

7. A LITERARY EXPLORATION OF TRAUMA AND RESILIENCE IN TAGWIRA'S THE UNCERTAINTY OF HOPE

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to critically analyse Tagwira's *The uncertainty of hope*, a novel set in turbulent Zimbabwe using the critical lenses of trauma and resilience theory. The two theories are applied as a way of accounting for the challenges, realities and hopes faced by 21st century African states and citizens. Through the application of these two theories the paper argues that literary theory has to address itself to the issues and concerns raised in fiction and that it is through balancing the traumatic realities of life and how the ordinary people resiliently face these challenges that African literature can truly mirror. The research found that the novel, *The uncertainty of hope*, clearly captures the different forms of trauma faced by the characters in crisis-hit Zimbabwe. Moreover, the research also demonstrated the characters' resilience and their agency in mitigating the traumatic experiences they face.

Key words: trauma, resilience, coping, Zimbabwean crisis

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore the relevance of trauma and resilience theory in elucidating contemporary African texts. Using the selected novel, the two theories are used as literary lenses to demonstrate how malleable literary theories are and how our present day challenges, joys and celebrations are scripted by modern writers of commitment. African literature is closely linked to the experience of the African in his family circle, his society and his continent. This reality is however, not adequately addressed by traditional literary theories. This study, therefore explores how trauma theory and resilience theory could be employed to answer the quest for critical literary theories that can be adequately applied in the African context by analyzing the selected literary text, *The uncertainty of hope* (2006) by Valerie Tagwira.

In literary studies it is important that theories are applied that will adequately emphasize the message of the literary work. However, traditional theories have failed in many ways to capture the essence of African literary works which serve a central purpose in society. It is important for theories to address 'the real world', the real issues and concerns of society and its joys, fears and challenges. In the selected text, the writer Tagwira reflects on the hardships and trauma endured by the characters and how they come up with survival strategies that enable them to reconstruct their lives and hope for a better future. This paper therefore attempts to demonstrate how trauma theory and resilience theory can be used to analyse literary texts, fictional and non-fictional as a way to explain the realities of everyday lives in Africa. The two theories are rooted in the social sciences and when used in literary studies, these literary lenses bring about some novel perspectives to literary studies, and in some ways they address the 'poverty of theories' that some African literary critics like Vambe (2003) and Nnolim (2006) have lamented about.

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2. Understanding theoretical terms: Trauma and resilience

The central terms in this paper, which are the theoretical buffers of this research are trauma and resilience and the terms are explained below as they have been defined by different thinkers. According to Rodi-Risberg (2006, p. 33), trauma is “a phenomenon that is too shocking to be fully registered upon occurrence. It is only experienced belatedly. It offers specific challenges to traditional notions of referentiality”. From this definition, what comes out clearly is that Rodi-Risberg’s definition fruitfully captures the essence of literary studies in the sense of recording an event in its belatedness; that which has been and or happened, can be or can happen and may be. Moreover, Caruth (1995) argues that “trauma includes symptoms that had previously been called shellshock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome, and traumatic neurosis, and referred to responses to both human and natural catastrophes” (p. 3). She further mentions that these symptoms had previously been classified as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. “There is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dream thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the recalling of the event” (p. 4).

Marder (2006) describes a traumatic event as a strange sort of event that cannot be located within the boundaries of place and time, therefore literature is one of the ways we communicate events about human experiences that cannot be contained by other ordinary modes of expression. Furthermore, according to Hartman (2004), trauma theory dwells on the relationship between words and trauma which helps to read the wound with the aid of literature.

Another important theoretical term used in this research is resilience. Resilience is explained as a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma. This term does not represent a personality trait or an attribute of the individual, rather, it is a two dimensional construct that implies exposure to adversity and the manifestation of positive adjustment outcomes (Lothar et al., 2000, p. 858). According to Mlambo (2014), “resilience, therefore, emphasises the strengths that the people have, rather than their vulnerability, through exploring the coping strategies that they exhibit” (p. 39).

This study emphasizes the importance of literary theory in the evaluation, interpretation and preservation of literary works. This study proposes trauma and resilience theory as some of the main theories for critically analysing African literature. This study therefore proposes the use of trauma theory and resilience theory as some of the main critical tools to theorise African literature.

