

Women writers' use of metaphor as gender rhetoric in discourse on HIV/AIDS and sex-related issues: The case of *Totanga Patsva (We start afresh)* by Zimbabwe Women Writers

Zifikile Gambahaya, Jairos Kangira and Pedzisayi Mashiri

1. Introduction¹

This chapter, in the broad sense, deals with the relationship between language use and culture. Specifically, the chapter examines the type of language or linguistic expressions that a group of Zimbabwe women writers use in relation to HIV/AIDS and sex-related issues in their Shona short stories in the anthology *Totanga Patsva (We start afresh)*.² The women writers in this anthology do not refer to HIV/AIDS and sex-related issues directly, but do so using metaphors to a large extent and similes, euphemisms and proverbs, to a less extent, hence this study's focus on metaphors. It is apparent from the language the women writers use in the short stories that Shona culture promotes indirectness.³

Culture is everything that "one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members".⁴ We argue that cultural norms and conventions render some words taboo, thereby making it imperative for the women writers to use metaphors in their stories. The word 'taboo' is derived from the Tongan word *tabu* which means something that is forbidden or to be avoided,⁵ hence we talk of linguistic avoidance. According to Mashiri, Mawomo and Tom, "[t]he Shona people consider matters relating to sex, death, illness or other misfortune as taboo or unspeakable".⁶ In other words, Shona, like all languages,⁷ has tabooed words and the communicators have to find words from their linguistic repertoire to replace the tabooed words. Before analysing specific instances of use of

¹ A previous version of this paper appeared in *Nava Journal of Language and Communication*, 1, 1 (2007).

² Zimbabwe Women Writers, *Totanga Patsva* (Harare: Zimbabwe Women Writers, 2006).

³ P. Mashiri, K. Mawomo and P. Tom, "Naming the Pandemic and Ethical Foundations of Vocabulary", *Zambezia* 27, 1 (2002): 221-233.

⁴W. H. Goodenough, "Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics", in *Language and Cultural Description*, C. O. Fraake ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980): 167-173.

⁵ F. O. Aysis, *An Introduction to the Study of African Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1972): 91.

⁶ Mashiri, Mawomo and Tom, *Zambezia*, 221.

⁷ Hans Hendrich Hock, *Principles of Historical Linguistics* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1991).

metaphor to express experiences with HIV/AIDS in selected short stories in *Totanga Patsva*, it is necessary to provide brief descriptions of key terms such as metaphor, rhetoric and rhetorical situation.

1.1 Metaphor

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary a metaphor is defined as "the use of a word or phrase to indicate something different (though related in some way) to the literal meaning. Metaphors are used as the substitution of direct words which would have been regarded as disrespectful, offensive or taboo by a cultural group".⁸ In other words, metaphors are the vehicles of indirectness, they are used to talk about things in a roundabout manner;⁹ and thus "the reader has to consciously do something to discover its meaning",¹⁰ since it is a "covert comparison".¹¹ According to Eckert and MacConnell-Ginet "a linguistic metaphor uses language from one field — (for example the sport of baseball — to talk about another different field — for example (hetero) sexual relations".¹² As already stated above, in Shona society, as is the case with other African societies in general, sex is a tabooed subject. Hence, speakers tend to use existing metaphors or create new ones where they are not readily available.

What is important to note is that the use of metaphors by members of a particular society presumes shared social knowledge of the language functions and norms¹³ among members of that community. This means that the speakers of a language must acquire communicative competence¹⁴ or "culturally appropriate communicative competence"¹⁵ which enables them to perform all linguistic functions meaningfully. Since culture censors them through linguistic avoidance, people use metaphors, among other reasons, to avoid the loss of 'face'.¹⁶ Hence, from a speech act point of view, expressing one's experiences with HIV/AIDS or sex directly, both in spoken and written discourse is considered a face-threatening act.¹⁷ That the use of metaphors in

⁸ A. S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994): 780.

⁹ R. Wardhaugh, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (New York: Blackwell, 1986).

¹⁰ J. C. Pongweni, *Figurative language in Shona discourse: A study of the Analogical Imagination* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1989).

¹¹ G. N. Leech, *Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (London: Longman, 1969): 30.

¹² P. Eckert and S. MacConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 213.

¹³ D. H. Hymes, "On Communicative Competence" in *Sociolinguistics: Selected readings*, ed. J. B. Pride and J. Holmes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

¹⁴ Hymes, *Sociolinguistics*.

¹⁵ F. Moto, "Towards a Study of the Lexicon of Sex and HIV/AIDS", *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 13, 3 (2004): 342-362.

