LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF STIGMATISATION AND MYTHS

SURROUNDING DEATH IN THE NOVELS *THE PURPLE VIOLET OF OSHAANTU* BY

NESHANI ANDREAS AND *THE OTHER PRESENCE* BY FRANCIS SIFISO NYATHI

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

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ABSTRACT

This research study is an analysis of literary representation of stigmas and myths associated with death in the two selected novels, namely: *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas and *The Other Presence* by Francis Sifiso Nyathi. The two novels analysed in this research project were selected because they both emphasised on the theme of death. The thesis used The Social Dominance Theory to analyse the impacts that stigmas and myths associated with death usually have on the victims. The study revealed that widows are often mistreated by their husbands' families and relatives as portrayed by Andreas in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu.* Equally, the study revealed how mostly those who are closely related to the deceased are mistreated by the mourners and the community as portrayed by Nyathi in *The Other Presence.* Furthermore, the study showed that education can be used to help eradicate myths and stigmas associated with death. All in all these two books offer a voice to the voiceless people who have lost their loved ones such as Mee Kauna, Mee Saara and Elder Sinvula to stand up for themselves and not let myths and stigmas associated with death silence them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

It is with pride and affection that I dedicated this thesis to my parents Josef and Selma

Shilongo, for their love and unconditional support throughout my life. Dad and mom this is

for you.

DECLARATION

I, Teopolina Ombili Hangula , hereby declare that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher education.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

This study was about the exploration of the literary representations of stigmatisation and myths surrounding death as presented in the selected novels *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas and *The Other Presence* by Francis Sifiso Nyathi. The study aimed to explore how stigmatisation and myths surrounding death are presented in the selected novels. Therefore the aim of this chapter is to introduce the study through a presentation of the study's orientation, problem statement, research questions, significance of the study and the study limitations.

1.2   Orientation of the proposed study

In some African cultures, if death occurs, it is regarded to have been as a result of witchcraft or some bad omen. This is despite the fact that death is an inevitable end for every living creature on earth, including human beings. A study carried out by Umoh (2012) titled *Death is not natural* reveals that:

> apart from the deaths of elders, who are said to return to their ancestral homeland after a ripe old age, all other deaths in Africa, especially in Nigeria, are considered unnatural; they are viewed as premature, untimely, and therefore caused by an evil force. (p. 10).

Given the nature of the way people view death when it finally occurs; there is confusion because people do not really know the best way to approach death as illustrated in the two novels. Instead of talking about death and the pain that it brings, mourners in some African societies are expected to follow some traditional customs when their beloved ones pass away as it is portrayed

in the novels *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas and *The Other Presence* by Francis Sifiso Nyathi. For example, mourners are expected to deliver farewell speeches; there is a special dress code and a special way of addressing the bereaved. Although some of the customs were probably designed to make the mourning process easier, many a time they make it more difficult and mourners who do not adhere to these customs might be victimised and accused of being responsible for the death in question. The myths and stigmatisation that surround death in the selected novels appear to cause mistrust among the family members. It was the aim of this study therefore to analyse the literary representations of stigmatisation and myths surrounding death in the selected novels.

1.3   Statement of the problem

The major concern of this study is to explore how stigmatisation and myths surrounding death are portrayed in the novels *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas and *The Other Presence* by Sifiso Nyathi. According to Umoh (2012, p. 2), an "African viewpoint regards long life as a blessing and [anything] contrary to it [like death] is considered as a curse either from the gods, ancestors or an earthly foe." In some Namibian communities as well, when a person dies, the death is often seen as a result of witchcraft and not as a result of the natural life cycle. The researcher has noticed that characters in the two novels choose to ignore common causes of death, such as accidents or diseases. When death is a result of accidents or diseases, the characters are often still left asking questions and trying to find 'the culprit' among themselves as represented in the selected novels. The researcher therefore analysed how stigmatisation and myths that surround death as portrayed in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas

(2001) and *The Other Presence* (2008) by Sifiso Nyathi can affect people as represented in the selected novels.

1.4   Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study were to:

1.4.1. evaluate how stigmatisation and myths that surround death are portrayed in the two novels, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas and *The Other Presence* by Sifiso Nyathi;

1.4.2. analyse emerging themes from the discussion of stigmatisation and myths surrounding death in the two novels; and

1.4.3.   examine how the two authors portray relationships amongst the characters caused by the impact of myths and stigma that death have on families and members of the societies as represented in the selected novels.

1.5   Significance of the study

Stigmatisation and myths surrounding death, if studied in literature, may help to fight against stigmatisation and other stereotypes that are associated with myths surrounding death.

1.6   Limitations of the study

There are many literary texts that address stigma and myths surrounding death. However this study was limited to two novels, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas and *The Other Presence* by Sifiso Nyathi. In addition, there are many communities in Namibia that can be studied to fulfil the purpose of this study but, only two of the communities, the Subiya and the

Aawambo communities, were studied as they are the ones represented in novels *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* and *The Other Presence.* Therefore the results of this study cannot be generalised to other Namibian communities.

1.7   Outline of the chapters

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one presents the introduction and background of the study, while chapter two reviews the literature that is related to the topic under study. Furthermore, chapter three of the study presents the research methodology used in this study. In addition, chapter four of the study presents the analyses and discussion of the collected data. Concluding the study is chapter five which presents the findings and recommendations before the overall conclusion of the research study is presented.

1.8   Conclusion

This chapter focused on the introduction, the background of the study as well as the statement of the problem of the study. Furthermore, the chapter presented the research objectives, the significance of the study as well as the limitations of the study. The next chapter reviews the literature related to the literary representation of stigmatisation and myths surrounding death in The *Purple Violet of Oshaantu* and *The Other Presence* as presented in the two novels. It is in chapter two the researcher would be able to identify gaps that may be overlooked by previous studies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the literature that has been produced on the representations of stigmatisation and myths surrounding death in literature. The chapter is divided into various subsections namely: the portrayal of stigma and myths that surround death in the two novels *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas and *The Other Presence* by Sifiso Nyathi; mourning and mourning rituals in the African cultures; death as a taboo in Africa; what the treatment of widows is like in some African cultures; the stigma that is attached to HIV related diseases; the portrayal of relationships amongst the characters in the two novels and the impact that death can have on families and members of their societies.

The chapter also contains a discussion on the Social Dominance Theory (SDT) which will help readers to understand the development of the discussion in this thesis. This theory is relevant because it allows the researcher to analyse the preservation of myths and stigmatisation that surround death in the two selected novels. The assumption in the Social Dominance Theory is that the expressions of power within a specific cultural group can contribute towards the oppression of people, such as widowed women, which seems to be the case in the *The Purple*

Violet of Oshaantu. The theory further states that certain individuals or groups of people benefit from perpetuating myths that lead to the disempowerment of other individuals.

2.2 Stigmatisation and myths as viewed in African context

UNAIDS (as cited in Ndiaye, 2008), defines stigma as a quality that significantly discredits an individual in the eyes of others. It is believed that the pain caused by stigma is comparable to physical pain as it engages the same neural mechanism that supports the experience of physical pain. Moreover, understanding stigma is important because stigma creates an environment that makes it harder for prevention programmes to have a meaningful impact. Ndiaye (2008) investigated HIV stigma in the family context from the lens of African context. On the other hand, Mercatante (1988 as cited in Udefi, 2012) defines myths as:

> a traditional story orally passed from one generation to the next, believed to be literally true by the culture that produced it about gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines and other real and fantastic creatures taking place in primeval or remote times (p. 60).

Udefi (2012) maintains that a "myth is a vehicle conveying a certain fact or certain basic truth about man's experience in his encounter with the created order and with regards to man's relation to the supra-sensible world" (p. 6).

Based on the information above it is evident that a myth is a way of communicating a message to maintain culture as everything seems to be a myth depending on the cultural beliefs. "They are the encyclopaedia engraved in the chambers of the African mind to be passed from generation to generation" (Anthony, 2014, p. 99).

Some people in some African societies believe in the existence of witchcraft, and it is evident throughout the two novels in this study. Equally, many African societies seem to believe that the untimely death of young people is related to evil forces. Umoh (2012) states that in most cases social disruptions occur in the aftermath of some untimely deaths as it is represented in the selected novels. In these African societies, parents expect their children to witness their death and not parents witnessing the death of their children (Byock, 2002). And when this does not happen as expected, witchcraft is usually seen as the culprit, because some African societies believe that the natural order of death is to die only when one reaches the 'ripe age' (old age). The study therefore aimed at using two novels *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) by Neshani Andreas and *The Other Presence* by Sifiso Nyathi to investigate these beliefs.

2.3   Mourning and mourning rituals in African cultures

Mourning the dead appears to be a universal experience for human beings and it often involves the expression of emotions symbolising grief. Mourning is also regarded as a traditional sign of grief after a person's death. Setsiba (2012, p. 11) sees mourning for the dead as a universal practice mediated by religious and cultural practices in different societies. It is believed that mourning usually involves some core beliefs, spiritual practices and equally, some expected behaviour as a symbol of expressing grief. This implies that when death occurs in a particular community, people are all expected to mourn in the same way, which can be difficult as people express their emotions differently. Setsiba (2012, p. 11) further elaborates that mourning can be both a conscious and unconscious process which binds the mourners to the loved one who has passed away. Performing the mourning rituals, the bereaved families show the community that

they are grieving; in return the community supports and acknowledges what the bereaved are doing. The bereaved people may behave in a way that does not position them as in need of support from others (Setsiba, 2012, p.18). Based on the above information, it is evident that people should not expect others to mourn in a way similar to the way they are mourning because people are different and respond to grief in different ways.

According to Neimeryer, Burke, Mackay and Van Dyke Stringer (as cited in Setsiba, 2012, p. 10), "mourning the death of a loved one is a universal human experience". Nwoye, (2005, p. 150) states that the whole process of mourning begins with the effort at an appropriate time and place. In most African countries, it is believed that the home of the bereaved is the most appropriate place to mourn, whereas early in the morning and or late in the evening is good hours for the dissemination of such painful information. When a loved one dies, those left behind usually have to make some adjustments so that they can get used to functioning without the deceased. In other words, death upsets the social equilibrium of the bereaved family or community.

Setsiba (2012) claims that people normally use certain prescribed rites to restore the disturbed balance. These include various prescribed behaviour and rituals performed such as what is to be worn and how people should show their emotions and feelings, and the preparation of the corpse for burial depending on the age of the deceased. This is supported by Baloyi (n. d.) who states that in some African traditions different rituals are performed when grieving, depending on who has died and how they have died. For example, in some African tribes widows are required to wear black clothes to symbolise the dark cloud of death that has befallen them.

Black is also associated with loss and pain. Widows who refuse to wear these black clothes are usually seen as the possible "cause" of their husbands' deaths. Setsiba (2012), reports that the dress code carries the message that the person is now mourning. The performance of mourning rituals varies from one ethnic group to the next, and they are important because they can be seen as a way of maintaining the balance between the deceased and those left behind.

Sossou (2012, p. 202) contends that while most African societies respect mourning rites because they possess cultural values, it is also important to notice that many of them are gendered. Sossou (2012) explains that it is important to note that it is usually the widows who are expected to dress differently and not the widowers. Sossou (2012) also states that widows and not widowers endure the most humiliating rituals such as covering their heads, eating specific food, crying all the time and sitting at one place for a long time. From the foregoing, it is clear that in the African context, widows are expected to behave differently when mourning their beloved ones compared to their counterparts. The traditional African values include the sense of community life, good human relations, the sacredness of the religion, time, respect for authority and elders, as well as sense of language and proverbs (Emeka, 2012).

The question of how mourners respond to the death of a loved one in some African societies is also an interesting aspect. When death occurs, people who are close to the deceased are often expected to show their emotions of sorrow. Setsiba (2012, p. 6) points out that "it is customary for the bereaved families, especially widows, to continue to be in a sad mood for a culturally stipulated period of time." This can be very difficult because people do not require the same amount of time to mourn. Some require a longer period of time and some require a shorter period of time.

Like any other significant life transition, after the death of a loved one, the bereaved individuals need to adjust and go back to normal life. Sossou (2002) argues that while it is understandable that death is always shocking, especially to those closely associated with the dead person, it is important that they get back to normal life again. However this does not usually happen fast in many African societies. Setsiba (2012 p. 17) highlights this by stating that in many African cultures , when faced with the death of a family member, the whole community and the bereaved family members perform bereavement rituals that take a long time, and some of them even take as long as a month. This is not always possible, either because of employment commitments or because some of the rituals make the bereaved people feel sadder. However, when people are unable to do this, they are often labelled as having a hand in the death of their loved one.

Although death in the two novels is viewed as an emotional and painful moment, it is highly likely that some people may not take death as such, but rather accept it as a natural phenomenon. Sossou (2002, p. 205) posits that in many parts of the African society, the early parts of the mourning period are the most rigorous and it is where certain rituals are performed. Sossou (2002, p. 202) further observes that all human societies have since time immemorial sought ways to make death acceptable and provide a chance for expressing grief and showing respect for the dead person.