It has to be further emphasised that the word trauma comes from the Greek word for “wound”. Trauma produces repeated, uncontrollable and incalculable effects that endure long after an event (Marder, 2006). Marder (2006) says that trauma has an inherently political, historical and ethnical dimension because traumatic events happen due to social forces in the social world. The impact of trauma cannot be fully located in a traumatic event. Trauma fractures the experience of the person to whom it happens and the event cannot be experienced fully at the time, as Tagwira’s novel reflects. However, trauma does not only produce negative consequences, but there is the possibility of new beginnings. These new channels allow the traumatized person to survive, and by implication, this points to the value of resilience which this paper clarifies on.

Through literature we experience events that might have remained hidden to us. Through literature these events become meaningful to us and by mirroring the world, fiction is thus one avenue through which trauma can be expressed. Trauma is the story of the wound that needs to be told and this mode of expression is found through literary texts both fictional and non-fictional. It unveils the reality or truth that we can only experience through close reading of the text. Trauma is therefore the act of bearing witness and this act places the witness in a unique position of risk, a risk associated with selectivity, self-censorship and the betrayal arising out of the unreliability of memory as Mlambo and Pasi (2010) have pointed out.

People react to life's challenges in many different ways. Some will emotionally explode; others might become angry; and others might become physically violent. Others may implode, go numb, feeling helpless and overwhelmed by what has happened. Some might portray themselves as victims, blaming others for what has happened. They spiral downward and harbour unhappy feelings. Then there are people who get through this situation. They bounce back; emerge better and stronger than before. These are resilient people who can quickly adapt to the new circumstances and the present paper explores the extent to which the characters face traumatic circumstances which are typically African, in a resilient manner.

Research into coping, optimism, stress-resistance, post-traumatic growth, creativity, emotional intelligence and a survivor personality have been identified as the main attributes of resilience (Mlambo, 2013). Resilience has been frequently defined as the act of positive adaptation despite adversity and these are the very acts which are represented in this study through the two literary texts.

Lothar (2000) has called resilience a construct with two distinct dimensions: significant adversity and positive adaptation. This qualification indicates that resilience is never directly measured, but indirectly inferred, and by implication therefore, one way of recording and measuring it is through literary representations. Trauma theory and resilience theory are lenses through which the African critic can investigate and explore trauma and survival techniques. Peoples' livelihood and constructed identities are threatened in times of crisis and they have to adopt and explore new possibilities in life.

3. *The uncertainty of hope: a synopsis*

The uncertainty of hope depicts the difficulties faced by many Zimbabweans especially those living in the city. Life is difficult and complex, and indeed traumatic for many. Onai lives in a high density suburb of Harare. She is married to Gari, an unfaithful drunk who does not care for his family. She has three children. She is abused by her husband and exposed to the risk of HIV/Aids. She finds herself in the street after Gari dies of an HIV/AIDS-related illness and his possessions are taken over by his younger brother and Onai refuses to become his wife.

Onai is a woman living in a patriarchal society in Zimbabwe, Africa. She suffers economic hardships like most Zimbabweans in crisis-hit Zimbabwe, but as a woman she is also oppressed by her husband. In spite of the entire trauma in her life, Onai finds resilience and bounces back, emerging stronger than before. She fosters new friendships that carry her through difficult times. Katy and her husband John support Onai and her family. But they are also role models to her by

sending their daughter to university. She also builds a relationship with Emily, the health professional who helps her protect herself from HIV/AIDS. Through strategic alliances, Onai is able to bounce back from traumatic experiences and it is these traumatic and resilient expositions which this paper further explores using trauma and resilience theory. Some of the traumatic dimensions explored in the novel and how the characters resiliently face these challenges are explored below:

4. Trauma and resilience in Tagwira's *The uncertainty of hope*

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how a critical reading of the novel using the lens of trauma theory and resilience theory can help account for African literature in the 21st century and how readers and critics can understand it and its implications. The paper will discuss the following issues as raised in the novel and analysed through the selected theories:

4.1 Understanding the representations of traumatic economic collapse

The uncertainty of hope is set in 2005, in a time when Zimbabwe faced economic sanctions due to its political policies. The country was unable to deliver adequate public services and the currency plunged to record lows due to the high inflation rate. People are earning millions of dollars, but they cannot buy basic necessities. Mlambo (2014) remarks that the situation was so dire, resulting in “inflation running into the millions, everyone was virtually a billionaire in Zimbabwean dollar, a currency denomination which stretched from as little as a one cent note to fifty billion dollar note, where price changes had become a daily if not hourly event and one’s “take-home” salary could hardly take one home” (p. 3). The economy was further hurt because people did not save their money as banks could not generate any interest on it; neither could they manage to give depositors their money back due the critical cash shortages. The national currency became practically worthless. Fuel shortages crippled the transport industry and people had to queue everywhere to buy the basics.

