

The Effects of an Unplanned Pregnancy in the Post-Independence Shona Novel: “De-Womanisation” or Women’s Empowerment?

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Summary

This article foregrounds the theme of unplanned pregnancy in Sharai Mukono-weshuro’s novel *Ndakagara ndazviona* (1991) and Mabasa’s novel *Ndafa here?* (2008). The article scrutinises the two novelists’ treatment of the girl child character when she becomes a victim of an unplanned pregnancy. This is a qualitative, critical literary study that adopts the tenets of Africana womanism theory to argue its case. It uses those tenets to discuss two forms of data. There is data gathered from the two novels and data collected during a discussion with two legal practitioners from an organization that deals with women empowerment issues on the matter under study. In the process, the article establishes and debates strategies the two novelists employ to empower their female characters so that they progress to success in life the very moment they become victims of unplanned pregnancies. It concludes that, since the strategies which the novelists advocate and lobby for are not informed by Africana womanism as an action plan for empowering African women, they fail to empower the victims of unplanned pregnancies. Thus, ultimately, the two novelists “de-womanise” and dehumanise victims of the unplanned pregnancy. That being the case, this study recommends that, novelists need not ‘de-womanise’, dehumanise and disempower their female characters, who become victims of unplanned pregnancies. Rather, they need to struggle to empower them to triumph in life. In that way, they will teach their society that the life of a girl child does not degenerate and become worse than futile the moment she becomes a victim of an unplanned pregnancy.

Opsomming

’n Onbeplande swangerskap in Sharai Mukono-weshuro se roman *Ndakagara ndazviona* (1991) en Mabasa se roman *Ndafa here?* (2008) is die onderwerp van hierdie artikel. Dit bestudeer die twee romanskrywers se uitbeelding van hul hoofkarakters, meisiekinders wat die slagoffers van ’n onbeplande swangerskap word. Dit is ’n kwalitatiewe, kritiese literêre studie wat die beginsels van die Africana womanism-teorie berus. Twee stelle data word op grond van die beginsels bespreek. Enersyds is data uit die twee romans ingesamel en andersyds is ’n gesprek gevoer met twee regspraktisyns verbonde aan ’n organisasie wat hom vir die bemagtiging van vroue beywer. Die strategieë wat die twee skrywers volg om hulle vrouekarakters te bemagtig om ’n sukses van hulle lewe te maak vanaf die moment dat hulle die slagoffers van ’n onbeplande swangerskap word. Die gevolgtrekking word gemaak dat hulle nie daarin slaag om die slagoffers van ’n onbeplande swangerskap te bemagtig nie omrede die strategieë wat hulle voorstaan, nie op Africana womanism berus nie. Eintlik

“verontvroulik” en verontmenslik die twee romanskrywers slagoffers van ’n onbeplande swangerskap. Daarom beveel hierdie studie aan dat romanskrywers hulle karakters eerder bemagtig en oor hul omstandighede laat triomfeer. Sodoende leer hulle die samelewing dat die lewe van ’n meisiekind nie waardeloos raak sodra sy die slagoffer van ’n onbeplande swangerskap word nie.

Introduction

This article applies/adopts tenets of Africana womanism theory to scrutinise and debate the manner in which both Sharai Mukonoweshuro (1991) and Ignatius Tirivangani Mabasa (2008) handle the theme of unplanned pregnancy in their novels. The debate is based on how they treat the girl child character who becomes a victim of an unplanned pregnancy. The argument of the article is that, African literature has to be literature of hope and not of hopelessness and despair (Morell 1975). This being so, this study adopts Africana womanism theory to argue for the empowerment of the girl child who would have become a victim of an unplanned pregnancy in post-independence Zimbabwe. That means, the setting in life (*sitz im leben*) under which the girl child is victimised and under which the girl has to be empowered, is considered during this critical appreciation of novelists’ visions of the aftermath of an unplanned pregnancy. In this article, unplanned pregnancy is understood to mean pregnancy that results from a sexual encounter between a man and a woman who would not have both agreed on having it. This pregnancy is regarded as unwanted pregnancy. Unplanned pregnancy may result when both sexual partners indulge in sex without intending to have the pregnancy and/or when one of the two partners is against having such pregnancy. Thus, unplanned pregnancy can occur inside or outside marital unions. Kulkarni (2006) has defined empowerment as “... a process that gives a person freedom in decision making”. For him, “Women empowerment means emancipation of women from the vicious grips of social, economical, political, caste and gender-based discrimination. It means granting women the freedom to make life choices”. In this article, the term women empowerment is interpreted to mean the situation where, after she becomes a victim of an unplanned pregnancy, a woman has freedom to make life choices which, when she willingly acts on them, enables her to progress to success in her life on the economic, social and cultural fronts.

Theoretical Framework

Africana Womanism Theory and the Concept of “De-Womanisation”

This theory was developed by Clenora Hudson-Weems from 1986 onwards. Her first thorough-going presentation of the theory came in 1993 when she

published a book with the title *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*. She made critical elaborations on the theory in her 2004 publication with the title *Africana Womanism Literary Theory*. According to Hudson-Weems (1993: 22), “Africana Womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of African women”.