Setsiba (2012, p. 18) points out that within the African context, the dead are regarded as ancestors and they are treated with great respect as they are believed to have a special relationship with the living. Therefore proper rites and ceremonies need to be performed following the death of a loved one in order to reflect this belief. Any deviation from the above

could be perceived as a sign of disrespect for the ancestors and bad luck could befall anyone who does not adhere to the stipulated practices. Furthermore, in many African countries, once the funeral is over, the public display of mourning is also over. This is an indication that death seems to become less fearful and it is regarded as a natural phenomenon. The way the world views death also influences Africa as the influences of modernism are resulting in the world to be regarded as a global village. Maluleke (2012, p. 3) asserts that traditional cultural practices reflect the values and beliefs held by members of a community for periods often spanning for generations. These beliefs and values shape a community's way of conduct amongst themselves, their environment and in relation to the supernatural world.

A sense of community and that of being humane are considered as great values of traditional African life. Yankuzo (2014) states that "African societies are forced to accept uniform moral principles of what is right and wrong within the global cultures" (p. 1). If African ethnic cultures are forced to fuse with foreign cultures, then the whole idea of African self-definition is diluted. The contemporary African people have a diluted self-definition because of the presence and influence of alien cultures. Globalisation and modernism present challenges that cause the weakening of African culture and tradition, as noted in *The Other Presence* and in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu,* and to a greater extent they are responsible for the possible nearing extinction of African cultures and traditions. Kasongo (2010) observes that when an incoming culture in this case (modernism) seeks to totally replace the existing cultural values, it causes social frustrations and generates maladjustment of group members to this new system, which leads to the demise of the traditional society. It can, therefore, be concluded that the contemporary African culture is another form, a crossbred culture, as it is a fusion of the original and alien culture and tradition.

The aim of this study was by no means intended to make the readers see African beliefs towards death as the same throughout the continent, but to clarify that these beliefs vary from society to society. This is well explained by Setsiba (2012, p. 2) who observes that "all societies have their own customs and beliefs surrounding death and each culture has its own approaches to deal with loss." The two authors of the two novels considered in this study, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* and *The Other Presence* depict how the two societies (Subiya and Aawambo) approach death.

2.4   Death and witchcraft in African societies

According to Asuguo (2011, p. 175), "death is a creation of God, made for the purpose of taking people from earth when people's time is up." However, it seems as if some people in some African societies in general, and Namibia in particular find death as something hard to talk about and comprehend, as it is portrayed in the selected novels.

In the novel *The Other Presence* Nyathi (2008, p. 111) writes that:

>in African traditional set-ups, there is no death that occurs innocently. Behind every death, there is some form of mysterious work by either a sorcerer or a spell. Even in the situation where a western clinic diagnoses a patient as a HIV carrier, the cause of the death of that person would have to be questioned.

According to Mlambo and Kandemiri (2015), death is something that can never be readily accepted no matter how many occasions one encounters it. Furthermore, Mlambo and Kandemiri (2015) argue that death is everywhere, and there is no country without a grave but it becomes an issue for concern when death occurs (p. 56). Asuguo (2011, p. 171) explains that human life is a

cycle which includes death. It is therefore essential that people are made aware of this fact, so that they can start to view death as natural.

Umoh (2012, p.1) observes that "every death, apart from that of elders, is considered untimely or premature because the hand of one's enemy is presumed to be involved." Umoh (2012) further sheds light on how in most African societies it is believed that people hardly ever die a "natural death"; rather they are killed by witches who are typically members of the household. This unfounded and superstitious attitude towards death may cause some grave disaster for family unity. In some African societies, families are torn apart due to innumerable witchcraft accusations. This is what is presumed in the two novels of this study and it is going to be explored in detail in chapter four of this study.

In the study conducted by Umoh (2012), it is revealed that social disruptions in the aftermath of "untimely deaths" are alarming in Africa. It is also observed that the Africans' attitude towards death in general and of young people in particular is distinctive. Umoh (2012) notes that:

> I have lived in the United States and Western Europe. I have attended several funerals of both young and old on these continents, including funerals of teenagers who committed suicide. But I have never witnessed or heard of a fight or even quarrel sparked by relatives or friends against presumed killers (p. 3).

This is further proof to corroborate the fact that some of the Africans' attitude towards death and its "cause" is quite unique, and there are some beliefs that need to be changed and addressed.

Sossou (2002, p. 203) mentions that in many societies in Africa, the birth of a child is seen as an occasion for joy, while death is seen as great and unredeemed tragedy even when it happens in

extreme old age. When discussing the issue of death in some African societies, it will be impossible to discuss the matter without taking into consideration the question of witchcraft, especially when the death in question is of a young person. Under such circumstances people go overboard in a bid to find an explanation as to why the person died. In the same way Ogumefun, Gilbert and Schatz (2011, p. 86) add that the death of young people is also sometimes attributed to the lack of respect for societal norms and traditions. This means that sometimes if a young person dies, people in the community usually look at his/her past, and if he/she had no sense of respect for people, the community members usually conclude that his/her death came as a punishment from the gods for not respecting authority or elders.

Apart from the gods, as mentioned earlier, witchcraft is also seen as a culprit for causing death in the community. Among African communities, witchcraft is understood to be a problem in that it disturbs and countercultures most of the African cultural tenets such as communalism. Eldam (2003) notes that "it is believed that the art of witchcraft is passed on by inheritance" (p. 58). Witchcraft can therefore be seen operating in the same way as chieftainship which is passed on from generation to generation through inheritance. The magical powers are used for self-aggrandisement, harming other people in society and they may also be used to kill people as well. Igwe (2004) asserts that witchcraft is believed to cause epileptic fits, excessive weight gain, accidents, infertility, and miscarriages, among other mishaps. In other words, witchcraft is a means of societal destruction because of the evil attributes attached to it.

In Africa, witchcraft can be manipulated by human beings for both good and evil uses. It is in the same vein that everything that happens in the African context ought to be a reason for it. Mbiti (1989) stresses the fact that the spirit world of the African people is very densely populated with

spirit beings, spirits and the living dead or the spirits of the ancestors (p.75). There are human beings who have the powers to communicate with, or rather have access to these spirits. People like herbalists and traditional healers are meant to connive with the supernatural so that they are guided on medicines that help the people in their communities to curb some, if not all, kinds of illnesses (Mbiti, 1989). The problem arises when these herbalists and traditional healers defy the intended operations by using the same powers to manipulate roots and herbs that in turn harm other people (Mbiti, 1989). This now becomes the evil manipulation of the supernatural and it includes acts such as witchcraft, sorcery and black magic which are the very things that are troubling contemporary African communities and they have been troubling the African past as well.

Semenya and Letsosa (2012, p. 1) give a detailed analysis of how most communities in Africa view witchcraft. They state that many people believe in the existence of witches. Witches are people who perform hurtful things to others such as causing other people's deaths. Therefore, anyone who is accused of practising witchcraft within the community will either be killed or stigmatised by any means by the community members. This is evident in many parts of the countries which make up the African continent, Namibia included. Semanya and Letsosa (2012, p. 8) maintain that the belief in witchcraft is found in all African societies, only that it varies according to locality and ethnicity. Hayes (as cited in Semenya and Letsosa, 2012, p. 2), maintains that Africans respond with violence towards those suspected of practicing witchcraft because witchcraft is seen as a damaging practise that can bring misfortune, poverty and death in the community. However, it is important to note that not all the people accused of witchcraft are really guilty of these deeds. The majority of deaths in African communities are usually perceived

and linked to witchcraft activities. Even to this day and age of the deadly HIV and AIDS pandemic, alongside cancer, in these African communities, witchcraft is still believed and considered as a major contributor to people's deaths. Berhend (2007, p. 48) observes that "witchcraft not only reflects social tensions and conflicts but actually is an aggravator of all hostilities and fears in a community." Thus, witchcraft is a threat to society as the majority of the evil happenings are believed to be permeating from witchcraft activities, which is a critical point of note in the novels, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* and *The other presence* as it will be demonstrated in chapter four of this study. Chapter four of this study will explore the issues that individuals accused of practicing witchcraft often go through as portrayed in the *The Other Presence* and *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu.*

Umoh (2012, p. 2) asserts that the perspective in many African countries that see long life as a blessing from the gods and the lack of it as either a curse from supernatural beings, ancestors or earthly enemy can also be one of the reasons why it is difficult for some people in these societies to accept untimely death when it occurs as it is portrayed in the selected texts under study here. It is also important to remember that most Africans do not doubt the inevitability of death but the timetable of it (Umoh 2012, p. 9.) This is true about the situation in Namibia where death is often viewed through the lens of witchcraft as can be seen in the two novels *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* and *The Other Presence* in this study and it is going to be explored in detail in chapter four of this study.

Presented in the novels under study is a picture of what people who are accused of witchcraft go through. This shows us that there is a need for people in many African communities to be educated about the "actual" causes of deaths, which includes issues such as HIV and AIDS and

simply some accidents such as driving while under the influence of alcohol. This will cause people to be more careful and in addition, it will also make them aware that not all deaths occur as a result of someone's wrong doing. In the study done by Umoh (2012, p. 2) it was concluded that death whether of a young or old person is inevitable. Umoh (2012) adds that, death can come to everyone, and it always comes at its right time. Based on the above statement it should therefore be understood that everybody dies only when the time is up.

2.5 The treatment of widows in African societies

This section examines the treatment of widows in some African societies. According to Sossou (2012, p.203), a widow is a woman who has lost her husband or partner due to death. Sossou indicates that when death occurs it is always shocking especially to those closely associated with a dead person irrespective of what caused the death. Becoming a widow is not by choice but rather it is a normal process which happens to any married woman who has had husband who passed away, and therefore, it is not good that widows are blamed for the death of their husbands because it is not always them who caused the death.

Widows are often accused of being the cause of their husbands' deaths. According to Sossou (2002 p.201), widows of all ages and from different backgrounds and cultures in African societies are subjected to multiple forms of accusations when their husbands die. These accusations sometimes come from the members of their husbands' families or from general members of their communities. These forms of accusations usually happen when women are deemed not following certain mourning rituals that widows are expected to follow after their husbands' death. It should be noted that only a handful of widowers are accused of bewitching

their wives and causing their deaths. Sossou (2002) observes that few widowers are accused of bewitching their wives because widows have more restrictions than widowers, and therefore community members have few "signs" to look for that they can use to accuse widowers of witchcraft compared to the amount of "signs" that are there for widows. For instance a widow is expected to cry when her husband has died. In addition, Sossou (2002) states that widowhood is likely to impact far more traumatically upon women than men at the hands of their society. For instance men are not really expected to cry and they have no rituals to perform. Sossou (2002, p. 201) further states that in the African traditional set up, women are expected to grieve openly and to demonstrate the intensity of their feelings in a more formalised way than men.

On the other hand, it is also important to stress the point that the mourning of a dead husband is not left for widows alone. Other people like relatives of the deceased and even grown-up children of the deceased are also expected to mourn and come under varying degrees of cleansing rituals. It is believed that women in some African cultures are more likely to have their lives governed by traditional laws than the modern laws. Widows are silenced into submission and acceptance of the practice as culturally appropriate and respectful in honour of the dead. Thus, Sossou (2012, p. 208) believes that there is a need to empower women to break the spirit of domination and render the women incapable of an understanding of how to deal with a series of attacks on subordination and rather take steps to overcome them. Some characters in the two novels refuse to be governed by customary or traditional laws and they empower themselves to fight against negative traditional practices. Some of the characters took steps to overcome them and this will be explored in detail in chapter four of this study.

In an article by Nwoye (2005), which focuses on healing processes and community intervention, the author states that the "bereaved's weeping" in receiving the bad news must be able to inform people in the immediate vicinity of the bereaved. Furthermore, the mourners in hearing such weeping must be able to reach the bereaved's place for emotional support. The widows cry with the bereaved in joint protest against such great loss. Their supportive crying at this period carries an enormous power. It validates for the bereaved the "relevance of tears" and signifies that the berevead's crying is not a sign of maturity or weakness but the appropriate response in the face of the loss in some African societies.

As Sossou (2012) puts it, "women all over the world are subject to a wide range of violations of their human rights simply because they are female". This means that women are regarded as inferior to men. In addition to that, Sossou (2012) observes that no social group has suffered greater violation of its human rights than women have. Therefore, Sossou (2012, p. 208) claims that all women have the responsibility to champion the cause of fighting inequalities against the women and that the educated African women and scholars have a responsibility and obligation to champion the cause of fighting inequalities against all women. This will start by educating communities about real causes of death and educating them that widows do not benefit anything from the deaths of their husbands, but rather they suffer, and therefore it is not true that they are the ones responsible for their husbands' deaths.