As the novel reveals, (Tagwira, 2006): “Gone were the days when such food products had been a matter of course. Her son Fari had spent the previous Sunday in a queue for cooking oil, while the girls helped her at the market. He had returned home empty-handed, dust-covered and exhausted, but bursting with exciting, hilarious accounts of the skirmishes with the riot police (p. 67). However, what has to be emphasised in this instance is the sense of agency, fortitude and apt capability to find humour and positivity in the midst of the drudgery of life. It is these challenges which are traumatic at national level and the socio-economic malaise is by no means any cause for celebration, but the resilient reaction by the ordinary people is equally worthy recognition.

Coupled with the drought of the previous year, the political and economic crisis is an overarching crisis that includes several “micro” crises which threaten people’s very existence. The public transport system is not operating properly because of the fuel shortages, there are no jobs, proper housing is lacking, the health care system is in shambles and raw sewerage runs into the streets where the children play (p. 57). This in essence is symbolic of a situation that “wounds” an individual’s well-being and this form of representation by the author allows the reader to peep into some of the traumas and challenges besetting the African continent.

Caught in this vortex is the major character, which faces the brunt of economic collapses with both a mixture of trauma and resilience which defies all categorization of Afro-pessimisms. Onai Moyo is a married woman and she lives with her husband Gari and three children in the high density suburb of Mbare. When Onai arrives at the hospital after one of the beatings she receives from her husband, she is told that there is no local anaesthetic and she has to bear the pain of the wound being stitched without anaesthesia. She is wheeled to the ward in a rickety wheelchair and the walls of the lift look rusty and the paint is peeling. The lift reminds her of a coffin. People have to wash old bandages to re-use them because the hospital has no new bandages. The qualified medical personnel are streaming out of the country to look for better opportunities in the UK and many other parts of the world. The frank account of the realities facing the people is a stylistic feature of the novel which makes it carry a flare of verisimilitude.

There is however the few professionals like Emily Sibanda who stays. “I keep asking myself why I don’t move abroad like so many of my colleagues, and I can’t find the answer or not one that makes sense” (Tagwira, 2006, p. 47). The answer comes in the words of Sister Mashave: “People need us here” (Tagwira, 2006, p. 47). In the hospital there is no water and no electricity and the doctor has to perform a caesarean by candle light. These words by Emily and Sister Mashave are the glimmers of hope, optimism and are indicative of how despite all the odds the characters defy the traumatic experiences and resiliently continue to serve and save their communities.

The trauma due to the economic collapse seems unbearable and one cannot help to ask how it is possible for anybody to survive in such harsh circumstances. Tagwira, however, manages to show how people are capable of coping with this tragedy by adapting resilient strategies. Martin-Breen and Andries (2011, p. 3) say that “self-organisation generates inherently new ways of operating”. They define resilience as the ability to withstand, recover from, and reorganise in response to crises, which is what the readers witness through Onai the heroine in the novel. When the transport fee is highly inflated by the drivers, Onai and Katy decide to take the long walk home. The two women walk energetically, share the township gossip and companionable laughter, crossing into Mbare in half an hour. Instead of allowing themselves to be taken advantage of by unscrupulous people, they take the alternative of self-sustenance, sacrifice and resilience without showing any victim mentality.

Onai Moyo is a married woman with three children. She has to make a living as a market vender although she is a qualified dress-maker. Although she thought that she did well in an interview for a dress-maker vacancy, she did not get the job. She has to reinvent her identity to make a living for herself and her children because her husband does not make contributions to the household expenditure although he has a well-paying job. Gari only pays the council rates so that he secures the house his parents left him. After losing her stall due to the government’s clean-up operation which saw many houses and market stalls demolished (*Operation Murambatsvina* of 2005), Onai decides to sell her products from house to house and in the ever-present queues, risking being arrested by the riot police. This is an indication of creativity, innovativeness and resilience and ultimately whilst hope seems to be uncertain as the title of the novel suggests, Onai manages to starve off hunger and starvation.