In that theory, an Africana woman “... is a black woman activist who is family-centred rather than female-centred and who focuses on race and class empowerment before gender empowerment ...” (Hill 1979 in Hudson-Weems 2004: 51). Again, in that theory, African womanhood is crystallised into eighteen descriptors/characteristics. The eighteen descriptors are; self-namer, self-definer, genuine in sisterhood, in concert with males in the liberation struggle, strong, male compatible, flexible role player, respected, recognized, whole, authentic, spiritual, respectful of elders, adaptable, ambitious, mothering and nurturing ...” (Hudson-Weems 2004: 63).

Apart from its being race-based, Africana womanism is both family and mother centred. As a matter of fact, it perceives men and women as comrades-in-arms in the struggle for African people’s survival and freedom. In that sense, it is against feminism, especially the radical category that considers men to be the enemies of women and that speaks against sexuality, reproduction and patriarchy as a tripod of stimulants that propel women’s oppression globally (Mannathoko 1992: 75-76). Because she is family-centred, the Africana woman “places the needs of her family before her own individual needs ...” (Hudson-Weems 2004: 54). Hudson-Weems also believes that the African continent is the mother of humankind. Therefore, the African woman is a mother per excellence (Hudson-Weems 2004: 66).

In Africana womanism, men and women are to be partners in the struggle against forces that militate against their freedom. Thus, Hudson-Weems (2004: 97) has come up with both positive and negative aspects that characterise male and female and female and female relationships. They are:

Positive

1. Love
2. Friendship
3. Trust
4. Fidelity
5. Truth
6. Mutual Respect
7. Support
8. Humility
9. Fun
10. Compassionate
11. Sharing/Caring
12. Complimentary
13. Spiritual

Negative

1. Contempt
2. Rivalry
3. Distrust
4. Infidelity
5. Deceit
6. Disrespect
7. Neglect
8. Arrogance
9. Mean-Spirited
10. Callous
11. Selfish/Egocentric
12. Critical
13. Non-Spiritual

The positive features mark the desired characteristics of the relationship between men and women. The negative traits work towards promoting the de-womanisation of African womanhood.

De-Womanisation of African Womanhood

Sofola (1998) has come up with what she has termed the “de-womanisation of African womanhood” that is caused by upholding both the feminist sensibilities and the western education’s defining formats of femininity.

Hudson-Weems (1998) sees feminist education as the major cause of the “de-womanisation” of African women. She perceives the de-womanised African women as those women who uphold feminist ways of achieving women’s empowerment. She labels such women “assimilationist and sellouts” (1998: 156).

In her bid to demarcate between African womanhood and the de-womanisation of that womanhood, Sofola (1998) has juxtaposed the philosophy and behaviour of an educated de-womanised woman of Africa and that of an illiterate woman of Africa.

Western Educated African Woman Mark of de-Womanisation	VS	Illiterate Woman of Africa Mark of African Woman-hood
<i>Says that:</i> a) What a man can do a woman can do better	—	<i>Says that:</i> What a woman can do a man cannot do
<i>Says that:</i> b) Behind every successful man is a woman	—	<i>Says that:</i> The strength of a man is in his woman
<i>Conception of self:</i> c) She conceives of herself as someone to be seen not heard	—	<i>She is guided by the view:</i> If the <i>Ada</i> (daughter) says a day-old chick is a hen, so it is
<i>General behaviour</i> d) She hangs on to a wicked and bestial husband	—	<i>Says that:</i> The burden of a husband is carried on the wife’s shoulders not on her head: she quickly drops it when it becomes too unbearable

This article uses the views of these two scholars on African womanhood and on the “de-womanisation” of African womanhood to debate issues raised from the two novels.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study of Mukonoweshuro's (1991) and Mabasa's (2008) treatment of the theme of unplanned pregnancy in the novels under study. Leedy (1997) understands qualitative research as an approach that is used to describe life experiences, and give them meaning and that is meant for researchers to understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live. This study is qualitative in that, it discusses the life experiences of the victims of unplanned pregnancies in *Ndakagara ndazviona* and *Ndafa here?* And gives them meaning based on whether or not their experiences are humanising and empowering within the socio-cultural context of post-independence Zimbabwe of the 1990s. Two forms of data are used in this research. There is data that was gathered using desk research and data that was collected during a discussion that was held with legal practitioners. Desk research was used to collect data from the two novels under study and to gather data from secondary texts that deal with Africana womanism theory and matters to do with women affairs. One of the researchers held an informal discussion with two legal practitioners who were based at the Musasa Project's Gweru branch on the 22nd of March 2017. The researcher narrated the stories in the novel to the two. The legal practitioners then commented on the stories. Some of their views are used in this article to come up with the sixth school of thought on how Revai in the novel *Ndakagara ndazviona* needs to progress to success after she becomes a victim of an unplanned pregnancy. The research findings are discussed using tenets of the Africana womanism theory and the events of post-independence Zimbabwe of the 1990s.

