Moses & Plummer, 1995, p. 2). Therefore a better understanding of these underlying causes is needed; they must be recognised and addressed at national, regional, and global levels (Moses & Plummer, 1995). Again, that Cephas reconciles with his wife and promises to build a rural home where his wife would stay; helping his mother with domestic chores is not a lasting solution. This is not a satisfactory way of curbing multiple sexual partners. Such a solution fails to get to the root cause of the problem. It calls for another husband-wife separation which makes the problem cyclic. Such literature fits into a kind of literature, which Osundare regards as one that “builds bridges where there are no rivers, and the type which feeds starving people with dreams of absent harvests” (1996, p. 34). It is totally unrealistic to advocate that everyone remain faithful to one partner in situations where partners never live together for more than a week at a time (Jackson, 1992, p. 91). Complete abstinence, or avoiding any sexual activity is obviously a safe option although it is not a realistic, practical solution for most married people, nor indeed, for most adults whether married or single (Jackson, 1992). Instead, the demand for commercial sex may be reduced if husbands are not separated from their wives, if migrant labour is reduced, if sex within marriage is more fulfilling and if women have better access to education and employment and stronger inheritance rights so that they are not forced into prostitution to survive (Jackson, p. 103).

Conclusion

It generally emerges that Shona writers’ vision of the HIV and AIDS epidemic is quite different. Whereas some castigate men, individual characters and traditional customs, others demonstrate a better understanding of the factors that disempower society against the spread of the HIV virus. Again, some writers present no life beyond infection. They portray being infected as synonymous to a death sentence. In this way they do not satisfactorily undertake their responsibilities as writers who must help society surmount the challenges it encounters. Others suggest solutions. However, there is still need for writers to offer practical, wide-range and meaningful solutions. The tendency currently is to suggest solutions that act as painkillers; which temporarily silence people’s pain. The solutions ought to centre more on how to prevent further infections and how to limit the viral effect in infected people.

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