Moreover, Onai’s best friend, Katy also a market vender has turned to foreign currency dealing in order to pay her daughter’s university fees. Katy dreams of a time when she will leave the high density suburb of Mbare and its poverty behind and live in the more affluent suburb of Marbelreign. Tagwira shows that the dire situation that the ordinary Zimbabwean citizens find

themselves in does not stop them from dreaming and hoping for better times. But they do not only dream, they act by reconstructing the urban space in which they live through resilience and a never-give up entrepreneurial spirit. The novel thus celebrates the ordinary people's agency and ability to rise above adversity as represented through these two women.

4.2 The literary representation of trauma due to the government's clean-up operation

The sheer brutality of the national governments as presented by Tagwira finds ample presentation through how the people lost the most basic need for shelter through the Operation *Murambatsvina* of 2005. The artist, the voice of the voiceless and advocate for the poor, victimized and traumatized, Tagwira, records this event thus:

All Onai could think of was that their bulldozer would trample her little vegetable patch. If they torched the shack, the searing heat would wilt the vegetables. The defenseless plants were still very young and delicate. She suddenly saw splashes of red; then cornucopia of stars and black spots. Her migraine hovered, with an onslaught of pain. Her chest felt heavy with the effort of restraining her anger. One day, my chest will explode, she thought. Very coldly she said, 'I will do it myself.' The officer, 'starred at her, openly surprise. He laughed contemptuously. 'I really think you need a man for a job like this'. She stared back at him and shouted, 'I said I will do it myself!' With a start, he backed away slightly. He shook his balding head, scratching the receding hairline in exasperation, and walked towards the riot police who were waiting expectantly across the road, ready to stifle any disturbances. (Tagwira, 2006, p.142)

The above quotation, long as it is, emotive and full of pathos, is not a hyperbolic, rubble rousing and sensationalised account of events. It is the author's literary ability to recreate events as they happened and a fictionalisation of history, charged as it is with verisimilitude.

The vegetable patch harbours Onai's livelihood, is a mark of her resilience, creativity and innovativeness in the face of challenges. She grows a few vegetables to add nourishment to the meagre meals of *sadza* and cabbage that she serves her family. When it is threatened by the bulldozer and the riot police she reacts in a very explicit way, marking the depth of trauma she undergoes. She decides to break down the shack herself. However, the physical destruction of the shack becomes the mental destruction of all the forces that threaten her life. "She struck a forceful blow against all the Garis of this world and against everything that threatened her existence" (Tagwira, 2006, p. 142). All her repressed memories manifest themselves in this violent act that transforms her identity. She behaves like a possessed person and becomes so physically strong in her rage that she does the job that requires the strength of a man. During the outburst she does not speak a single word. She is only characterized through her actions. The police remarked that those who seemed calm and composed are usually the craziest. One can say that Onai's mental equilibrium is altered by this traumatic event. A very appropriate question would be whereto now for Onai? She has just learned that her husband has an extra-marital affair with a prostitute. Her worst expectations have come true. She has always expected her husband to be involved in extra-marital sex, but now she has certainty. This is a devastating discovery which shatters her world to the core. However, resiliently Onai does not turn her back to the world. She extends a helping hand to her lodger, Sheila whose shack she had to break down. She allows Sheila to sleep under

her roof, not knowing that Sheila was one of Gari's lovers and maybe even the one from whom he contracted the HIV-virus. The next day Onai and Katy help Sheila to construct a shelter at Tsiga grounds where those whose shacks have been destroyed have set up camp. The act of constructing basic shelter is therefore at a symbolical level a representation of how under traumatic and challenging times women particularly manage such shock waves through finding harmony, togetherness and indeed a sense of creativity. The writer, does not in any way seek to minimise the hardships faced, neither does she seek to condone the politically induced trauma but she does not seek to crucify the reader on the alter of pessimism, gloom and doom. There are shimmers of hope and glimpses of optimism which ultimately flavour the whole novel.

In addition, the traumatic events also find expression through the following: "I will shoot the whole lot of you! Do you know who I am? Do you know whose side-kick I was during the struggle? You're going to be very sorry. You don't understand what I am saying, do you? I said I fought for this country. I said, I risked my life for this country" (Tagwira, 2006, p. 150). Hondo is a retired war veteran. He is proud of his legacy. The cleanup operation transforms his identity and leaves him disillusioned and traumatised. He is rendered helpless when the bull-dozer moves in to demolish the extensions to his house. The clean-up operation destroys the very identity that Hondo has claimed for himself. He played an active part of liberating his country from the British colonisers, but he can do nothing to save his own property. Hondo takes his own life. The name Hondo means 'war' in Shona, a Zimbabwean local language. It is very ironic that Hondo's identity is destroyed by the very notion that helped him build it. The character, Hondo, reminds one of Okwonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe who chooses to die rather than live with the reality of losing his identity. This demonstrates how in some instances the trauma can be so intense that people may fail to be resilient enough and cope with trauma as exemplified by Hondo and this is an illustration of how some modern governments prey upon their own people.