Setsiba (2012) also alludes that African cultures have their practices, traditional beliefs and customs surrounding death and performance of mourning rituals. This is corroborated by Sossou (2002, p. 204), who highlights that widows are expected to contribute food and wear a particular dress during the mourning period, fast during the day and weep each day at sunrise and

sunset. Mostly women are suspected of causing their husbands' death as it appears in the novel *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu.*

According to Evans (2015), widows may lose assets to their husband's relatives just after his death because relatives assume that they (widows) brought HIV into the family or used witchcraft against their husband. Andreas (2001) also claims that in some African cultures it is believed that when a husband dies it is customary and part of tradition to inherit things from their loved ones when they pass away in order to treasure their memories. On the other hand, Setsiba (2012) claims that culture is not fixed but it changes, and people may begin to assign a meaning to it that is different from what others may think it is. One can therefore say that the issue of inheritance by the relatives is regarded by others in the community as a right thing to do whilst for others it is not. This will be further explored in this study as represented in the two novels. Based on this information, women are considered to have less bargaining power; this in turn often has negative impacts on household expenditures.

Moreover, Setsiba (2012) observes that in some African cultures, like in South Africa, it is believed that "the dead spirit cannot reach the destination before the death rituals are performed" (p. 12). Therefore, anyone who is not willing to perform the required rituals is accused of having a hand in the death. People who are accused as having a hand in the death of the deceased are often victimised by both their family members, as well as their societies.

2.6   HIV and death in Africa

HIV is one of the challenges facing the African continent. Ndiaye (2008, p. 25) emphasises that in most African contexts, HIV remains a cause of premature death while the positive status is taken as a death sentence by some. Despite the fact that there has been a lot of progress when it

comes to HIV awareness, there are still people who choose to view HIV as a taboo. Given the fact that some communities still view HIV as a taboo, when somebody dies of HIV related illnesses, it may cause dissent in the community because the community or family members would rather accuse somebody that she or he is the one who caused the death rather than mentioning the real cause which might be HIV.

Ndiaye (2008) further states that families often come up with an official cause of death such as tuberculosis and malaria in order to hide the fact that their family member has passed away due to HIV. It seems that another way for people to shield themselves from shame is to ignore and deny that their loved one died of HIV. As Ndiaye (2008) puts it, the belief that HIV is transmitted by people who have been engaged in promiscuous behaviour also perpetuates the stigma attached to death caused by HIV. Therefore, people are unlikely to show empathy towards the infected person and this lack results in stigma to the person accused and anyone associated with them. This shows the reason why family members may keep the HIV status of their beloved people as a secret, and they will always look for a scape goat to blame after this person has passed away such as a witch because they do not want their relative to be known by the community members as one of the people who has died because of the "disease of promiscuous people". This scenario is well illustrated in Sifiso Nyathi's novel *The Other Presence*. In addition, family members may feel that the HIV positive relatives have brought shame to the family.

Muhela (2014, p. 1) addresses the same issue by stressing the importance of making sure that people in the community understand the causes of HIV. If people understand ways that HIV can be prevented, this can prevent future infections, and it can also make it easy for those infected to

share their status with others, thereby reducing the number of people accused of causing the deaths of others when the real cause is HIV.

Parrinder (as cited in Umoh, 2012), observes that:

> Diseases in Africa are normally regarded as having some spiritual cause because they neglect this side of life; European hospitals are suspected and regarded as cold and inhuman. Not only disease but death itself is thought to be due to an evil Spiritual force. The idea of natural death is foreign to many peoples. An enemy hath done this thing (p. 4).

The same idea is supported by Appiah- Kubi (as cited in Umoh, 2012), who states that:

> An illness which does not yield to medicines must be attributed to other baneful forces. Thus expect in the case of a very old man, [Africans] do not talk of natural death. For a common man religion is largely the means of reinforcing life, of proper precautions against the destructive powers. When straight-forward remedies fail, as in the case of an illness not responding to normal treatment or in time of disaster, recourse to the priest healer is necessary. (p. 4)

What the foregoing literature review demonstrates therefore is the fact that death in African context whenever it occurs, it is mostly linked to witchcraft activities. It seems as cases of deaths such as HIV and other plethora of diseases are being ignored and when discussing death in African societies it will be impossible to discuss the matter without taking into consideration the issue of witchcraft. The literature also reviewed that in African culture widows suffered multiple forms of accusation when their husbands die. This is mostly

happen when the widows do not follow the mourning rituals. It is also demonstrated that some Africans attitude towards death and its cause is unique.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

As a way of foregrounding the critical theory which is used in the study, it is important to briefly consider the views of Pratto, Sidanus and Levin (2006). According to Pratto et al. (2006), despite progress in the expansions of civil and human rights to different parts of the world, the problems of intergroup discrimination, bigotry, genocide, and the oppression of women and sexual minorities are still present in the world. Regardless of a society's form of government, the contents of its fundamental belief system, or the complexity of its social and economic arrangements, human societies tend to organize as group-based social hierarchies in which at least one group enjoys greater social status and power than other groups (Pratto et al., 2006).

Pratto et al. (2006), further state that members of dominant social groups tend to enjoy a disproportionate share of positive social value, or useful material and symbolic resources such as political power, wealth, and protection by force, plentiful and desirable food, and access to good housing, health care, leisure, and education. Negative social value is disproportionately left to or forced upon members of subordinate groups in the form of substandard housing, disease, underemployment, dangerous and distasteful work, disproportionate punishment, stigmatisation, and vilification (Pratto et al., 2006). Although the degree, severity, and definitional bases of group-based hierarchical organisation vary across societies and within the same society over time, the fact of group-based hierarchical organisation appears to be universal. Intergroup discrimination can be seen throughout the two novels being studied (Pratto, et al., 2006).

To understand the intergroup discrimination, vilification and stigmatisation in the two novels in this study, this study will be informed by the Social Dominance Theory (SDT). The Social Dominance Theory was developed in an attempt to understand how group-based social hierarchy is formed and maintained (Pratto, et al., 2006). The Social Dominance Theory is a psychologically oriented theory that examines how certain power structures and hierarchies are maintained within social groups. Sidanius and Pratto (as cited in Van Lange, Kruglanski, and Higgins, 2012, p. 418) argue that:

> intergroup oppression, discrimination, and prejudice are the means by which human societies organise themselves as group-based hierarchies, in which members of dominant groups secure a disproportionate share of the good things in life (e.g., powerful roles, good housing, good health), and members of subordinate groups receive a disproportionate share of the bad things in life (e.g., relatively poor housing and poor health).

Furthermore, Sidanius and Pratto (as cited in Van Lange, et al., 2012, p. 419), also explain that:

> group-based social hierarchies consist of three distinctly different stratification systems: (1) an *age- system*, in which adults and middle-age people have disproportionate social power over children and younger adults; (2) a *gender* or *patriarchal* system in which men have disproportionate social and political power compared to women; and (3) an *arbitrary-set* system in which socially constructed categories are hierarchically arranged. These arbitrary sets may be constructed to associate power and legitimacy with social class, religion, or any other group distinction that human interaction is capable of constructing.

Pratto et al. (2006) clearly state that unlike many other theories of prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination in social psychology (for example: realistic group conflict theory, social identity theory) social dominance theory is different because it assumes that scholars must understand the processes producing and maintaining prejudice and discrimination at multiple levels of analysis, including cultural ideologies such as burial practices in the two novels and policies, institutional practices, relations of individuals to others inside and outside their groups, the psychological predispositions of individuals, and the interaction between the evolved psychologies of men and women.

In addition, because Social Dominance Theory views human societies as systems, it theorises how processes at different levels such as burial practices in a community and the treatment of women in a country can work together to produce systemic effects such as the ill treatment of widows as seen in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*. In addressing the processes structuring human societies, Social Dominance Theory is more general than theories particularly in the literary theory fold that focus only on one issue such as capitalism, empires, gender, immediate self- or group interest, social identity, or individual differences.

The maintenance of myths and stigmatisation that surround death in the two selected novels seem to be expressions of power within a specific cultural group. Pratto, et al. (2006), mention that men are the most frequent perpetrators of both lethal interpersonal violence and intergroup violence.

According to the Social Dominance Theory, group-based social hierarchy is produced by the net effects of discrimination across multiple levels: institutions, individuals, and collaborative intergroup processes. Discrimination across these levels is coordinated to favour dominant groups over subordinate groups by legitimising myths, or societal, consensually shared social ideologies. All these mechanism are present in the novels in this study hence it is all the more reason for adopting this otherwise sociological theory as a critical literary lens to analyse these selected novels.

The Social Dominance Theory states that legitimising myths, stereotypes, and cultural ideologies is another way that people as a system can continue intergroup violence. This is evident in *The Other Presence* where people are using myths about death to victimise the uncle because they are unaware of the other possible causes of the death, as these myths seem to contribute towards the oppression of widowed women. It would seem that certain individuals or sections of the group benefit from perpetuating myths that lead to the disempowerment of other individuals, and it is the aim of this study to identify and analyse these underlying power structures as represented in the selected novels.

In addition, according to the Social Dominance Theory, one way that people can legitimise myths and stereotypes is by "hiding" behind moral and intellectual justification for group-based oppression. For example, in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, community and family members of meme Kauna's family feel justified to whisper that meme Kauna is the cause of her husband's death because she refused to follow mourning rituals. The same is true for *The Other Presence* where the mother of the deceased feels justified accusing the uncle of the deceased of causing his nephew's death because he is not crying, and he does not show the "acceptable emotions". Given

all the above, the researcher therefore believes that the best theory to analyse the two novels is the Social Dominance Theory.

2.8   Conclusion

This chapter began by providing a brief summary of some of the mourning rituals in many African cultures. The chapter also presented some of the reasons why people in these cultures perform these rituals. Moreover, the chapter discussed the treatment that widows in most African societies receive if they fail to perform all the rituals that they are supposed to perform when their husbands have died. Furthermore, the chapter discussed the relationship between death and witchcraft in Africa, and how women are usually the number one victims of these accusations. In addition, the chapter discussed the relationship between death and HIV in some African societies, and how the stigma attached to HIV continues to affect the various relationships between people. Finally, the chapter discussed the Social Dominance Theory, a critical theory that allows researchers to study how various power structures such as men, institutions and individual people within different communities can use power to perpetuate intergroup violence to weaker people such as widows and poor people. Different sources were reviewed in order to find out the views of different authors on issues discussed in the texts. The next chapter presents the research methodology that was employed in this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research methodology and research objectives used in this study. The chapter also looks at the research design and discusses in-depth the research background in which the research design is based. Furthermore, the chapter outlines the research population and the characteristics of the defined population. In addition, the chapter pronounces the sampling technique and the procedure used to collect data. Finally, this chapter gives a more detailed description of content analysis and how the researcher employed it in this study. A description of the research ethics observed in this study is also included in this chapter.

3.2   Research design

Kothari (2004, p. 31) defines research design as the "the arrangement of the conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose. It is conceptual structure within which research is conducted." In addition, it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data. Therefore, the design includes an outline of what the researcher will do from writing the hypothesis and its operational implications to the analysis of the data (Kothari, 2004, p. 31).

In this study, a qualitative, desk top research approach was employed where the selected texts *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (Andreas) and *The Other Presence* (Nyathi) were qualitatively analysed. Since it is a desk top based study, no field work was carried out. Bui (2014, p. 290)

defines a qualitative approach as "a method that delves into a particular situation to better understand a phenomenon." According to Gay, Mills and Airasian (2011, p. 12), "qualitative research seeks to probe deeply into the research setting to obtain in-depth understandings about the way things are, why they are that way, and how the participant in the context perceives them." That is to say, qualitative research is likely to expand the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. In addition, in qualitative study, without being biased, the researcher will understand how people make sense of the world and the experiences they have of the world. Thus one can conclude that this study evaluated and carried out an examination to get an in-depth view of how the two authors Neshani Andreas and Sifiso Nyathi portray the stigmatisation and myths surrounding death in the selected texts.

The following objectives of this study are regarded as the most important tools of the study, namely to:

- evaluate how stigmatisation and myths that surround death are portrayed in the two novels, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas and *The Other Presence* by Sifiso Nyathi;

- analyse emerging themes from the discussion of stigmatisation and myths surrounding death in these two novels; and

- examine how the two authors portray power relationships amongst the characters caused by the impact that myths and stigma that are attached to death can have on families and members of the societies as represented in the selected novels.

3.3 Population

Johnson and Christensen (2012) explain that the population is a complete set of cases from which a sample is drawn. According to Creswell (2013, p. 142), population "is a group of individuals who have the same characteristics." A population is a group of individuals with some common defining features that the researcher can pinpoint and study. Furthermore, the population is always alike in some significant facets. In this study, the population is all literary texts written in English portraying stigmatisation and myths surrounding death in Namibia.