Mukonoweshuro's Treatment of the Aftermath of an Unplanned Pregnancy

Characters in the Novel that are Dealt with in this Article:

- Revai is a young girl who is a victim of an unplanned pregnancy
- Vamhosva – is Revai's aunt's husband who impregnates her against her will
- VaRegadzai – is Revai's mother
- VaTichaona – is Revai's father
- VaMandinika – is both Revai's paternal aunt and wife to VaMhosva
- VaTadzei – is Revai's other paternal aunt
- Jemisi – is Revai's lover
- VaMuchazvirega – is VaMhosva's mother and both vaMandinika and Revai's mother-in-law
- VaChiramwiwa – is an old village woman who is approached by Revai's mother to induce an abortion on Revai.

In her novel, *Ndakagara ndazviona*, Mukonoweshuro depicts a case of unplanned pregnancy. VaMhosva rapes Revai and impregnates her. VaMhosva is Revai's father's sister's husband. In Shona culture, VaMhosva is *babamukuru* (brother-in-law) to Revai and Revai is *mainini* or simply *muramu* (sister-in-law) to him. The type of relationship that exists between them is what the Shona call *chiramu*. *Chiramu* is "a cross-sex joking relationship" that commences with the marriage of a family member (Charamba 2010: 134). In Shona culture, whilst *chiramu* participants can engage in horseplay that involves physical contact, but they are not allowed, under what circumstance, to indulge in sex, (Hodza, 1984; Gombe, 1998).

When VaMhosva impregnates Revai, different characters propose different ways for resolving the matter. Their propositions are presented and debated in this article with the objective of establishing if they either empower or "disempower" Revai.

When Revai is raped and then impregnated by VaMhosva, Mukonoweshuro depicts the emergency of some five schools of thought. The first school of thought is represented by VaRegedzai. When she initially learns of the news that her daughter Revai is pregnant, VaRegedzai vows that she will make sure Revai aborts the foetus: a situation that will enable her to proceed with her education. Passing "O" Level will aid her to become a teacher and then fend for the family. As such, VaRegedzai approaches VaChiramwiwa to carry out the abortion. Pretending that she is administering the abortion, Va Chiramwiwa serves Revai with harmful concoctions after which Revai falls seriously ill. She is taken to the hospital where the illness is remedied.

The second school of thought is composed of VaRegedzai, VaTichaona and VaMhosva. What that means is, as the story progresses, VaRegedzai joins a second school of thought. In fact, when she finally learns that it is VaMhosva who has impregnated Revai, VaRegedzai quickly changes her mind. She becomes convinced that, as per the demands of tradition, Revai has to marry VaMhosva. She is absolutely certain that, since VaMhosva is a budding businessman, the moment Revai marries him, will become the very moment her family will start to enjoy bread and some other foodstuff. Just because he is too traditional and at the same time very poor, VaTichaona supports the idea that Revai has to marry VaMhosva. VaMhosva, who seems to be quite traditional too, accepts responsibility over the pregnancy and is ready to marry Revai so that at the end of it all he will be a polygamist. As the story progresses, VaMhosva marries Revai. Thus, rape and the resultant unplanned pregnancy pave way for VaMhosva to marry Revai against her will. That is the case, since Revai, who is deeply in love with Jemisi, is prepared to marry Jemisi and not VaMhosva. Due to pressure from her parents, Revai finally marries VaMhosva. She then gives birth to a baby boy. The child is named Tasara.

The third school of thought is the school of characters that vehemently speak against the marriage of Revai and VaMhosva. The school is composed of

VaMuchazvirega and VaMandinika (Mai vaRudo). The two women oppose the marriage arrangement on the understanding that polygamy was no longer viable and feasible in post-independence Zimbabwe because of an ongoing increase in rural poverty.

The fourth school of thought is represented by Revai and Jemisi. Both believe they should be allowed to marry in spite of the fact that Revai is pregnant with VaMhosva's baby.

The fifth school of thought is represented by VaTadzei. VaTadzei's stance on the matter is that Revai should be afforded the freedom of choosing what she thinks is right for her.

The 3rd, 4th and 5th schools of thought could be merged into one paragraph-continuous narrative.

Whilst Mukonoweshuro has some five schools of thought on how to proceed when a young woman falls victim to rape and to an unplanned pregnancy, the two legal practitioners interviewed averred that, in a situation such as that of Revai, the girl child has two major options. The first option is to report the case to the police and/or to other voluntary legal services providers so that the law can take its course. One of the two stated that, a woman, who is not raped but is impregnated by a man outside wedlock without having planned for it, has to receive maintenance charges from the man that cover for her own upkeep (if she is not employed) and for the upkeep of the baby (that is when the woman finally delivers). These legal practitioners, who recommended imprisonment of the perpetrator of rape and maintenance of the woman who becomes a victim of unplanned pregnancy outside wedlock, make up the sixth school of thought in the study of the events in *Ndakagara Ndazviona*.

Mabasa's Treatment of the Aftermath of an Unplanned Pregnancy

Characters in the Novel that are Referred to in the Article:

- Betty – is a young woman who is impregnated by Watson when she is studying for a degree at the University of Zimbabwe
- Watson – is a student at the University of Zimbabwe who impregnates Betty
- VaMatanga – is Watson's father and Betty's father-in-law
- Mai Matanga – is Watson's mother and Betty's mother-in-law
- Kiri (tete Kiri) – is Watson's sister and Betty's sister-in-law
- Pasipanodya (Pasi) – is Watson's younger brother and Betty's brother-in-law
- Matipfumisa (Mati) – is Betty's close friend
- Martha – is Betty's other friend

In *Ndafa here?* Betty is impregnated by Watson without the two having planned for it. Once she is in that predicament, the former ekes out four different plans of action at different times that she thinks can aid her to progress to success in life.