The clean-up operations were meant to remove all the illegal buildings and stop the black market dealers in foreign currency. However it takes away the livelihood of a lot of the residents of Mbare. Katy, Onai's best friend and her husband John are illegal foreign currency dealers, a lucrative form of pragmatic morality which allows them to survive and move beyond survival in a crisis-hit situation. They have their daughter Faith's university fees to pay. They also dream of leaving Mbare to go and stay in a better location. John, a long-distance truck driver has no option but to leave the dealings to his wife Katy, putting her at risk of being arrested. John is aware that he could never accuse an officer of the law of buying foreign currency; he therefore makes a brilliant plan to tie the corrupt officer to the foreign currency dealing. He makes the officer sign in his receipt book. When the government cracks down on the illegal currency dealers, John is in South Africa and the officer pays the price. This form of survival tactic is a replica of the trickster character in traditional African folktales and indicates how the weak use their wit to survive.

The clean-up operation leaves many people homeless. People sleep in the street with only cardboard boxes to protect themselves against the bitter cold. The elderly and the children are the worst infected. They come down with chest infections that overcrowd the casualty wards of hospitals, where overworked doctors have to attend to them. This further demonstrates the ability of fiction to account for the trauma that post-independent Africa faces on a daily basis – some of the challenges are natural but some of them are indeed man-made.

A toddler dies when the demolition team moves in on the shack in which he was sleeping without checking if there was somebody inside. A woman commits suicide by taking rat poison, leaving

six children behind of which the youngest was only one year old. “With no income and no home, death had almost been a quick and easy escape (Tagwira, 2006, p. 155). Sheila joins the homeless at *Tsiga* grounds. Sheila was always a fighter, but now she was like a lost soul, the fire has faded from her eyes. This account of events therefore illustrates a “wound” – a national wound, a personal and individual wound and also a wound upon the reader whose emotional code is touched by such traumatic events.

4.3 The traumatic nature of lives as shaped by HIV/AIDS

Livelihoods are important to people’s material and cultural well-being as well as constructed under construction social identities (Mlambo, 2014). The deeply rooted cultural sensibilities which have been passed from generation to generation and the constructed identities (those that are still being transformed) of the people, get threatened in periods of crises as people adopt various strategies in the pursuit of viable livelihoods in response to the constraints occasioned by crises. The lived experiences and resilience of the ordinary people in negotiating, responding to and coping with the main political crises as well as the series of micro-crisis engendered by the former is what the novel further explores. One such challenge is that of HIV/AIDS and to fully understand the magnitude of this challenge, one has to read Tagwira’s novel using trauma and resilience theory.

Onai’s husband Gari is an unfaithful husband and he is not too selective about whom he sleeps with. Sheila and Gloria are prostitutes, but that does not seem to scare him. Tagwira presents the trauma of HIV/AIDS through the two friends Onai and Katy. Onai suspects that her husband is sleeping around. He demands his conjugal rights in a very abusive way. Onai knows that she can’t refuse it to him, because he might accuse her of having boyfriends. If such a rumour should do rounds in Mbare she would be the outcast of society. However, the socio-economic situation forces her to stay with him. In a patriarchal culture such as the one in which she lives, she dare not divorce her husband. She cannot put up with the beatings all the time and she is forced to grant him his marital rights. Onai makes a resilient choice that saves her life. She puts on a female condom before her husband comes home. He is drunk most of the time and does not notice that she is wearing one. This resilient act proved to be a life-saving one, since Gari dies of an HIV/AIDS related disease. However, what carries the day is not an emphasis on the trauma faced in Africa but how through Onai, the writer presents the classical example of the tongue surviving in a mouth full of very sharp teeth - she devices mechanisms to survive. This is the core message of the novel, to argue that despite all the problems and traumatic events in post-colonial Africa, there is still hope. Some Africans, just like in any part of the world, are not passive recipients of all that is thrown at them but rather they are active makers of history who make conscious decisions to face life’s challenges and survive.