3.4 Sample

Research on a population is burdensome as one cannot study the entire population due to the feasibility and lengthy process. Thus, there is a need to have a sampling procedure in the study. Gay et al. (2011, p. 129) define a sample as "a group of individuals, items, or events that represents the characteristics of the larger group from which the sample is drawn". In the research under study the two selected texts, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas and *The Other Presence* by Sifiso Nyathi were used as the sample. According to Creswell (2013), a sample is a subgroup of the total group that the researcher plans to study for generalising the target population. Moreover, Bhattacherjee (2012) argues that it is extremely important to choose a sample that truly represents the population so that the inferences derived from the sample can be generalised back to the population. In this study, only two of the communities, the Subiya and the Aawambo communities were studied as represented in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* and *The Other Presence.* Thus, the results of this study are not to be generalised to other Namibian communities. In an ideal situation, one can select a sample of

individuals who are representative of the whole population as a representative sample from the population.

Purposive sampling was used to select the two literary texts as they share similar themes of stigmatisation and myths which surround death as portrayed by the authors. Creswell (2013, p. 300) sees purposive sampling as a sampling method in qualitative research where the researcher "selects individual sites for the study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study." Therefore, purposive sampling was used as the researcher was only looking at the two literary texts that address stigmatisation and myths surrounding death as portrayed by the authors.

Through purposive sampling, the researcher chooses sample texts that might have similar themes. Texts are sampled depending on the time that the sources are written rather than considering a random reading or analysis of sampled texts (Krippendorff, 2013). In qualitative research, purposive sampling is used as a sampling method whereby the researcher "selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 300).

The sample for the study was therefore the two novels written by Namibian writers. These two novels were selected because of the similar themes they represent. The themes include: stigmatisation, myths surrounding death and the treatment of weak people in society like women and elderly people among others.

3.5   Procedure

Two novels, *The Purple violet Of Oshaantu* and *The Other Presenc*e were selected based on the similarity of targeted themes. The data were collected through reading the selected texts. An in-depth reading and comparative evaluation of the selected texts was done by critically analysing the texts, as well as looking at the dialogue of the fictional characters as portrayed in the selected texts of this study regarding stigmatisation, myths surrounding death as well as the treatment of weak people in society. The data from the selected texts were collected in order to explain the views portrayed.

 Content analysis was used as an approach to the study of the two selected texts, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu and The Other Presence.* Content analysis is "a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying the specific characteristic of a body material" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 144). In addition, Krippendorff (2013) defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p.24). On the other hand, Berelson (as cited in Masule, 2014 p. 30), sees content analysis as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of communications." Moreover, Berelson (as cited in Masule , 2014) , further explains that content analysis "is used to determine the presence of certain words, concepts, themes, phrases, characters, or sentences within texts and to quantify this presence in an objective manner." Therefore, in this study content analysis was used to analyse the similar themes as portrayed i*n The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* as well as *The Other Presence.* Several authors in defining

content analysis concentrate on the meaning of the texts. The selected texts under study were analysed and emerging themes were understood and explored.

However, some critics against content analysis consider it as a positivist and decontextualising in its orientation. For instance, critics have also recognised that poor sampling is likely to lead to bias. The words and meanings that need to be included in the interpretation of texts should thus be limited (Krippendorff, 2013). In order to evaluate how stigmatisation and myths that surround death are portrayed in the two novels, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas and *The Other Presence* by Sifiso Nyathi; the researcher compared and contrasted how stigmatisation and myths surrounding death are portrayed in the two selected texts. Furthermore, to analyse emerging themes for the purpose of a discussion of stigmatisation and myths surrounding death in these two novels, the researcher looked at how the themes are portrayed in each selected text. And lastly, the researcher used content analysis technique to examine how the two authors portray power relationships amongst the characters caused by the impact that myths and stigma that are attached to death can have on families and members of the societies as represented in the selected novels. The researcher also looked at how weaker people such as women and old people are treated in each selected text.

3.6 Data analysis

Data analysis is the interpretation of the collected data in this study. The data collected from the study of the two novels, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* and *The Other Presence* were analysed using the content analysis method. The study used content and data analysis of the two novels to

interpret myths and stigmatisation surrounding death and the treatment of weak people in society in the selected texts so as to come to the results of the study.

The collected data were reduced to smaller chunks by categories for easier management and in the process themes and relationships between categories began to emerge. The interpretation of data was done by incorporating the tenets of Social Dominance Theory. The findings were extracted from the interpretations by comparing and contrasting stigmatisation and myths surrounding death as presented in the selected texts.

Data analysis involves organising data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organising themes, representing the data and forming an interpretation of the data collected (Creswell, 2013). Data analysis in qualitative research includes preparing and organising the data, (for instance, text data as transcripts, or image data as in photographs), for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and later representing the data in discussions, tables and figures (p. 180). The data collected from primary and secondary sources are presented in chapter four. The themes emerged from both the literature review, and the selected texts themselves were analysed and presented. The data in this study were not altered or falsified in any way. The researcher ensured that an account given in the analysis of collected data is as accurate as possible. Conclusions were therefore drawn from the interpretations and analysis and presented in narrative form as will be presented Chapter 5 of this study.

## 3.7	Research Ethics

To ensure objectivity in this study, the researcher reported the findings fully and safeguarded against not misrepresenting them through a close reference to the literature and using textual evidence. Thus, the researcher reported how the two authors portray stigmatisation and myths surrounding death in fiction. Although the Social Dominance Theory was used, the researcher was factual to avoid any stereotypes and prejudices. The information obtained from the research was used for the purpose of this study only.

## 3.8	Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher highlighted the research design of the study. A qualitative desktop study was employed as no field work was done. The research objectives were explained in order to clarify the purposes of the research. The population of this study was also defined; and the population of the study was given as all the literary texts written in English portraying stigmatisation and myths surrounding death in Namibia. Purposive sampling was chosen by selecting fictional novels by Namibian writers. Content analysis was used as an approach to the study of the two novels, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* and *The Other Presence*.

 To ensure the objectivity and integrity, the research ethics of this study was also considered in this chapter. In the next chapter, the presentation of data and data analysis based on the two novels under study will be done.

CHAPTER 4

STIGMATISATION AND MYTHS ASSOCIATED WITH DEATH IN *THE PURPLE VIOLET OF OSHAANTU* AND THE *OTHER PRESENCE*

4.1   Introduction

This chapter is about the presentation and analysis of data that relate to the topic about the exploration of the literary representations of stigmatisation and myths associated with death in relation to African people as presented in the novels *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas and *The Other Presence* by Francis Sifiso Nyathi. The chapter presents the representation of the stigmatisation and myths associated with death in context, employing the Social Dominance Theory, and the novels and theory are interpreted from an African worldview. The theory has helped in maintaining the focus of the study.

 In this chapter, the research responds to the three research objectives as presented in chapter one. Firstly, the research evaluated how stigmasation and myths associated with death are portrayed in the two novels, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas and *The Other Presence* by Sifiso Nyathi. Secondly, the research analysed emerging themes from the discussion of stigmatisation and myths associated with death in these two novels. Lastly, the research examined how the two authors portray relationships amongst the characters as a consequent of the tension caused by the impact that myths and stigma that are attached to death can have on families and members of the societies as presented in the selected novels. The summary of each selected novel is given and then the analysis commences thereafter.

4.2   Summary of *The Other Presence* by Nyathi

The Other Presence tells a story about a young man called Akapelwa who died untimely and his uncle Elder Sinvula is suspected to be responsible for his death. The story further reveals how the village members are gathered at Ma Simanga's homestead to mourn the untimely death of Akapelwa. Moreover, the novel reveals that in African traditional set-ups, there is no death that occurs innocently. Behind every death there is someone responsible for it. Throughout the novel, there are many strange things that are happening leading mourners panicking. It is Elder Sinvula who is being accused to be a wizard and being responsible for strange behaviours as well as all the misfortunes befalling Ma Simanga's compound. Elder Sinvula embarks on a journey to the hospital to find out what has caused Akapelwa, his nephew's death. Akapelwa's death is just one of the deaths which have occurred in Ma Simanga's homestead. Ma Simanga had also lost her husband through a road traffic accident, shortly after he had bought a new Toyota vehicle. In addition, Ma Simanga had also lost her five children within a short space of time. It was elder Sinvula being accused of being responsible of all the mishaps happening in Ma Simanga 's compound. Towards the end of the novel Elder Neo identifies the culprit responsible for all the strange happenings. The novel reveals that it was Ma Simanga herself who is responsible for her misery. Whilst an expatriate physician, Dr Castro also explains that the other cause of deaths in the contemporary world is "the other presence" inside many of the people, which is a euphemism for HIV/AIDS.

This section examines the stigmatisation and myths associated with death in *The Other Presence* as interpreted by the researcher. The discussion is focused on the following:

- Myths about HIV/AIDS

- Myths about natural elements

- Myths associated with mourning

- Treatment of relatives of the deceased

4.3   The myth about HIV/AIDS

Nyathi (2008) uses Thomas to show the readers the importance of education. In other words, through Thomas, Nyathi (2008) is able to show the readers that it is only through education that people can fight against HIV/AIDS. Although his friends still see HIV/AIDS as a taboo or something that does not need to be spoken about, Thomas opted to tell the truth rather than to please his friends. One can assume that according to Nyathi, HIV/AIDS can only be overcome when people start speaking about it, and not through treating it as something that does not need to be spoken about. This is evidenced when Thomas retorts that "Our people are dying and if we remain silent about it and treat the disease as some sort of mysterious issue, we will all perish" (Nyathi, 2008, p. 25). Therefore, in this instance, the author demonstrates that death should not be shrouded in some mystery which perpetuates stigmatisation and unfounded myths as to why death befell an individual. Instead, through the character of Thomas, who is an epitome of education and enlightenment, the author demonstrates that indeed stigmatisation can be overcome and it is agents like Thomas who can perhaps bring about the desired change.

The power of education in the novel is also found in the fact that Thomas is a young person. One can argue that Nyathi chose to use a young person for Thomas' character so that his message of education, openness and di-stigmatisation can be embraced as one of the most critical solutions to HIV/AIDS. It seems like the community where this novel (*The Other Presence* by Sifiso

Nyathi) is set; people do not really give audience to young people. However, by giving an education to a young person who is almost the same age as the deceased, Nyathi has empowered young people to speak up when it comes to HIV/AIDS. In other words, he has empowered them because they are normally the ones affected/ infected by the disease the most.

However, despite the fact that Thomas is a well-educated person, Nyathi seems to be suggesting that if educated people are to make greater impacts in their communities, they ought to do it in a way that does not show disregard for the culture and identity of the people that they want to address. If people think that you do not respect their ways of life, they may not listen to you although your message might be important. A good example is that though Thomas has a lot of information about HIV/AIDS but the way he dresses makes him to be regarded with disdain and disgust. This is because:

> Thomas brought something new to the community. His baggy jeans hung below the upper part of his buttocks. One could see perfectly well that the traditional way of tying the belt around the waist was now a thing of the past. Thomas's pants now sat so low that the valley between his buttocks would alert an indifferent passer-by" (Nyathi, 2008, pp. 21-22).

This might be the main reason why people were not ready to listen. Even though he is an agent of change who should bring about the much needed transformation concerning issues of stigmatisation, Thomas can also be regarded as a failure. Therefore, one can conclude that Nyathi wants to inform educated people that education should not entirely wipe out everything about their culture.

It is critical to note that for one to better appreciate the concern about myths and stigmatisation, the issue of HIV/AIDS needs to be explored further. In this vein, another character that Nyathi utilises to address the issue of HIV/AIDS and education is the Cuban doctor, Castro. Despite the fact that he is a foreigner, as opposed to Thomas who is a local, Dr Catro is an agent for the di-stigmatisation of myths surrounding deaths in the Kwena community where the novel is set. This is particularly noted when Doctor Castro addressed the mourners at Akapelwa's funeral. When we think of doctors, we think of people who stay at the hospitals and we do not expect them to come to the funerals of community members that they are not related to. Therefore, in bringing the character of Dr Castro at the funeral, Nyathi achieved intensely. Like Thomas, the doctor is a very educated person in the community. However, unlike Thomas, the doctor also knows how to speak to people in order to get their attention, and people are likely to listen to him. The doctor understands that this community sees HIV/AIDS as a taboo and something that should not be spoken about openly. However, this did not stop him from talking about it to the community. Instead he chose to call it the "dreadful presence" (Nyathi, 2008, p. 110). This way, people were able to listen to something that would not have been possible had he explicitly mentioned the name HIV/AIDS and by so doing Dr Castro managed to circumvent the myths and stigmatisation around HIV/AIDS and the subsequent possibility of death as witnessed through the demise of Akapelwa.

Dr Castro chooses the words carefully and skilfully in order to get the villagers' attention when he says:

> I want to agree with many, some of whom are here with us, that there is always another
>
> presence that is responsible for our deaths. However, I also want to tell you that there is
>
> also another presence inside our bodies that can kill indiscriminately. It has neither colour

nor race. It knows no sex or gender. It conquers all. Sometimes, it can wipe away a clan,

a family or a tribe… So please, please, please, come to the hospital and I will test you.