In the first place, she imposes herself on Watson, who is not willing to marry her. As a result, the two start to live as husband and wife at the Matanga homestead. It is when she joins the Matanga family that Betty suffers serious traumatising, dehumanisation, de-womanisation and total disempowerment to progress to success in life. The barrage of calamities she suffers proceed from the fact that members of the Matanga family, who include Watson himself, Mai Matanga, Kiri, VaMatanga and Pasipanodya, do not welcome Betty in the family.

When it dawns on her that her presence in the Matanga family is not welcomed, Betty starts to believe that her empowerment to progress to success in life comes through going back to the university and accomplish her studies and then graduate with a degree. That being the case, no female member of the Matanga family is prepared to take care of her baby girl (Sunungurai) in order to allow Betty to go back to the university and proceed with her studies.

When her first two plans do not help her to progress to success in life, Betty resorts to the third plan of braving the brutal atmosphere of hate, rivalry and arrogance that brews up in the Matanga family. When the members of the Matanga family abuse and harass her sexually, physically and emotionally, Betty almost always finds solace in crying and weeping.

Betty's fourth and final action plan is moving out of Matanga's "house of hunger". She starts to believe in the notion "*Simuka ufambe*" (*Rise and walk*) (p. 120). As such, Betty starts to look for an opportunity to "rise and walk" out of the Matanga's "house of hunger". Fortunately for Betty, that opportunity comes when her two female friends, Matipfumisa and Martha, visit her. Upon seeing them, she vows that they were not going to leave her behind in the Matanga family. The novel ends when she and her friends are in the car driving to an anonymous destination.

Appreciation of Mukonoweshuro's Treatment of the Aftermath of an Unplanned Pregnancy

In *Ndakagara ndazviona*, Mukonoweshuro demonstrates that an unplanned pregnancy fosters the de-womanisation of African womanhood. The moment VaMhosva impregnates Revai outside wedlock, becomes the very moment when rivalry emerges between and among women who start to speak and live against the demands of genuine sisterhood. Pertaining to genuine sisterhood, Hudson-Weems (1993: 63) says that:

There has always been bonding among African women that cannot be broken – *genuine sisterhood*. This sisterly bond is a reciprocal one, one in which each gives and receives equally.

Although, genuine sisterhood advocates communion and fellowship between and among women of Africa, the moment VaMuchazvirega learns that her son (VaMhosva) has impregnated Revai, becomes the very moment she teams up with VaMandinika to dictate that Revai should not visit VaMhosva's rural home. Thus the two team up against another woman and plot hatred against her. Therefore, instead of the women upholding the demands of genuine sisterhood that would propel them to fight against a force that seek to divide them (unplanned pregnancy), they fight between and among themselves.

What emerges from the novel is that VaMandinika, who is a poor rural woman, survives on being behind VaMhosva and she seems to be carrying the burden of her husband on her head and not on her shoulders. That can be interpreted to be the case, since when she learns that VaMhosva is marrying another woman, VaMandinika cannot drop the burden of a man. Instead she mounts brutal hatred against Revai. In that way, genuine sisterhood is compromised and mutuality between women is curtailed. Just like Mataranyika (1994: 83), VaMandinika holds the notion that "*Mhandu yemukadzi mukadzi*" (A woman's enemy is another woman). VaMhosva's infidelity in marriage, negatively impacts on the characteristics of Africana womanism. For instance, it militates against sisterly love that should abide between Revai and VaMandinika and Revai and VaMuchazvirega. What that indicates, is that the descriptors of Africana womanism and the positive characteristics of human relationships operate as a holistic entity since they feed into one another. That is the case since infidelity in marriage impacts negatively on genuine sisterhood. Again, what emerges from this novel is that, the environment under which women are to relate as sisters, can impact negatively on their relationships. Because very few women got gainfully employed after independence (Gaidzanwa 1992), they survived on men's provisions of basic resources to satisfy their needs and wants.

As *vamwene* (Mother-in-law) to both VaMandinika and to the newly married Revai, VaMuchazvirega, is expected to "mother" and "nurture" the two women. That is expected since, in Shona culture, "*vamwene ndimai*" (A mother-in-law is mother to a daughter-in-law). However, when she learns that VaMhosva has offered to marry Revai, VaMuchazvirega vows that she has nothing to do with her. Such a vow militates against genuine sisterhood and mothering and nurturing.