Katy’s husband John falls in the high risk category for contracting HIV/AIDS, since he is a long distance truck driver. Katy trusts her husband but she cannot be sure that he will not fall for temptation; therefore she packs condoms for him when packing his bag for the long trip. This is an indication of pragmatic morality and wisdom in the face of changing times. Onai and Katy face the psychological scare of HIV/AIDS, and they have to react proactively. Testing themselves for the virus would be the best thing to do. If testing positive, they can get anti-retroviral drugs that can prolong their lives. They accept the reality they have to face as African women and dare prepare to live positively and in a di-stigmatised manner if ever they were to test positive.

However the uncertainty of not knowing provides (temporary) comfort to them. Both women, without telling the other, go for testing and they test negative. The writer's style of writing is in such a manner that the reader is enveloped in the two women's lives and the reader feels like celebrating with the two women – they are exemplars of the hope of Africa and African writings like these are indeed celebratory works which sow seeds of hope and optimism rather than pessimism. Trauma is a reality in Africa but the resilience of the people, their innovativeness and sense of agency far out-weighs the often touted Afro-pessimisms.

Onai also loses her twin brothers to HIV/AIDS. The twins deceived everybody into believing that they had decent jobs at Harare's Sheraton Hotel, while they were in fact drug dealers who were exposed to all the dangers coming with it. They kept the same girlfriend who could have given them the disease, or they could have given it to her (Tagwira, 2006, p. 273). These are Onai's inner thoughts as she attends to their graves behind her mother's house. Even in her grief Onai is aware of the vulnerability of women. The HIV pandemic leaves many grandparents with the task of caring for their grandchildren in their old age. It is a situation that puts extra strain on old people and on the children alike. Can the elderly grandparents really be a surrogate for the psychological and emotional care that parents can give their children? However, during this time of institutional failure, people fall back on their families for comfort and support, embracing the African philosophy that 'it takes a whole village to raise a child'. Indeed the concept of *ubuntu*, the African philosophy of oneness, being hospitable and caring towards one another becomes a resilient strategy which the author celebrates.

Sheila has contracted the virus and lives with it. She is sick, has a baby to care for and has no income; therefore she is forced to continue with her behaviour. Sheila says that there was a time when she thought of living with an empty stomach was worse than dying of AIDS. Nyambi (2014) states that the representation of women as especially vulnerable to crises in urban settings puts under spotlight the immortality and injustice of traditions, codes, and conventions that have "cultured" women into gendered subalternity. He goes on to mention that the 'eclipse' of female centric voices suppresses women's perspectives. His views are echoed by this study in which the literary products of two women writers are explored. This study advocates that theories such as trauma and resilience theory can be applied to give women's views the space it deserves.

Institutional structures such as the Kushinga Women's Project provide support to women in abusive relationships that expose them to the risks of HIV/AIDS. These women not only get counselling, but are also assisted legally to lay charges against their husbands, destroying the basis of the patriarchal system that a woman is under the control of a man. Medical treatment is available through these groups. "AIDS is the leading cause of death in Zimbabwe and other countries in Southern Africa. It has massive consequences for development as it continues to deplete the human resource base" (Chitando, 2008). Tagwira articulates the vulnerability of women, but she does not leave them without hope. Through organisations such as the New Start Centre, not only women, but the nation is educated about the dangers of HIV/AIDS, and how to take charge of their own body. In modern Africa, there are structures which are available and which buttress the traditional village support and these forms of support are the avenues through which the weak and vulnerable can bolster their resilience and face the traumas of life with more courage and hope.

4.4 Writing as a way of witnessing trauma along gender lines

Nyambi (2014) argues that when talking of a patriarchal society it is eminent to explore gender based issues and women's vulnerability, because in cultural, political and economic spheres the status of most Zimbabwean women is still reflected as inferior to that of a man. Nyambi states that during the big economic crisis, there were several small, micro crises. Without husbands by their sides the decision that Sheila and Gloria take to engage in commercial sex might be because they are forced by economic circumstances and do not really have a choice. Nyambi relates the selling of the body, selling being an economic activity, directly linked to the economic crises. The decision that Onai takes to stay in an abusive marriage where she is also exposed to the possibility of HIV infection is equally not out of a free personal choice. Onai does it because she knows that she cannot raise a family without a husband. If she divorces Gari, his family might cast her children away. When Gari does not come home one night, Onai is sick with worry, but she knows that it would not help to report him missing, because the officers would dismiss her case. She pictured them telling her what she already knew. So many men spend nights away from home without telling their wives. It is a man's prerogative to run his household as he wishes, with no allegiance to any rules, especially not those dictated by a woman. "Her husband was no exception. He was, after all, a man, no less so than the next" (Tagwira, 2006, p. 121).