(Nyathi, 2008, p. 110).

Dr Castro uses an appropriate discourse which attracts the villagers to listen to him. In other words, Dr Castro did not detach himself from the community, and this enabled him to communicate his message successfully. Nyathi therefore educates his society and lets the society understands that whenever death occurs, it is not always someone's responsibility. Therefore, instead of accusing people of causing others' deaths through witchcraft, people should also consider other possible causes like HIV/AIDS, road accidents, and even being bitten by poisonous creatures like the snake that attacked Chuma which eventually claimed her life. From this, one can infer that Nyathi is a committed writer who wishes to be in a society where people would not be affected by HIV/AIDS due to ignorance. Nyathi does not want his kinsmen to view HIV/AIDS as a mysterious disease but rather to understand that HIV/AIDS is a reality that can only be overcome if a society accepts the reality of the disease. Moreover, Nyathi' also becomes the typical "novelist as a teacher" which has become Achebe's classical adage, in as much as Nyathi through this character manages to educate the readers that there are a myriad of reasons why people may die. Therefore it is not enough the be blinkered so much that mourners can only think that there should be a human "culprit" responsible for death.

4.4   Myths about natural elements

The story opens with a whirlwind which threatens to disturb the mourners. The appearance of the whirlwind is believed in an African context to be signalling something, something which is yet to

be known. The supernatural elements are regarded as a premonition of something ill which is yet to come and this is evidenced where the novel reads:

> The tree at the centre of the village swung towards the west. The whirlwind beat its way through the thickets of the forest as it forced its path towards the compound. Dust flew high into the heavens and slowly started taking the natural space of the clouds. Pieces of dead wood, grass and leafage lifted high up and faded into the blue sky. One could vividly see the ugly specks are debris of nature was creating in the sky. It was not a pleasant sight (Nyathi, 2008, p. 1) .

Whirlwinds are a common sight especially in the open African terrains, but the one that is being described in the above passage appears to be abnormal. The fact that villagers are gathered at a funeral, and the way the whirlwind seems to be targeting particularly the compound where they are gathered, becomes cynical. This type of whirlwind signals the presence of the myth associated with a whirlwind as noted by the way the villagers react to its appearance. The villagers are able to explain, predict and some individuals are even capable of controlling some of the whirlwind situations. For instance, Elder Neo was able to stop the whirlwind. Thus, the whirlwind is pronounced as unusual and it carries embedded mythical characteristics according to some African beliefs (Mlambo and Kandemiri, 2015).

From another angle of analysis, this presentation of this scene and how Elder Sinvula rebuked the whirlwind and it obeyed has some biblical semblances of a time when Jesus quietened the tempestuous storm at sea. Therefore through such a presentation, Nyathi shows that it is not adequate to be completely dismissive of the so-called "myths" as non-events and phantasmagoria in the African mind. The novel therefore takes an Afrocentric gaze into the myths surrounding

the natural environment and demonstrates that the African cosmos is both natural and supernatural. It is this critical point that Nyathi repeatedly makes in the novel through the character of Elder Neo. The idea of validating the presence of the natural in the African world is also supported by Mlambo and Kandemiri (2015) who argue that " the presence of the supernatural manifests can only be felt by the unusual manifestation that becomes visible to human eyes" (p. 56).

Moreover, according to the African set up as portrayed in *The Other Presence*, wizards and witches are believed to kill through masking their missiles as common ailments such as the wind, fire or lightning. Thus, the villagers predict that the whirlwind is considered to be Elder Sinvula and he is believed to bring death such as that of Akapelwa. In Chapter Seventeen, the convoy of mourners from the mortuary encounters two whirlwinds which are moving towards the convoy (Nyathi, 2008, p. 87). This raises suspicion as noted by the way Neo says to his elderly companions "what is the matter with the other world today? Whirlwinds during morning time like this could not be a signal of peace" (Nyathi, 2008, p. 87). The 'other world' being referred to is the spiritual world. The supernatural though invisible, makes itself self-visible to the mourners through the strange and fierce whirlwinds. Up until now nobody has been able to establish the possible cause of the mishaps that the mourners are encountering, but elderly characters like Elder Neo and Situmbeko can rationally sense that something is wrong. Therefore one can conclude that for Nyathi, the question is not that the supernatural does not exist, rather it is that in addition to these supernatural happenings, are the African societies like Kwena village able to appreciate that there is yet another force in play – the modern health challenges that come in a plethora of diseases.

This is supported by the fact one of the elders of the village, Elder Neo, is vested with the powers that enable him to communicate with the spiritual world. This is noted by the way he commands the whirlwind when he says:

> Find your path to your haven of peace and leave the children of life in their already troubled cradle. We seek serenity from you and not another spell of anguish. I implore you to pardon us of our infirmities. Please find your path where your legs suit your walk and not where your fangs will consume our creation (Nyathi, 2008, p. 2).

The whirlwind appears to respond to Elder Neo's command by remaining still for a while and then it moves rapidly into the forest. The scenario is a typical exhibition of the supernatural at work. As such, Elder Neo is able to instruct the whirlwind to go away and not disturb the mourners. Thus, the African worldview is functional in this scenario where the witchcraft is exhibiting self, and the African people reacting to the phenomenon, strengthening the relationship between the natural and supernatural worlds. This is in agreement with the available source where for example Mlambo and Kandemiri (2015) argue that the supernatural can be manipulated by human beings, in the novel *The Other Presence* where Elder Sinvula is a victim who is falsely accused for being responsible for Akapelwa's death.

The perceptions of whirlwinds, owls and black cats that are presented in *The Other Presence* may be interpreted as bad omens that entail Elder Sinvula to be vigilant and be prepared. However, the issue of signs is somehow subjective, depending on how different cultural groups perceive the concept of witchcraft. In an African context and in Kwena village in particular, witchcraft may be marked as part of cultural beliefs as writers incorporate them into fictional works like *The Other Presence,* a literary work reflecting a typical African society.

Moreover, in *The Other Presence,* Sinvula embarks on a journey to find out what had caused Akapelwa, his nephew's death and on his way to hospital, he encounters black cats mating and an owl hooting at him (Nyathi, 2008. p. 32). This encounter instils fear and induces anger in elder Sinvula as the creatures he meets are culturally associated to witchcraft, as evident from the novel. This is noted in the novel as it is recorded that:

> It was difficult to tell whether elder Sinvula was in a state of confusion or insanity. His fears of these strange happenings had now changed to anger. He was angry at his failure to understand what was actually happening to him, seeing all these strange creatures that were traditional omens of witchcraft. He was not sure whether to throw questions to his ancestors or simply call on the powers of the Heavens (Nyathi, 2008, p. 32).

Witchcraft has strange ways of presenting itself to human beings. It could be that the spiritual world may be trying to communicate something to Sinvula by making him see these strange happenings on his way to the hospital. It becomes even more difficult to point at exactly what the premonitions mean or represent, or maybe they are not even linked to the spiritual world at all. However, as a Christian he pretends as if nothing has happened; rather he sang a church hymn but deep in his heart as an African believer, he knew that what he encounters were premonitions (Mlambo & Kandemiri, 2015, p. 61). From the foregoing, it can thus be argued that there is thin line dividing myth and reality in some African societies like Kwena village as presented by Nyathi. Of utmost importance in this presentation is that Nyathi strikes a balance between presenting the power of the supernatural as reality that portends evil and may cause death, yet at the same time the novel cautions against the belief that the supernatural is the cause of death in all circumstances.

Elder Sinvula is being suspected to be a wizard, and being responsible for Akapelwa's death, as well as all the misfortunes befalling Ma Simanga's compound as evidenced in Chapter four of *The Other Presence*. The belief that somebody or some force is behind the lives of people is customary in most African societies, hence the acceptance and belief in the existence of witchcraft. Equally, as Sossou (2002) puts it, in African societies it will be impossible to discuss the issue of death without taking into consideration the question of witchcraft. In Africa, the supernatural can be manipulated by human beings for both good and evil uses, consequently elder Sinvula is being accused. Of everything that happens in the African context ought to be a reason for it, hence the death of Akapelwa is being blamed on elder Sinvula. Mbiti (1989) stresses the fact that the spirit world of the African people is very densely populated with spirit beings, spirits and the living dead or the spirits of the ancestors (p. 75). It is these spirits that unsympathetic human beings manipulate for self-aggrandisement.

Elder Neo may possibly be described as a medium considering the role that he is performing as portrayed in the *The Other Presence.* A medium is one who links the human beings with the spiritual world and ancestors. There is a belief among some African people that ordinary human beings cannot speak directly to God because God is considered as the supreme highest and, therefore, not an equal. Thus, the medium serves as the link between human beings and the ancestors who in turn serve also as a medium between the human medium and God. A typical representative of the presence of the witchcraft is substantiated as elder Neo communicates with the whirlwind where it reads:

> Upon noticing the imminent chaos that could be caused by the winds, elder Neo stepped
> out of the vehicle and pulled out his knife and pointed it to the heavens. In an artistic

manner, the shinning and brandishing knife cut across in the lifting dust as Neo uttered

those ferocious, yet instructive, words to the void of the whirlwinds. "Go back to anthills

of troubled souls, you restless spirits of a lesser breed," commanded Neo (Nyathi, 2008,

p. 88) .

The whirlwinds have found their way and are going in the direction in which another unusual

occurrence is witnessed when Chuma is attacked by a python (p. 89). However, Chuma is

rescued by Elder Sinvula who kills the snake by piercing through the head of the serpent with a

knife (p. 90). From there, the convoy proceeds to Ma Simanga's compound where the villagers

witness yet another terrible revelation of the supernatural. Villagers gathered at the graveside,

pending burial events taking place waiting for the funeral of Akapelwa, are troubled by some

kind of petrifying creatures:

> Their eyes were fixed on a bird that had strangely fallen from the skies onto the casket. It
>
> was a dead vulture. It looked like something that had died a long time ago. A few
>
> moments after its fall, an owl landed on a huge tree whose branch hung just above the
>
> casket. (Nyathi, 2008, p. 103).

The dead-like vulture and owl are believed to be traditional omens of witchcraft and their

presence usually beckons the existence and interaction of the supernatural and the natural worlds.

Witchcraft is classified as something that comes through the revelation of the vulture and the

owl, and to a certain extent these creatures carry a hidden meaning. Elder Neo, vested with the

powers of connecting with the spiritual world, challenges 'the dead like vulture and the owl' and

commands the spirit in the creatures by condemning it to the sculls of darkness where it belonged

(p. 103). The spirit in the creatures responds to Elder Neo's directive instantly without wavering.

There is thus a discernible interaction between the natural world and the spiritual world; though the spirits are not visible, but their materialisation is made visible through such creatures as it is indicated in the novel:

> The vulture that looked dead at first now blinked its eyes and lifted itself onto its limbs. It pranced a little on the casket and flapped its wings loudly before taking off. It lifted itself into the air and flew towards the forest. The owl that had all along been looking from the branch hooted again and took off as well and followed the vulture. (Nyathi, 2008, p. 103)

Characters such as Elder Neo who are bestowed with powers that allow them to interact in society and to the spiritual world, are important from an African perspective. They regulate the relationship between the natural and spiritual worlds by proving what may be deemed bad and evil, at the same time advocating what may be perceived and valued as good. This is why they can be dangerous to society when they are not utilised in a good way. Acts such as witchcraft are alleged to disturb and counterculture some of the African cultural tenets like communalism, and as such they are criticised as they are understood to use evil magic powers.

Though elder Sinvula is being falsely accused of bringing the calamities that have befallen Ma Simangas' compound, characters like Elder Neo act as mediators and they control such situations. In *The Other Presence*, the manifestations of the metaphysical may be related mostly to activities affiliated to occultist practices such as witchcraft. The problem is to figure out who may possibly be responsible for the strange happenings as they carry and maintain attributes of the witchcraft and there is a possibility that they can cause harm. This is agreement with Igwe (2004) who asserts that witchcraft is believed to cause epileptic fits, excessive weight gain,

accidents, infertility, and miscarriages, among other mishaps. The strange happenings in *The Other Presence* may as well thus be labelled to be radiating from witchcraft. However, as Elder Neo warns, such strange happenings which have shaken the whole village during the burial of Akapelwa are not caused by an enemy. Instead it is Ma Simanga herself who is to blame as she meddled too much with the supernatural world as she went from place to place in search of answers as to who or what could have killed her child Akapelwa.