Revai's plight forces VaRegedzai to compromise her motherly roles. When she initially learns that Revai is pregnant, like a genuine mother, VaRegedzai works towards making sure that Revai rises above the problem and then progresses to success in life. That is when she organises that Revai aborts the foetus and then proceeds with her academic career. However, for some reasons her decision is misguided and has roots in dehumanisation and de-womanisation of African womanhood. In the first place, abortion of a foetus is the abortion of mothering and nurturing. Abortion is at times used as an escapist strategy from African womanhood. In the second place, Va

Regedzai's decision to employ VaChiramwiwa to carry out the abortion is misguided, because VaChiramwiwa, who is neither a traditional nor a modern medical expert, fails to safely induce abortion which nearly costs Revai's life. A mother, who is so wanton and careless in her behaviour to the point of nearly causing the death of her daughter, is a no mother. Therefore, VaRegedzai's actions are meant to destroy a woman, which is akin to destroying life itself (Hudson-Weems 2004: 66).

VaRegedzai's actions are not guided by genuine sisterhood. She wants Revai to abort and then progress with education so that when she is finally employed after schooling, she will fend for the family. While the Shona have the saying *Chirere mangwana chigokurerawo* (Bring it up for tomorrow it will take care of you), they do not mean to promote *pfumirapavana* (Children-are-a-form-of-wealth philosophy) Look after them today so that they reciprocate in future. Unfortunately, rural poverty is teaching her to neglect the demands of genuine motherhood. That is the case since she perceives her daughter to be a human resource that she can educate and abuse for the benefit of the family.

VaRegedzai's other decision, that Revai has to marry VaMhosva, is in line with tradition. Tradition demands that, when a man impregnates a sister-in-law (*muramu*), he has to marry her and seal the relationship through *lobola*. However, she seems to insist on traditional ways of resolving this sort of conflict without considering the demands of time and place (setting in life). She does not consider that, in the period of Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), that was imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank on Zimbabwe in the early 1990s, rural poverty could be easily exacerbated by polygamous unions. As such, in the period of ESAP in which the economy of Zimbabwe nearly reached bottom-rock levels, no woman in her five senses would readily welcome a situation where her husband had to marry another woman. Thus, when she coerces Revai to marry VaMhosva (in such a period of Zimbabwe's history), VaRegedzai promotes hatred between Revai and VaMhosva's beneficiaries such as his wife and children, and between Revai and VaMhosva's dependents, who include his mother VaMuchavirega

The other thing is, as mother to Revai, tradition does not allow VaRegedzai to decide, as she is doing, who Revai should marry and who not. Gombe (1998) indicates that it is the girl's aunt and not the mother who should guide her in matters to do with the choice of a marriage suitor. Therefore, VaRegedzai is working outside the demands of mothering as they are defined by Shona culture. In that way, her actions are not guided by what Williams (2014) has called African agency. Williams says, African agency is "... acting on cultural beliefs, rules and values to reconstitute culture."

What is noticeable in this novel is that there is what one can term negative complementary relations between VaRegedzai (a woman) and VaTichaona (a man). That is the case since the two work together to make sure Revai marries

VaMhosva so that they will benefit as a family from that marital union. Complementary relations between men and women, that defy the demands of mothering, fathering and nurturing, serve to demonise African womanhood. They promote egocentrism which is a characteristic of the de-womanisation of African womanhood.

Going by the demands of tradition that a man, who impregnates his *muramu*, has to marry her, VaMhosva promotes negative complementary relationship between a man (himself) and a woman (Revai). VaMhosva believes that it is when he marries her that they can complement each other in preparing for the future of the baby. His sense of responsibility is laudable, but his view that such responsibility solely comes with marriage cannot be lauded. That is the case since in a “poorfare state” (Chinweizu 1987) (such as that of Zimbabwe during the period of ESAP), polygamous unions almost always lead to increased poverty in a rural family set up. Thus, it is rural poverty that causes both VaMuchazvirega and VaMandinika to speak against VaMhosva and Revai’s marital union. VaMhosva and Revai’s marital union will not allow the latter to be respected and to be respectful of elders as what Africana womanism lobbies for. Instead, it leads her to be at loggerheads with elderly women such as VaMuchazvirega and VaMandinika. The other thing is, a marriage that proceeds from a raping encounter has a wrong foundation. Such a marriage usually does not last. In the novel, the marriage between Revai and VaMhosva does not last since VaMhosva impregnates Revai who is already deeply in love with Jemisi. Jemisi later on murders VaMhosva to reclaim Revai by force. At this point it is therefore conclusive that negative complementary relationships between men and women cannot empower a woman to enjoy the pleasures of African womanhood.

Jemisi and Revai believe that the way forward, after Revai has suffered the precarious consequences of rape and unplanned marriage, is for them to marry. Their marriage may not particularly serve to empower Revai who is a victim of an unplanned pregnancy. Given the two’s poor backgrounds in the period of ESAP, their marriage will not capacitate them to fend for themselves and for Tasara. Thus, when they finally cohabit after Jemisi has murdered VaMhosva, Jemisi uses the excuse that Tasara harbours avenging spirits (*ngozi*) against him and so he orders Revai to take him back to the rural areas against her will. However, not disputing the fact that avenging spirits are believed to be real forces to reckon with in Shona culture, one can still conclude that, given the meagre and starvation wages black Zimbabwean people received during ESAP, it may be that Jemisi is not financially stable to fend for Revai and her baby in the city of Harare where the cost of living is very high. In fact, Jemisi seems to be using the belief in an avenging spirit as a scapegoat strategy for eliminating a dependent (Tasara) in a period of economic instability. What is noteworthy, is that the marriage of Revai and Jemisi generates a negative complementary relationship between a man and a woman.