Tagwira presents the issue of gender relations also through the marriage of Maya to Mazai. Maya is a big woman, strong and muscularly built. Maya is a vendor at the market. Her husband is timid and does domestic chores at home. He is the laughing stock of other men. If their marriage is viewed from another perspective where there is equality between men and women, it seems as if the couple has found equilibrium in their marriage. The partner who is physically strong and outspoken competes with the other vendors at the market and the one who is timid stays at home and does the domestic work. They complement each other. However, in the patriarchal culture they are made fun of.

The issue of gender is further explored through the cultural practice of inheritance laws. Onai is regarded as belonging to the Moyo family. Gari's younger brother inherits his household, including his widow. Onai decides that she will name Fari her protector. Her culture allows it. Onai shows respect to her cultural heritage. She first searches for options within the norms and codes of her society. It is only when it fails that she is forced to turn to western laws and to nullify a marriage that was never registered. In other words, the author demonstrates that where resilience abounds, there are always options to follow both in the traditional set up and in the modern world and these two worlds in Africa may be referred complementarily; it is the innovativeness, serendipity and proteanism of the character which makes one to survive and move beyond mere survival.

Tagwira explores life in this patriarchal situation not only through Gari, but through other male characters such as John, Hondo, Tom and Tapiwa Jongwe. Through these characters Tagwira shows that the individual in this fictional society has a choice. They can choose to be the stereotypical African male who reins his family with an iron hand and who causes immense suffering to them or they can respect their family and care for them. John cares for his wife and daughter. He stays faithful to his wife even though his job as a long-distance truck driver provides ample opportunity to engage in risky sexual behaviour where he can pick up prostitutes at border crossings. Hondo and his wife are portrayed as a lovely couple who travels together to South Africa and work together during the trying times in the economic crisis. Tom respects Faith's

wishes to first work for her family after the completion of her studies before she gets married to him, doing so also preserving positive relationships with his future parents in law. The African society that Tagwira portrays in *The Uncertainty of hope* is a society where men and women also work together for the harmony of society. In fact through the exploration of the marriages of Maya and Gari's sister Chipu, Tagwira shows that men not always have the upper hand. If it can be said that Tagwira sometimes argues from a feministic viewpoint, there is a need to explore this view point to see if it is in line with Western feminism or if it is in line with African feminism.

For Sheila the choice is between the empty stomach and HIV. Nobody has certainty; everybody can only hope. The commercial sex worker is also a vendor. The economy is unstable and so people have to negotiate their lives daily. Some make a resilient choice like Onai and Katy to protect themselves by acknowledging that the disease is a reality and they act proactively. Certainly the author acknowledges the enormity of the trauma people in Africa face but does not condemn them to pessimism. Instead the author demonstrates that though uncertain, hope is still there in Africa.

4.5 Representations of the unsayables: African spiritual trauma

The man shivered again. His thoughts wandered dreamily to what he often thought of as his past – and it was; the past that was inexorably linked with the future to which he would proceed when he had purged himself of the guilt festering within him. With that one, very brief instruction, he had destroyed everything that had mattered to him; so he'd resolve to live out his extreme act of contrition. People often talked of *kutanda botso* – a ritual undergone if one wronged one's mother, but for his wife he'd loved; the woman he still loved so much that it hurt. In an attempt to cleanse the remorse that weighed him down, he'd modify *kutanda botso* for himself; he would beg and accept public humiliation as an act of contrition. (Tagwira, 2006, p. 42-43)