Witchcraft draws its powers from the spiritual world and as such, it can only be reversed by a character that also has a spiritual link like a medium, as evident from the text where it reads:

> When Neo's eyes finally caught Ma Simanga's, it was clear that one of them had some explanation to do about the strange ordeal that they had just witnessed. Then Neo disengaged his eyes and winked. He looked around the gathering and then back to MaSimanga. "Give none blame but your own self that has caused your misery. Your endless travels and collection of eccentric roots and bones from strangers have opened a portal of misery into your compound." (Nyathi, 2008, p. 103)

It has come to light that Ma Simanga is responsible for the whirlwinds that have been attempting to disturb the mourners on a number of occasions. The knowledge of her secretive life of collecting eccentric roots and bones has been exposed by the powers of the medium that is linked to the spiritual world. This in itself resonates with values and beliefs attached to African cultural groups. A sense of community and being humane are considered as great values of traditional African life. It can thus be concluded that Ma Simanga is a typical example representing humans manipulating the metaphysical for self-aggrandisement.

Natural elements like the whirlwind and natural animals, as well as birds are used in the manifestations of the supernatural that typifies the occurrence and manifestation of stigmatisation and myths, especially where death is involved. A whirlwind may be seen as a natural occurrence, but in this case (in *The Other Presence* context) together with the black cats, owl, vulture and the snake, they insinuate the influence of witchcraft from an African point of view. The wind and the creatures will be maintaining their natural appearance as they are known to be, but they are believed to be under a greater influence of the supernatural powers.

4.5 Myths associated with mourning

The way mourners behave determines or risks being accused of having claimed the lost soul. As a result, some mourners may pretend to be sad because they are afraid of being accused as being responsible for the death in question. This can be seen in *The Other Presence* by the way the elders in the village were telling each other as follows: "We should show a little discomfort in our walks and stagger on our walking sticks so they think we are indeed in pain" (p. 9). We can learn from this incident that Nyathi tells the reader that mourners may express emotions symbolising grief just to satisfy the African societies' ego like the Kwena village. They just have to do what the community or society expects them to do, for these are unwritten laws which always dictate the actions and sensibilities of those who inhabit the specific environment. This does not mean that the person is hurt or not hurt by the death in question. It is also evident that even though the traditional norms expect bereaved families to express their emotions of grief, this is not always possible as each person has a different way of expressing grief. Setsiba (2012) also brings to the fore another point which supports the idea that mourning is not the same and

Setsiba (2012) further elaborates that mourning can be both a conscious and unconscious process.

Even though elder Sinvula was hurt by the death of his nephew, he was more hurt by the way the community is accusing him of being responsible for the death of his own nephew than losing him. Therefore, instead of mourning his nephew he was more concerned about finding the truth of what caused his nephew's death and also proving it to the whole community which has rendered him a pariah in his own village. In chapter fourteen of the novel, *The Other Presence* we came across how Ma Simanga seems depressed by the death of her only remaining son, Akapelwa. The reader is made to feel the pain that MaSimanga has endured when she has just lost her husband and her five children in a similar way and within a short space of time of each other as it is presented by Nyathi (2008) that:

> Two years after grieving the passing away of her beloved husband, her third born girl followed him. The following year two of her sons followed. They passed away in the space of about three months. Other than Akapelwa, the other most recent death of one of her children was that of her second born daughter who passed away after a short illness. Just like Akapelwa, all of MaSimanga's children underwent a similar process before they bid farewell to this earth (pp 11 - 12).

This seems a mystery and MaSimanga has a reason of weeping all the time, as it was observed during the mourning period that most of the time Ma Simanga has been seen sobbing in silence. Not only that, Ma Simanga could be seen sobbing while uttering inarticulate words that only her could understand them. This demonstrates how people who are close to the deceased show their

emotions of sorrow. As Setsiba (2012) states, it is customary for the bereaved families to be in a sad mood for a specific period of time. This also goes hand in hand with what Nwoye (2005) posits that normal grieving starts with shock and disbelief and ends with a healing. One may therefore say it is normal for MaSimanga to express her grief the way she does.

Nyathi in this novel also portrays how MaSimanga, Namukolo and Chuma eat the soil. The eating of soil is normally known to be done by those that are pregnant in some African traditional context in general and in Kwena community in particular. However, the three main characters believe that they are also worth to eat the soil as one of them says "It is not only eaten by those that are pregnant. It appeals to all that are patched like us" (p. 15). This seems to be a belief among the Kwena people that eating this type of soil is good in order to prevent something that ought to happen of which death can be included. On the other hand, the three women share the red soil that had been brought to the surface by the ants. This indicates that Africans do not only share edibles but they share difficulties as well, especially bereavement (Mlambo & Kandemiri, 2015). The novel portrays the aspect of togetherness in the face of loss, which advocates communalism and rejects individualism at all costs. This is further corroborated by Nwoye (2005) who notes that "The major goal of African grief work is to prevent the bereaved person's deep sorrow from degenerating into chronic negativity" (p. 148). Nwoye (2005) further asserts that "an important healing component of this stage is the presence of an intervening/witnessing community, fellow villagers, neighbours and friends." Therefore, Ma Simanga's friends who come to grieve together with her will lessen her pain and prevent this dark moment that has befallen her to drag her more and more into uncontrollable melancholy.

However, on the other hand, despite the fact Ma Simanga has been informed about the cause of Akapelwa's death, she still doubts the nature of the death that has occurred. In some African societies like the Kwena community when death occurs there is always someone accused of being responsible for it. Nyathi presents how things as the happened in real life with a sense of verisimilitude. Ma Simanga opts not to accept the reality; rather she shifts the blame to her brother in-law – elder Sinvula, suggesting that he is responsible for all the mishaps in her compound.

Furthermore, Nyathi portrays how Kachana a cousin to the late Akapelwa, approached the compound of the deceased crying so loudly to the extent that mourners do not know if her cries were genuine or alcohol driven. It was later discovered that Kachana's mourning was not real as throughout her sobbing she reported the dog that was stealing the meat hanging on the line for drying purposes. Kachana in her loud sobbing is also accusing someone unknown of being responsible for her cousin's death. Later on some women think that she is insulting someone when she says: "That dog feeds on the meat, Voet...sek!" (p. 6) It is only when Kachana incorporates the dog's activity into her sobs that her message is communicated effectively. Nyathi therefore advises society to be on the lookout that not all the mourners' cries are genuine. This is a clear indication that not all the mourners who cry are hurt and there are many ways one can express grief and not necessarily by crying. Also when elder Sinvula gets a chance to address the mourners, he wiped some tears out of his eyes, the tears that one may consider genuine. It is very rare to see a man crying and the tears and loud sobs are mostly associated with women. This gave an indication that even though elder Sinvula is saddened by the passing away of his nephew, he is more saddened by the way his kinsmen accuse him of being responsible for his

nephew's death. In his speech he alludes that only an individual who gives lives knows what claimed the life of his nephew and people do not need to lose faith but rather to accept it the way it is. Through the elder's explanation, Nyathi is able to appeal to society to let them know that it is not the way that a person mourns that determines whether they are the ones who have caused the death.

4.6   Treatment of relatives of the deceased

Throughout the novel, elder Sinvula is presented to the reader, according to the society's perspective as the person who is responsible for all of Ma Simanga's misfortunes. Elder Sinvula is a close relative to Akapelwa yet he is being accused of being responsible for his death and this becomes a double tragedy as Elder Sinvula is one of the bereaved families who are in need of support from others. This notion is justified by Nwoye (2005) who argues that the bereaved families need emotional support from familiar people to lessen their burden of pain. On the other hand, Setsiba (2012) stresses that the bereaved families are expected to show their emotions of sorrow and if not they will be labelled as having a hand in the death of their loved one. However, this is not always possible as people have different ways of expressing grief. This is also true for elder Sinvula. Nyathi skilfully brings this out to remind the society that those mostly close to the deceased are usually mistreated for not showing emotion as expected by their family members.

In some African societies it is peculiar for a man to be accused of having practiced witchcraft as is the case of elder Sinvula as portrayed in the novel under discussion. Elder Sinvula has been accused of being jealous of her sister in-law's prosperous homestead. This corroborates what Umoh (2012) states, that people are killed by witches who are typically members of one's household. Moreover, the Kwena community uses myths to victimise an old man Sinvula

because they are unaware of the possible cause of Akapelwa's death. This has led to elder Sinvula being victimised and harassed by his kinsmen of Kwena community. The mother of the deceased also feels that elder Sinvula is responsible for her son's death because he is not crying and she thinks that elder Sinvula, an old man as he is, wants to inherit her son's pension. Ma Simanga subsequently vows not to allow this to happen again as it had been done to her when her husband and the rest of her children died.

Another reason that encourages the mother of the deceased to feel that it is elder Sinvula who is responsible for all the misfortunes in her compound is some of the diviners who insinuate that elder Sinvula is the one responsible for the death of Ma Simanga's husband so the elder Sinvula will be able to marry her. The community is left astonished when Ma Simanga's husband dies in a car accident and two sons died within three months. Ma Simanga's children got thinner and thinner until they died. The rest of the children also underwent a similar process before they died. This is obviously strange in people's eyes when death attacks the family in the same way. Thus elder Sinvula who had a feud between him and his brother is consequently accused of being responsible for all the mishaps in Ma Simanga's compound.

When elder Sinvula was absent from the compound, mourners speculated that he had gone to see his "things" in the jungle. The things referred to are what has supposedly been used to kill Akapelwa. Whatever the villagers gossiped about, elder Sinvula decided to stand on his principles as he knows that he has nothing to do with Akapelwa's death. We can learn from this incident that Nyathi tells the reader that Elder Sinvula is accused of practising witchcraft and he was stigmatised. Equally, Semenya and Letsosa (2012) note that anyone who is accused of

practising witchcraft within the community will either be killed or stigmatised by the community members using any available means. The explanation above proves that the community stigmatised elder Sinvula, accusing him of practising witchcraft.

Moreover, some of the elders in the village refuse to walk with or be associated with elder Sinvula. Nyathi (2008), states that their reason for doing so is that "they will think that we work with him in his activities of the night and the whole village will condemn us" (p.19). This is an indication that no one wants to be associated with elder Sinvula because of the connotations given to him that he is responsible for causing the death of Akapelwa. Another instance which is used to stigmatise elder Sinvula is the collapse of Ma Simanga and she claims that she has been attacked by epilepsy. When the villagers find elder Sinvula around the place where Ma Simanga has collapsed, it is believed that elder Sinvula is the one who has made her to collapse. Elder Sinvula tries to make it clear that he carries nothing in his hand that could have made someone to fall. In this scenario, after witnessing such an event, some people got even convinced that elder Sinvula has something to do with Ma Simanga's collapse. Nyathi brings out the issue of fabrication whereby society talks out on the issues of which they have no proof. The author tries to warn people in society to be aware of such practices that results in people being accused of things that they did not do.

Nyathi portrays that it is painful to be accused of something that one does not do, especially where death is involved. This is noted when elder Sinvula was confused to hear that he is responsible for Ma Simanga's awful collapse in *The Other Presence* where it reads: "His eyes glistered with tears. The throbbing of his heart accelerated" (p. 20). However, despite the fact

that Elder Sinvula is accused of being responsible, he tries to convince the two men (Neo and Dube) that he is not guilty of anything and courageously greeted the three women, Ma Simanga, Namukolo and Chuma with his usual voice. Nyathi thus uses the novel to empower the victim (elder Sinvula) who did not let the myths and stigmas associated with death to put him down.

Another instance of where a dominant group is being oppressed is when the mourners are asked to give money, goats and chickens to Reverend Guiseb. Reverend Guiseb was on Christian mission and has a good opportunity to console the Kwena people with the word of God. Reverend Guiseb sees it as a good opportunity to get money for his personal gains. When he was informed about the death of a relative of one of his congregation members, he plans how to collect money for his personal gains as noted below:

> When he was approached to offer a sermon at this event, he suddenly thought about how he would supplement the small pennies he had been left with. He needed this money to purchase the fresh fish of the Great Zambezi River which he would have to transport back home. Those from central part of Namibia ate fish from the salty waters of the great Atlantic. Very few had this opportunity of getting access to fish from the fresh waters of the flowing river. This fish was known to be much tastier than the ones from the ocean. He was so excited to take up the opportunity of preaching at this wake. He anticipated a good fee. (Nyathi, 2008, p. 49)

The passage above portrays how Reverend Guiseb uses the death of a human being to meet his own wants. He shows no mercy to the mourners at all. The mourners are the people who are supposed to be given support to cater for funeral expenses, food for the mourners and other related activities. Instead of giving them support, Reverend Guiseb appeals to them to dig deep

into their pockets and give him money. The Reverend pretends as if he is preaching but his speech was more of begging than preaching. He went further asking for other offerings such as chickens, goats and cattle. This is an indication that Reverend Guiseb is of course out of the church mission and he uses the name of God for his personal goal. Nyathi through literature therefore, is raising awareness to the society that there are some church leaders who make churches their business and he is warning the society against this negative practice.