One aspect in the story: Jemisi seems to be suffering from serious psychological disturbances, of which the real source is not easy to determine. His insistence that he wants to marry a pregnant Revai is misguided and “atraditional”. Such a totally confusing situation is also portrayed by Mumvuma in her novel *Imbwa Nyoro* (1982). In *Imbwa nyoro*, Sergeant Makoni offers to marry Sekai who is heavily pregnant with Kunaka’s baby. Such a decision is not common in Shona culture. Among the Shona, one can marry a woman with a baby she has had with another man. That is summed up by a Shona maxim which says that: “*ukakweva sanzu wochitokweva namashizha aro*” (if one marries a woman with offspring one adopts her child as well. When one pulls a branch he should pull it with all its leaves), However, it is rare that a man in his five senses will opt to marry a pregnant woman since that decision will lead him to shoulder the burdens associated with pregnancy and delivery before he even takes care of the child. What Jemisi and Sergeant Makoni do is indicative of schizophrenia.

Another worrisome thing is that, when Revai finally marries VaMhosva, Jemisi develops into a rapist and a murderer. At one time he enters Va Mhosva’s place of residence (at Jakata) and rapes the heavily pregnant Revai claiming that Revai still belongs to him and not to VaMhosva. At another time he stabs VaMhosva to death with a knife as means of snatching Revai from him. His moves cannot be interpreted to be acts of love. Rather, they are symptoms of neurosis. On the whole, marrying a neurotic will not serve to empower a girl child who would have suffered the consequences of rape and unplanned pregnancy. Thus, when they finally cohabit, their cohabitation ends in serious domestic violence. The other thing is, Revai and Jemisi’s marital union has a wrong foundation. It pivots on rape and murder. A union with such a foundation cannot promote genuine complementary relations between Revai and Jemisi. When they marry, one cannot say Revai is humanised and womanised through marriage for she cannot be male compatible and cannot be in concert with a seriously traumatised guy who, upon seeing Tasara, starts to experience serious mind boggling which results from the brutal murder he has committed on VaMhosva. The Shona say, “*Mushonga wengozi kuripa*” (The solution to an avenging spirit is paying restitution). Therefore, before Jemisi pays a fine and becomes cleansed of the traumatic effects of an avenging spirit, he cannot aid Revai to become empowered, humanised and womanised in a neo-colonial set up. His presence in her life causes her to fight with a man and to hate man as is symptomatic of radical feminists.

VaTadzei insists that the way to empower and re-womanise Revai, after she falls a victim of rape and unplanned marriage, is to allow her to choose what she considers best in her life. Her lobbying for Revai to exercise freedom of choice, has roots in the positive characteristics of human relations such as respect for human choice and dignity. Therefore, the position VaTadzei advocates and lobbies for, somehow marks genuine sisterhood between Revai

and her aunt. However, in a hard hit economy that is guided by the demands of ESAP, VaTadzei's decision to leave everything to Revai is disempowering and dehumanising. Gray (2001) reminds us that the core of Afrocentric literature is humanising and harmonising Africans. Thus, in a neo-colonial and ailing economic environment, leaving everything to Revai (a teenager) to choose how to progress to success is akin to neglecting her to suffer alone the perils of rape and unplanned pregnancy. Therefore, VaTadzei hides behind a liberal humanistic cosmetic concept of freedom of choice when there is no clear choice that Revai can make in her inimical situation. Genuine sisterhood is not promoted by giving someone freedom of choice where choice cannot be easily made.

The idea that Revai has to either report the case to the law-enforcement agents so that VaMhosva can be brought to book or that she has to take steps that will allow her to receive maintenance charges from VaMhosva, has some weaknesses. If VaMhosva is imprisoned, no one will take care of the poor Revai and her baby boy. As such, she will be condemned to utter poverty. Secondly, the moment Revai causes the arrest and imprisonment of VaMhosva, will become the very moment she will promote catastrophic hatred between her and VaMhosva's beneficiaries and dependents. Therefore, that move will promote hate relationships between women. Such relationships lead to the continued dehumanisation, de-womanisation and disempowerment of Revai.

VaMhosva can, of course, pay maintenance charges for both Tasara and Revai. However, the quest for maintenance will inadvertently expose the raping encounter at the courts. Once the encounter is revealed, VaMhosva will definitely be arrested. Again, if Revai successfully claims maintenance reparations, she will start to benefit from VaMhosva's economic yields. That situation will disappoint his beneficiaries and dependents and will promote hatred between her and them.

Appreciation of Mabasa's Treatment of the Aftermath of An Unplanned Pregnancy

In *Ndafa here?* Betty's endeavour to empower herself to progress to success through imposing herself on Watson has its weaknesses. What is noteworthy is that, "complementarity" between men and women is not achieved if one part is not willing to co-operate. In fact, Africana womanism cannot be realised if a woman is "male compatible" on one hand and on the other hand the man is arrogant. A woman cannot be in concert with a man (such as Watson) who is too critical and callous to complement her efforts to start a family.