Mawaya's real name is Tapiwa Jongwe and he is a business man who is living in the affluent suburb of Borrowdale. The people of Mbare call him Mawaya, suggesting that he is mentally unstable. He lost his pregnant wife and unborn baby in an accident and the trauma of the loss causes him to go into a self-imposed act of remorse (*kutanda botso* in Shona). Jongwe can afford the best trauma care that Harare can offer, but he makes a conscious decision to go into a mourning and spiritual cleansing period. One would really think that he is indeed mad to leave his comfortable life behind in such a difficult time. He observes and respects a cultural practice, not only from Zimbabwe, but from Africa (the belief that there is contact between the living and the dead). He goes into this mourning period to right a wrong to his dead wife. Ironically, the moment that Mawaya's mourning period is over and he wants to go home and claim his real identity, he is hit by a car and lands in hospital. When he wakes up, he is in a psychiatric hospital. He forgets his own name the moment when his identity could save him from discrimination and ill-treatment. What he does remember just confirms to the medical staff that he is mad. Mental instability becomes a metaphor through which Tagwira explores human suffering and the notion of identity. At the end of the novel he goes back to his plush home and reclaims his riches and becomes Onai's benefactor as a way of repaying her for the kindness, the ubuntu which she had shown him whilst he was a "mad" man. These acts of kindness demonstrate the ubiquity of the African philosophy of *ubuntu* once again and that despite the challenges and hardships faced, the people rely upon one another in an egalitarian manner as a way of resiliently coping with life's challenges.

4.5 Trauma of losing family to death

Gari, Onai's husband, dies of an HIV/AIDS related disease, leaving Onai widowed and her children orphaned. Gari mistreated his wife, but Onai still mourns his death. She has hoped for a time when they could reconcile their marriage, but his death deprives her of this opportunity. Left to the mercy of her in-laws, Onai has to tap from her inner resources and her rational brain to deal with the situation. She decides not to become a second wife to Gari's brother. She decides to name her son Fari her protector according to the Shona custom. When this seems not to be the solution, she turns to the law.

Through the death of her husband Onai loses her home. She has nowhere to go with her children. She seeks the assistance of her mother, well aware that in her situation she might not make the best decision. In most Southern African cultures it is always said that when a child suffers he should go to the house of his parents and seek their blessings. She and her mother share ideas on what is the best for her children. Onai rediscovers the novelties of her culture when staying with her mother. Onai finds herself enjoying *sadza* with roasted *madora*, preserved from the last rain season. "As a child she found the harvesting of the fat, squashy worms from the mopane trees revolting. Now it was a delicacy" (Tagwira, 2006, p. 268). However, the crucial point to note here is that though death is rampant and indeed a shocking experiencing, Onai finds ways of coping and one way of making ends meet is through going to the rural areas where her mother is; firstly to seek parental advice and solace and secondly to leave her children under the loving arms of their grandmother. Rural Africa is therefore presented as a place of refuge as opposed to the usual label of an agglomeration of disease, poverty and backwardness.

5. Conclusion

In this paper the focus was on the literary representation of trauma and resilience in the novel, *The uncertainty of hope* by Valerie Tagwira. Through the application of trauma theory the many crises faced by ordinary Zimbabweans are highlighted and through the application of resilience theory it was shown how they optimistically responded to the challenges to enable them to keep hoping in the face of uncertainty.

The aim of this paper has been to show that trauma theory and resilience theory can be applied as lenses through which African literature can be analysed. Many scholars of African literature such as Vambe (2003) and Nnolim (2006) have raised the opinion that the theories traditionally applied to evaluate African literature are not adequate and that new channels should be explored to further valorize African literature. Women's writings in Africa add new thematic expansions to the African literary tradition and these new dimensions beg for new theories to further address them.

Through the exploration of traumatic events in the cited literary work, the positive and inspirational ways of how people respond to these adversities, the paper has demonstrated that trauma theory and resilience theory are relevant and applicable to African literature and they help enhance the message of the author. Tagwira presents the traumatic events suffered by the ordinary Zimbabweans and how they reconstruct their identity to cope with the crises at hand. This novel

is evidence of how the arts in Africa, in this instance literature, serves a central purpose in the life of Africans and how literature can be utilized to teach valuable and lifesaving lessons.

This paper has shown that through the application of trauma theory and resilience theory the work of the female writer can be evaluated and criticised. Friendship between women, universally referred to as 'sisterhood' is emphasized and it is shown how women, through this support structure, are able to juggle their many roles at home and in society. It has also demonstrated that the experiences of women and the inspirational ways in which they react to adversity can be studied through trauma theory and resilience theory. Literature has become a way through which women can articulate their struggles in societies that are male-centric and male-controlled. In patriarchal societies where all spheres are male controlled, literature might be the only way to communicate their situations. Finally, this paper has proven that trauma theory and resilience theory should be studied in relation to one another. Traumatized people are able to make resilient choices for their lives and the lives of those who depend on them.

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