4.7   Summary of The Purple Violet of Oshaantu

The Purple Violet of Oshaantu tells a story of Kauna, an Owambo woman who lived in a village of Oshaantu in the northern part of Namibia. The novel reveals the friendship between Kauna and her friend Mee Ali. It is not Kauna herself who tells her story; rather it is narrated through the voice of Mee Ali. Kaunas' husband has just died mysteriously after he came back to his own house after spending the night at his girlfriend's place. Kauna goes mad for a couple of days. She hysterically tries to convince everybody that her husband did not eat the food that she has prepared but just died the moment he came back in the morning. However, Kauna was vehemently accused of using witchcraft to kill her husband because he was abusive.

The novel further reveals the burial process of Kauna's husband and how it was organised. Kauna's behaviour, uninterested in the activities of the funeral of her husband and refusal to shed tears was considered not normal by the family and community. As a result, Kauna was accused of poisoning her husband. This accusation proves untrue as it is later reasonably suggested that her husband has died of a heart attack. She did not express any emotions of grief. The extent of the anger of the community due to the inability of Kauna to express emotion can be seen by the

fact that even her best friend meme Ali is disappointed when she refuses to give a speech of the widow at the funeral of her husband.

The novel exposes many of the injustices, particularly those regarding women who live in rural areas in Namibia. At the end, the novel reveals how Kauna and her children were driven out of the house by her in laws. When her friend accompanies her with her children, they looked like people who were going away for a weekend as they carried a few pieces of luggage.

This section therefore examines the stigmatisation and myths associated with death in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* as interpreted by the researcher. The discussion is focused on the following:

- Treatment of widows

- Myths associated with death

- The role of education in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*

4.8   Treatment of the widows

Andreas portrays how Kauna was treated by her husband's family members and villagers when mourning her husband. Throughout the novel Andreas portrays Kauna as a widow who tries to be assertive and free herself from a chain of being abused at the time of mourning her husband's death. Kauna's husband Shange dies unexpectedly shortly after he arrived home from an overnight visit to his mistress. Kauna is blamed by the villagers for her husband's mysterious death. They accuse her of bewitching him out of jealousy. "She got tired of his abuse and poisoned his breakfast, she wanted to inherit his wealth and ate him up she wanted another man

and killed this one. Her parents on her mother's side are well- known witches" (Andreas, 2001, p. 81). This portrays how Kauna was stigmatised and mistreated. To illustrate this there are a couple of instances which show the mistreatment of Kauna as a widow. In one instance during the mourning period, she was quiet in her hut but she was called out of her hut for the meeting to be asked questions. The meeting was planned behind Kauna's back. This shows disrespect because it was supposed to be the mourners coming to her hut to express their sympathy and condolences but Kauna was called in by her husband's relatives in order for her to tell them what had caused the death of her husband.

Andreas shows the reader how widows are often accused for being the cause of their husbands' deaths. According to Sossou (2002, p. 201), widows of all ages from different backgrounds and cultures in some African societies are subjected to multiple forms of accusations when their husbands die. The element where widows are accused can be seen in Sossou (2012) where it is stated that the author portrays how one of the mourners urged the relatives of the deceased not to mistreat the widow and the children.

Furthermore, immediately after the funeral one of Shange's relatives moves into their bedroom and ignores the widow who was treated as an outsider in her own house. The mourners have different feelings about Kauna's behaviour when she was not crying. At first they thought that some people do not cry when they are in shock. Later the mourners got tired of waiting for Kauna to cry and they started to whisper about her. They feel justified to whisper that meme Kauna is the cause of her husband's death because she refuses to follow the mourning rituals. The relatives of Me Kauna's husband feel that they have the power to mistreat the widow after

the death of her husband because traditionally, most Namibian societies give more power to the families of the husband as a way of expressing power. Mee Ali tries to convince her friend Me Kauna to express grief and mourn the passing on of her husband. Kauna vows not to pretend stating that the people who want to see her crying will be the same to accuse her of being hypocrite. Similarly, the author indicates that when mourners console each other, they also use this event as a platform on which they would confess, confide in each other and resolve to change their attitudes in their relationship with others. Therefore, Kauna's refusal to shed tears during the death of her husband is considered as a social error in her community.

The delivering of a speech in praise of the dead husband at the funeral is regarded as an important part in the Oshiwambo culture. Andreas reveals how Kauna was self-assertive, regardless of the consequences. Another rebellious thing that Kauna does is that she refuses to appoint a representative to deliver the speech on her behalf. This is indicated when Kauna assertively and defiantly says:

> No, I am not going to tell the lies that widows tell at their husbands' funerals. I am not
>
> going to say what an honourable, loving and faithful man he was, while everybody in the
>
> village knows what type of a man he was… No, not because of Shange or anyone else,'
>
> she said with finality" (Andreas, 2001, p. 139).

The community where Me Kauna lives is no longer sympathetic towards Me Kauna as a widow who has just lost her husband because she refuses to shed tears and her lack of tears becomes the talk of the villagers and mourners. Kauna risks the extreme anger of her husband's family and the scorn of the entire village, as one of Shange's cousins remarks after Kauna's refusal:

You are doing this on purpose, aren't you? You want to disgrace our clan. You want to demonstrate to the whole world what a horrible man my cousin was... Haven't you done enough damage to his name already by running around like a crazy freak broadcasting, for everybody to hear, that Shange had not slept at home the night before he died? (p. 138).

The fact that Kauna does not shed tears seems to be strange to people in her community. Everyone was looking at Kauna interestedly. They gossiped: "Maybe at the funeral she will cry" (Andreas, 2001 p. 162).

However, Kauna insists not to please anyone including her own mother. Her refusal to cry and 'honour' her husband is seen by the people in her community as a sign of being rebellious and something that an 'average' well behaved widow will not do.

Sossou (2002, p. 204) highlights that widows are expected to contribute food and wear a particular dress during the mourning period, fast during the day and weep each day at sunrise and sunset. The above is in contrast with Kauna's reaction towards the death of her husband. The author presents the primary problems experienced by Kauna, in this case the author poses questions of why Kauna should cry: "Why should I cry? For what? For my broken ribs? For my baby, the one he killed inside me while beating me? For cheating on me so publicly?" (Andreas, 2001, p. 49). The reader is therefore made aware that this marriage was not a conventional marriage. It is a marriage where the husband abuses his wife and the woman remains silent. The questions asked serve as a constant reminder of what happened to Kauna. They further clarify why there is no need for Kauna to cry and the reader is made aware that this marriage was miserable.

Kauna refused to prepare a speech for her husband's funeral or to have somebody to say something on her behalf about her husband as all widows do. Kauna insists that there is nothing to be said as she says: "There will be no speech on behalf of me, the widow" (Andreas, 2001, p.138). Kauna believes that everybody knows how she has been treated by her husband, the physical abuse she suffered as well as her husband's public affair with a local woman. Thus she defiantly defies tradition and societal expectations of what a widow should do as she says: "No! I am not going to tell the lies that widows tell at their husbands' funerals."(p. 139). The fact that Kauna was not consulted by her in-laws concerning her late husband's funeral arrangements gives an indication that she is mistreated.

The author shows how Kauna was smiling during the speech made on behalf of the widow by her uncle kuku Peetu, which is an indication that she was not saddened by the death of her husband. Kuku Peetu describes Shange as a good, caring man who was always ready to help. This contradicts with Shange's character as portrayed in the novel. However, kuku Peetu had to say this as it is in line with the expectations of the people in this community, that of not speaking ill of the dead and showing extreme emotions regardless of whether they are genuine or not. One may say that in African culture, it is believed that if a person dies, the people left behind have to praise or say something good about deceased.

Therefore the novel portrays how Kauna breaks the code of conduct which governs her behaviour as a widow in traditional Oshiwambo society. The refusal to say something is a deviation from the normal way of mourning in most African contexts in general and Oshiwambo culture in particular. Therefore, the relatives of Shange were furious when Kauna fails to say

something; it was unusual for a widow to react the way she did. This was another blow to Shange's clan as they feel that Kauna has done an unimaginable damage to their clan. This shows the reader that the widow is important in grieving the loved one and the widow's silence in mourning the loved one can be traumatic especially to the relatives of the deceased, something that most people in society do not realise or appreciate.

Another way how the widow was treated is when Kauna seems to be given extra care by some people around her, for instance the friend of Kauna, Me Alli who was responsible for assisting Kauna during her time of bereavement. Me Alli spends most of her time with Kauna in her hut during the mourning period. Another caring person is the local nurse (Sustera) who decides to bring stress relief tablets to Kauna. Kauna indicates that it is not necessary for her to be given relief tablets as she does not stress at all. This gives an indication that Kauna does not feel anything about her husband's death. The way Kauna refuses to shed tears or does not show any sorrow heightens the hatred between Shange's relatives and herself.

Moreover, another act of open rebellion on Kauna's part occurs when she is approached to appoint somebody from her family to deliver the 'widow's speech' at her husband's funeral service. A speech in praise of the dead husband at the funeral is an important part of the Oshiwambo culture. Regardless of the consequences, Kauna refuses to appoint a representative to deliver the speech on her behalf.

> No, I am not going to tell the lies that widows tell at their husband's funerals. I am not
>
> going to say what an honourable, loving and faithful man he was, while everybody in the
>
> village knows what type of a man he was. No, I will not make a laughing stock of myself.

No, not because of Shange or anyone else,' she said with finality" (Andreas, 2001, p.

139).

This gives an indication that Kauna risks any situation coming from her husband relatives and

prepared to face the mockery from the entire village.

In another form of mistreatment, Shange's family comes to Kauna's compound claiming

Shange's home, land and animals. This shows us that Kauna was mistreated to favour the

dominant group which is Shange's family over the subordinate group, Kauna. This also shows

the reader that there is a deep hatred between Kauna and her husband's relatives. Although there

is nothing wrong with inheriting, the way the people do it as indicated in the novel is totally

heartless and it is indicative of the height of selfishness and greedy. Andreas brings out the issue

of harsh traditional customs whereby the headman treats the widow badly when informing her to

pay the land if she wants to stay. Kauna informs the headman that she knows the custom and will

abide to it. Andreas portrays that Kauna does not only suffer at the hands of her husband's

relatives but also at the hands of the general public as well. To make the matter worse, Kauna is

not given enough time to raise money to be able to pay for the homestead. She receives another

message informing her that her in-laws had already paid the tax for the house and they are the

new owners of the homestead. All these are cases whereby discriminations are coordinated to

favour dominant groups.

The author portrays how the in-laws' decision was influenced by the behaviour of Kauna during

the mourning process. On the other hand the author portrays that Kauna feels that the way

widows are treated has nothing to do with the behaviour of the widow as it does not matter how a widow behaves or says to the in-laws, the treatment is the same.

Another character that Andreas uses to address the issue of widows' treatment after their husbands' death is through the character of MeeSara. MeeSara is accused by her in-laws of witching her husband, even after his family learns that he had died of HIV/AIDS. Interestingly, the author portrays that MeeSaara lived in town but yet when her husband Victor died of an incurable disease, she was treated pitiless by her husband's relatives just like the women in villages. One can learn from this incident that in the African context in general and Owambo culture in particular, the way widows are treated is the same in rural areas as well as in town. Moreover, the novel portrays that when MeeSaara's husband Victor got sick, it was MeeSaara who suffered by looking after him. Victor had an incurable disease and the wife suffered by taking him to different hospitals, herbalists and even nursing him. The novel portrays that relatives claimed that MeeSaara should explain which "muti" she had used to make Victor suffer for a long time. The relatives of MeeSaara's husband use myths about death to victimise her because they are unaware of what caused his death. What is worse is the fact that even after Victor's family has learned of the real cause of his illness, they still went on accusing her that she is somehow responsible for his promiscuous ways.

The widows are subjected to multiple accusations that they are responsible for the death of their husband and this causes them to be victimised and harassed. Andreas portrays how Kauna refuses to be governed by customary laws and empower herself to fight against negative traditional laws. Andreas through Kauna exposes society to some of the issues that need to be

deeply thought about, for instance the expectations that the society has on the widow's behaviour towards the husband's death. Andreas advises society to stop unnecessarily and untruthfully praising the dead at their funeral if they do not deserve to be praised. In other words, the author reminds the society to say the "unsayables" (Mlambo and Kandemiri, 2015). Andreas shows that women have the ability to stand their ground after the men have treated them badly. In other words, Kauna is against the practice of normalising and excusing domestic violence.

4.9 Myths associated with death

In *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu,* Andreas portrays the myths associated with death. For example, customarily all mourners had to leave the homestead to allow the coffin to enter the house. This is a belief done not to allow the death to find them inside. Owambo people do this because they believe that if a corpse finds them in the house, more people will die. By going outside of the house it is believed that they can stop death from coming back to the same household again.

The corpse is also not allowed to pass through the same gate as the one that the person used when he was alive. In some African cultures like Oshiwambo, it is believed that gates used by the deceased should be closed as presented in the novel. By closing those gates, it is believed that the death will lose its way when it tries to come in the same house at the particular moment. It is also believed that only good people will have rains at their funeral. Hence it was surprising and disappointing for Kauna when meme Ali saw possible rain clouds on the day of Shange's funeral.