Upon joining the Matanga family, to her chagrin, Betty discovers that members of this family perpetually hunger and thirst for love, mutual respect,

trust, humility, sharing and caring, support of one another's efforts, and friendship and that they live in an environment of hate, contempt, rivalry, distrust, deceitfulness, disrespect, arrogance, selfishness and neglect. The members hunger and thirst for the satisfaction of what Maslow has termed physiological and psychological needs that serve to energise the behaviour of an individual to be motivated to become functional and successful in life (Zindi 1997: 68).

When she joins such a family, a girl child, who is a victim of an unplanned pregnancy cannot successfully uphold and enjoy the eighteen descriptors of Africana womanism. Rather, she will always suffer the diabolical consequences of trying to bring up a family in an environment that does not permit a family to grow. For instance, Mai Matanga hates Betty and wants her to go back to her natal family. She always says "*handimude*" (I do not want her presence in my family). Kiri atrociously abuses Betty as the family house girl. VaMatanga indecently assaults Betty when he fondles her buttocks and breasts against her will and when he proposes love to her against the demands of Shona tradition that considers it taboo for a father-in-law to fall in love with his daughter-in-law. Pasi also seeks an opportunity to indulge in sexual intercourse with Betty and Watson (that is before he leaves for London) always beats Betty for no apparent reasons. The writer seems to correctly suggest that African womanhood cannot be enjoyed in an atmosphere of hate and rivalry. The hate and rivalry in the Matanga family is also the hate and rivalry that existed in Zimbabwe in the late 1990s which is the setting in life of the novel. At that time, Zimbabweans witnessed the ex-combatants fighting for war compensation which affected the country's economic progression. It is at that time, when opposition political parties, that had a regime change agenda, were founded. It is at that same time when the Zimbabwean dollar crushed against the US dollar which marked the beginning of the Decade of Crisis in Zimbabwe. Such economic instability in the larger society permeates the Matanga family and transforms it into a house of hunger. It is such a family of hunger that has to welcome Betty as an additional member of the family in spite of the fact that the family is already struggling to sustain the survival of its existing members. Therefore, all that it means is, at a moment when a society is experiencing the economic and political turmoil and stress, forced marriage cannot serve to empower a woman who becomes a victim of an unplanned pregnancy.

Betty's view that going back to the university and accomplish her studies is the avenue to her womanisation, humanisation and empowerment is problematic. In a "poorfare" state, education rarely serves as a gateway to success for individuals. The novelist indicates that sort of reality when he portrays Watson, who manages to complete his degree at the University of Zimbabwe, failing to secure employment in Zimbabwe. At the end of it all, he leaves Zimbabwe for London. However, although the general view is that, in a "poorfare" state, education can rarely serve as the gateway to success in life,

still, it is important to realise that, during the late 1990s in Zimbabwe, which is the setting of the novel, professions such as teaching and nursing were not yet flooded as is the case at the moment. That means, if Betty manages to study and graduate with a science degree, she can potentially become a teacher. The teaching profession was somehow going to enhance her chances of surviving fairly well in the Matanga's house of hunger. However, since no member of the Matanga family is ready to take care of Sunungurai to allow her to go back to the university, Betty cannot pursue that avenue in order to succeed in life. Therefore, using that barricade to Betty's academic road, the writer indicates that the success of a woman cannot be achieved outside genuine sisterhood. That is the case since both the fulcrum and pivot of genuine sisterhood are the positive traits of human relationships. They include what Freire (1972) has termed characteristics of good dialogue which are, love, humility, trust, hope, faith and critical thought.

Once in the Matanga family, Betty remains strong amid militating factors. As such, she remains respectful of elders such as Mai Matanga and VaMatanga in an atmosphere of rivalry, distrust and hate. However, Betty's braving of the storm and stress in this family indicates that she is carrying the burden of a husband (Watson) on her head instead of her shoulders so as to be able to drop it when it becomes too burdensome. The issue is that, if the man is arrogant, callous, mean-spirited, hyper-critical and selfish, instead of living a jeremiad-type of life, a woman should drop the man in question and start a new life without suffering his burden any more. What it means is that a woman has to remain family-centred in an environment and atmosphere that allow a family to flourish. This sort of reasoning implies that writers need to empower women to generate the right type of agency that will bring positive change in their life. By agency "... we simply mean the act of trying to achieve a particular goal" (Flint 2006: 24-25). When she finds herself in an atmosphere of bitter rivalry, the agency of the woman is to work towards freeing herself from it.

Writers, who fail to empower women to successfully struggle for freedom from a de-womanising environment, end up producing literature of despair and hopelessness. In order to avoid such literature, writers should empower their female characters to join hands with other victims of their time, (who will be both men and women), and then fight to revolutionise the environment in order to generate a politico-economic and socio-cultural environment that nurtures the positive traits of human interaction. It is such traits that promote the descriptors of Africana womanism. The descriptors will in turn empower women who among them will be victims of unplanned pregnancies.

When Betty finally believes in the "*simuka ufambe*" (rise and walk) philosophy, she moves out of the Matanga family. In the novel, Betty's two female friends, Matipfumisa and Martha, are inspirational to Betty's moving out of the house of hunger. When they visit Betty as genuine sisters in a time of need, Betty vows that, on their departure, they will not leave her behind. In

this scene it is Betty who champions her own cause. The two friends cannot resist her since genuine sisterhood has roots in love, trust, humility, caring and sharing.

As they are moving away from the Matanga family in Mati's car, one asks these questions: Is Betty empowered to progress to success in life? Is Betty empowered to embrace African womanhood or she is now a radical feminist who is denouncing a family setup? The answers to the two questions come from the realisation that a family built on the negative traits of human relationships is a "no family". Therefore, Betty is not running away from a family but is running away from a "no family". In Africana womanist discourse, a genuine family has roots in the descriptors of African womanhood that emphasise complementary relationships between men and women (a dual-sex system).

The other thing is, when Betty visits a prophet who belongs to the Apostolic sect, she meets a woman who is suffering brutal treatment at the hands of a wicked and bestial husband. The husband creates hell on earth for her simply because she had given birth to a child with a physical disability. However, this woman does not carry the burden of such a husband on her mind. Instead she carries it on her shoulders. Therefore, she drops the man when she realises that the burden was becoming too burdensome. When she later meets Betty, sometime after their initial encounter at the prophet's church setting, the anonymous woman is now happily married. She is married to a man that tolerates her child. This incident shows that by moving out of the Matanga family, Betty has not given up the roles of mothering and nurturing. As an African woman she cannot be excused from such roles. One hopes Betty will marry another man who has a sense of family, of "husband-hood" and fatherhood. One may also hope that now that she has left the Matanga family, Betty is going to find someone who will look after her baby when she goes back to the university to proceed with her studies and graduate. In that way, Betty will be working towards becoming a new woman. Like a true African, when she leaves the Matanga's house of hunger, Betty seems to have assured herself that she should not marry a man in order to be behind him but should now marry a man on the understanding that "The strength of a man is in his woman" and not vice versa. She has also learnt that, as a woman, she should stop believing in the saying "What a man can do, a woman can do it better" but should be believing in the saying, "What a woman can do, a man cannot do". Thus, what Watson has failed to do (to bring up a family through taking care of Betty and Sunungurai), Betty will. The moment she tells Matipfumisa and Martha that she is not going to stay behind in the Matanga homestead when they depart, becomes the very moment Betty learns that, as an agent in African people's culture and history, she should not wait "to be seen but not heard". From that moment on, she seems to have learnt that, "If the Ada (daughter) says, a day old chick is a hen so it should be". Her ambition to live and lead a new life guided by principles of Africana womanism has taught her

to name and re-define herself as someone who does not have to be behind a successful man or a man who has inadvertently impregnated her and his family in order to progress to success in life.

At this point, it should be noted that, the hunger for the descriptors of Africana womanism and for the positive traits of men-and-women and women-and-women relationships in the Matanga family is symptomatic of the hunger in the broader neo-colonial Zimbabwean society of the 1990s which is the setting of the novel. If that is the case, then it is noteworthy that, taking Betty out of the Matanga family and immersing her in the wider society is not enough to empower her. The Matanga family is not living in a geopolitical vacuum. Therefore, in order for Betty to be empowered to become fully functional in Zimbabwe and then progress to success in life after she has become a victim of an unplanned pregnancy and of an unplanned marriage, the politico-economic and socio-cultural environments have to improve first. It is a futile activity for the novelist to try and “change the consciousness of the oppressed (Betty) without changing the material conditions of [the neo-colonial] environment [in Zimbabwe of the late 1990s] (Moyana 1988: 8).

Conclusion

What emerges from this discussion is that Mukonoweshuro (1991) and Mabasa (2008) deal with the theme of unplanned pregnancies. However, in their treatment of the theme, the strategies, which the two novelists advocate and lobby for empowering the victims of unplanned pregnancies, are not informed by both the tenets of Africana womanism theory and the demands of the prevailing socio-political and economic situation. Therefore, those strategies fail to empower the victims of unplanned pregnancies. Ultimately, the two novelists “de-womanise” and dehumanise victims of the unplanned pregnancy. Mukonoweshuro fails to rescue Revai from the abusive Jemisi since she keeps her in a family of trauma and abuse of human rights and dignity. The novel ends when Revai has to re-join Jemisi’s family. Mabasa tries to use the Matanga family as an institution of learning to the women who suffer the consequences of an unplanned pregnancy. It seems, he pushes Betty into the Matanga family from which she later graduates after she learns that, in a “poorfare” state, the descriptors of Africana womanism and their accompanying characteristics of good men-and-women and women-and-women relationships are not easily achievable. Therefore, it is not enough for Mabasa to simply take Betty out of the Matanga family into the larger economically challenged society. Her situation will not improve much. That being the case, this study recommends that novelists need not “de-womanise”, dehumanise and disempower their female characters who become victims of unplanned pregnancies. Rather, they need to struggle to empower them to progress to

success in life. In that way, they will teach their society that the life of a girl child does not become worse than futile the moment she becomes a victim of an unplanned pregnancy. The article further recommends that, in order to empower victims of unplanned pregnancies using Africana womanism as plan for action for that purpose, novelists need to empower characters to work towards a new economy based on a well calculated indigenisation agenda [] in order for them to rely more on home-grown and home-made products and philosophies of life than on imported ones.

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