4.10   The role of education in The Purple Violet of Oshaantu

To dispute the myth that people always die because they have been witched, Andreas uses two characters namely Mee Fudheni and Tate Erikki. Andreas uses education to give Mee Fudheni a local nurse a chance to talk to Mee Alli and Mee Kauna at the mourning house. Mee Fudheni tells Kauna and Mee Alli that a person who is not sick or complaining about any disease can still die and people need not to accuse someone of being responsible for such a death. Mee Fudheni mentioned the life-threatening diseases that are not easily identified but which are able to kill a person. She mentions life threatening diseases such as heart attack and high blood pressure as possible cause of death. It is clear that Andreas also uses education as an eye opener to the people to issues that are affecting their lives on a daily basis. Mee Fudheni (Sustera) tries to use education to influence the minds of people in her community for them to understand that there are life threatening diseases that may cause death rather than accusing someone of being witched.

Furthermore, Andreas also made great use of Erikki to educate the readers about the danger of HIV/AIDS. In other words, through Erikki, Andreas is able to educate readers that it is only through speaking out and not silence that HIV/AIDS stigma can be addressed. Apart from Tate Eriki, Andreas also used   Tate Fillipusa who is related to Mee Saara to show that there is a need for men in our society to stand up for women who are victimised. Another example of men who are able to stand for women is Michael, Meme Ali's husband who is able to stand up for his wife and not allow people in his life such as his mother to victimise his wife. Michael also stood up for meme Sara at the funeral of her husband. Apart from men, Andreas also uses Mukwankala, a

woman, to challenge Shange and speak up for Meme Kauna. By speaking up, readers can learn from these characters that it is not alright to keep quiet about violence. This is in line with Achebe (1988, as cited in Mlambo and Kandemiri, 2015, p. 61), who argues that "it is the novelist's duty to re-educate his society through literary works."   Thus, through the two novels the literary creators managed to achieve greatly.

In the same vein, we also see Andreas challenging the role of education in the society through the character of Victor's cousin (the teacher). We expect education to change the way people think in a positive way. However, in the novel we are presented with an educated person, a teacher whose education does not really seem to have had a positive impact on her. Andreas is therefore saying that education is nothing if it cannot challenge bad practices in our society. In an ideal world, Andreas is saying that the teacher should be able to see that it is not appropriate for her to inherit a television from a widow with children; especially that she (the teacher) does not even have electricity at her house.

4.11   Conclusion

In conclusion, the chapter discussed the literary representation of myths and stigmatisation associated with death in both *The Other Presence* and *The purple Violet of Oshaantu.* Both authors portrayed how the subordinate groups are oppressed by the dominant groups when death has occurred. In both novels the people use myths about death to victimize certain individuals. The myths seem to contribute towards the mistreatment of the subordinate groups such as widowed women, old men as well as poor people. The novels further reveal that some individuals benefit from perpetuating myths that lead to the disempowerment of others.   The

novels also depict the viewpoints of some African village people in general and viewpoints of

Oshaantu and Kwena villages in particular with regards to the concept of death.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   Introduction

The main aim of this research was to demonstrate the literary representation of stigmatisation and myths surrounding death in the novels *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas and *The Other Presence* by Francis Sifiso Nyathi from an African stand point. The concern of the objectives of this study that informed this research is how stigmas and myths are presented in the selected novels. The study sought to find out about the literary representation of stigmatisation and myths surrounding death in the selected novels in order to find out the extent to which the exploration of stigmatisation and myths surrounding death was done through analysing texts that were purposefully sampled.   The study was framed under the Social Dominance Theory. The major objectives of the study were to:

- evaluate how stigmatisation and myths that surround death are portrayed in the two novels, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas and *The Other Presence* by Sifiso Nyathi;

- analyse the emerging themes from the discussion of stigmatisation and myths surrounding death in these two novels; and

- examine how the two authors portray power relationships amongst the characters which is caused by the impact that the myths and stigma that are attached to death can have on families and members of the societies are represented in the selected novels.

This chapter is divided into two sub sections namely: the findings and conclusion, as well as the recommendations.

5.2 Findings

The findings of this study are presented in relation to the specific objectives of the study since the core concern of the research was driven by these objectives. The findings are summarised as follows:

5.2.1 Objective one: to evaluate how stigmatisation and myths that surround death are portrayed in the two novels, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas and *The Other Presence* by Sifiso Nyathi;

On this objective, the study revealed that in most African cultures it is believed that death does not occur on its own. It is regarded to be as a result of maybe witchcraft or some bad omen despite the fact that death is inevitable. One scholar explained that an "African viewpoint regarded long life as a blessing and [anything] contrary to it [like death] is considered as a curse either from the gods, ancestors or earthly foe" (Umoh, 2012, p. 2). In many cases as seen in the selected novels, death is always seen as cynical and suspicions are raised. Whenever death occurs, some characters are stigmatised and accused of being responsible for causing the death in question. Thus, some of the myths that are present in the selected novels include the one that sees HIV/AIDS as a taboo or something that does not need to be spoken about. The study also revealed that in many societies people are accused of causing death to someone using witchcraft, even in the cases where medical proofs are provided which are to the contrary. This has been attested to in both novels. In Nyathi's *The Other Presence*, the deceased's mother has been well informed about the disease affecting her son but, yet when her son died she insists on stating that there is someone behind her

son's death. Similarly, Andreas portrays how Mee Saara is accused of bewitching her husband despite the fact that he has been tested and diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. One may conclude that characters in the selected novels may be ignorant and are living in denial which may cause dissent in the community because the community or family members would rather accuse somebody that she or he is the one who caused the death rather than mentioning the real cause which might be HIV/AIDS.

Furthermore, Nyathi's *The Other Presence* revealed that there are various myths about natural elements such as the whirlwind, natural animals and birds that are used and believed to be under a great influence of the supernatural as they insinuate the influence of witchcraft from an African point of view. The study also revealed that in many communities mourners are expected to pretend to be sad at funerals to avoid being accused of being responsible for the death in question.

5.2.2   Objective two: to analyse emerging themes from the discussion of stigmatisation and myths surrounding death in these two novels;

There are various themes that emerged from this study. The first one is the treatment of widows and relatives of the deceased person. The study revealed that widows and relatives to the deceased are treated badly and stigmatised when their loved one dies. In many cases widows are being treated badly by their husbands' relatives and mourners such as the case of Mee Kauna, Mee Sara and elder Sinvula.

Another theme observed in the study is the theme of sisterhood as presented in both novels. There are women characters that support one another for example in *The Purple Violet of*

Oshaantu Mee Kauna and Mee Ali. Mee Ali supports her friend Mee Kauna, especially during the time when she was treated badly by her husband and during the mourning time of her husband. In *The Other Presence,* the sense of sisterhood is brought afore when Namukolo and Chuma were supporting MaSimanga at the time of mourning her son Akapelwa. These two women were surrounding MaSimanga and they gave her all the moral support. This was an indication that people support each other during difficult times.

On the issue of moral support, there are characters that speak up for others and become the voice of voiceless. Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* portrays Mukwankala as a woman who challenges Shange and speaks up for meme Kauna. Equally, Nyathi's *The Other Presence* depicts a doctor who speaks on behalf of elder Sinvula and who tries to let the mourners understand that HIV/AIDS is the primary cause of death. Doctor Castro noticed how the community does not understand the possible cause of death which is HIV/AIDS. By speaking up, readers can learn from these characters that it is not alright to keep quiet about violence.

Another observation the researcher made from the selected novels of this study is the fact that education is an important tool. Both novels revealed how education is the power for enlightenment. Nyathi's *The Other Presence* revealed to the readers that education can be education for development or education for destruction (Mlambo & Kandemiri, 2015). Education for development is education that benefits both the one educated and the society that he lives in. Whereas education for destruction is the education that destroys the one who receives it and contributes totally nothing to the development of the community (Mlambo & Kandemiri, 2015). For Thomas, Nyathi presented how education can be destructive. This can be attested when

Thomas returns home to Africa from the United States of America and he disregards his culture and identity, he does not know even how to dress at a funeral. He does not show respect to the people he wants to address. If people think that one do not respect their ways of life, they may not listen to that person, although the message might be important.

Another type of education highlighted is the education for development and intercultural communicative competencies, whereby the Cuban doctor, Castro who is a very educated person in the community addressed mourners using his skilful way of articulating the unsayables (Mlambo & Kandemiri, 2015). Unlike Thomas, the doctor shows love, sensitivity, care, tenderness and cultural awareness. He knows how to speak to people in order to get their attention, and people are likely to listen to him. A sense of commitment can be noted that Nyathi wants to convince the reader that there is a need to balance education and culture. Culture is considered as a tool that offers identity to a person as well as the sense of where one belongs. Thus, one can conclude that Nyathi wants to inform educated people that education should not entirely wipe out everything about their culture and he achieved a lot through Thomas and the Cuban Doctor, Castro. This was not an exception to Andreas with Mee Fudheni (*The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*) when Sustera tries to use education to influence the minds of people in his community in order for them to understand that there are life threatening diseases that may cause death rather than accusing someone of being a witch or wizard. Through characterisation and from these instances, one may conclude that education can make a huge impact in people's life and it needed that artist through their works seek to challenge bad practices in our society.

5.2.3 Objective three: to examine how the two authors portray power relationships amongst the characters caused by the impact that myths and stigma that are

attached to death can have on families and members of the societies are represented in the selected novels.

This objective was satisfactorily responded to as the authors also created awareness as a way to empower members of subordinate groups. The study demonstrated how some of the characters in both novels benefitted from perpetuating myths that lead to the disempowerment of other individuals. For instance some characters in both novels use power to perpetuate intergroup violence to weaker people such as widows (Me Kauna and Mee Saara) and old people (Elder Sinvula). Sossou (2002, p. 201) (see 2. 5) established that in the African traditional set up, women are expected to grieve openly and to demonstrate the intensity of their feelings in a more formalised way than men.

However, using the findings from this study, the researcher opposes this statement because this may be an indication that women are regarded as inferior and they are therefore subjected to inhumane and unfair societal norms. It is thus on this basis that the present study concurs with Sossou (2002) who believes that there is a need to empower women to overcome discrimination and to fight negative traditional practices. From these instances one can conclude that discrimination across these levels is coordinated to favour dominant groups over subordinate groups by legitimising myths or unfavourable societal mores, consequently these become shared social ideologies and in this way this fulfils the major tenet of the Social Dominance Theory.

It would seem that certain individuals or sections of the group benefit from perpetuating myths that lead to the disempowerment of other individuals, and it was the aim of this study to identify and analyse these underlying power structures as presented in the selected novels.

In *The Other Presence* the study revealed that widows suffer during the mourning process of their dead spouses than widowers. This can be attested to when Andreas in *The Other Presence* illustrates how the widows Mee Kauna and Mee Saara are subjected to multiple accusations that they are responsible for the deaths of their husbands and this subsequently caused them to be victimised and harassed. Not only that, the study also revealed that Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* depicts how Kauna has been victimised by the community because she refused to behave as per societal expectation. However, Kauna decides to be assertive, which is an indication that through Mee Kauna, Andreas wants widows to free themselves from the chain of being abused at the time of mourning their beloved ones.

5.3 Recommendations

Literature is a powerful tool that can change the shape of public values and ethos. Through literature, the real life situation of human beings can be reflected. It is through literature that the doubts can be studied, examined and researched in order to disentangle the threads that might be the stumbling blocks to the people's freedom. Therefore, this study recommends that more studies be done on the following:

- More studies can be conducted to show how myths in our society can be addressed and these studies can be at a larger scale involving literary texts from two or more southern African countries

- Other than concentrating on HIV/AIDS, more studies can also be conducted on the effects of other diseases and ills like cancer, obesity, extremism, fundamentalisms and eating disorders as these are becoming the current cancers of modern societies.

- More research can also be done to find out how people can find a balance between education and culture. There is a serious need for policy developers, communication experts, linguists and cultural performers to consider the issues that arise from novels, discuss them and develop ways of practically facing them.

- There is a need to create literature that depicts widows as victorious and not people who are always victims as in the case of meme Kauna and meme Saara. Thus there is need to critically analyse the sense of agency and proteanism in women as they are victors and not simply victims.

5.4   Conclusion

The study has analysed the literary representation of stigmatisation and myths surrounding death in the two selected novels *The Other Presence* by Sifiso Nyathi and *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas. The researcher's suspicion that many communities do not take lightly death in Namibia and Africa were confirmed. It appears that death is seen as a result of evil powers in most communities regardless of tribes (Kwena and Aawambo). The study also revealed that these myths usually have negative consequences to those left behind. Apart from that, the study found out that because of these myths, people are usually ignorant when it comes to HIV/AIDS because they see the myths and the supernatural as the only thing that can cause death and not diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Finally, the researcher gave various recommendations that need to be addressed by fellow researchers in the field of literary studies.

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