¹⁶ K. Allan and K. Burridge, *Euphemism and Dysphemism: Language used in Shield and Weapon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁷ P. Brown and S. C. Levison, *Politeness: Universals in Language Usage* (Cambridge:

sex-related discourse is not unique to Shona society is clear from Eckert and MacConnell-Ginet, who commend that "sex and gender are widely available as metaphorical vehicles or source domains, not only for speakers of English but also for speakers of many other languages".¹⁸

1.2 Rhetoric

Although the term 'rhetoric' is usually associated with politicians, it is found in every sphere of life. For this reason, this study refers to the ways of speaking about HIV/AIDS and sex by women writers in *Totanga Patsva* as gender rhetoric. Rhetoric is defined for the purpose of this study, as the art of persuasive communication in a given situation. In other words, rhetoric refers to the use of language in communicating a theme or an idea in an effort to convince an audience. The major purpose of rhetoric is to convince people to act or think in the same way the communicator wants them to do. Each of the stories under study is rhetorical in its own way as it demonstrates generally, that promiscuity is the major source of HIV/AIDS and consequently of individual or group anguish and agony.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to delve into the details pertaining to the three types of rhetoric namely deliberative, epideictic and forensic rhetoric. We use the term rhetoric in its more generic sense in this chapter. However, it is necessary to give a brief background of the origin of rhetoric. Literature traces the origin of rhetoric as an art to the first century BC in ancient Greece. Rhetoric was then popularised by the Sophists or rhetoric teachers like Protagoras and Georgias in the fifth century BC. Ancient philosophers like Isocrates, Plato and Aristotle followed this period of the Sophists. These challenged the teachings of their predecessors and developed their own approaches to rhetoric. Whereas for Plato sophists do not care for the truth of an argument but only how they might appear to win it, according to Aristotle rhetoric is the "art of finding in any given case the available means of persuasion".¹⁹ Aristotle described rhetoric as comprising three sources of persuasion, namely, *ethos* (the character of the speaker), *logos* (argumentation) and *pathos* (the emotions of the audience). In the analysed stories, each writer presents a *logos* through weaving her story and in that story the writer attempts to persuade the readers by appealing to both the *ethos* and *pathos* of the reader. This is done also by using the characters of the personae and their emotions in the stories.

The voices of the women writers in the stories in *Totanga Patsva* are not sentimental. The metaphors the women writers used depict the dangers of HIV/AIDS, the squashed hopes and the pain brought mainly by infidelity. In short, the women use metaphors to warn people and to transmit vital

Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹⁸ Eckert and MacConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender*, 215.

¹⁹ E. Garver, *Rhetoric. Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. Vol. 8* (London: Routledge, 1998): 307.

information about the AIDS pandemic. These metaphors seem to have a rhetorical impact on the reader as they appeal to the reader's *pathos* in various ways.

1.3 Rhetorical Situation

Since rhetoric is used in a particular situation, it is important to understand the rhetorical situation in which the women writers generated their short stories. According to Bitzer in Medhurst, a rhetorical situation is "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigency which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigency".²⁰

In this case, the rhetorical situation in which the women writers found themselves comprises mainly the prevalence of the AIDS pandemic, infidelity and a culture that discourages the use of direct Shona words when talking about sex, a culture that results in self-censorship in talking about both AIDS and sex. In a largely patriarchal society the women writers' use of metaphors may also be explained by the fact that they may not want to be labelled as wayward. They do not want to lose their dignity and respect by using direct words on sex-related issues and therefore end up using metaphoric language which society considers as being more 'dignified' language than directness.

The stories in *Totanga Patsva* were written by women from different socio-economic backgrounds, from the simple rural woman to the modern urban woman. The importance of the rhetorical situation or context in the meaning interpretation of metaphors confirm what Richards observes when he says that "...any part of discourse, in the last resort, does what it does only because the other of surrounding, uttered or unuttered discourse, are what they are".²¹ This means that both the urban and rural women share and are influenced by the same cultural milieu.

2. Selected Metaphors in *Totanga Patsva*

In this section we identify some of the common Shona words that the women writers used in the stories to connote sex and HIV/AIDS. The literal meanings of these words are also given to demonstrate how the metaphor is related to the words, as already has been established.

2.1 Verbs used to connote sex

²⁰ M. J. Medhurst, *Beyond the Rhetorical Presidency* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996): 20.

²¹ I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936): 10.

| Word | Meaning |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <i>kujuruja</i> | to harvest (termites) |
| <i>kudziura</i> | to open |
| <i>kudya</i> | to eat |
| <i>kupakwa</i> | to be forced to eat |
| <i>kupona</i> | to survive |
| <i>kuseva</i> | to dip morsel in relish/soup |
| <i>kunonga joy</i> | to enjoy |
| <i>kuwanza</i> | to have many (sexual partners) |
| <i>kupinda nedzakawanda</i> | to do many (dirty) things |
| <i>kufara</i> | to be happy |
| <i>kufarana</i> | to be happy with each other (reciprocal) |
| <i>kuti hande</i> | to say let's go (and have sex) |

2.2 Nouns used to name HIV/AIDS

| Noun | Meaning |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>majuru</i> | termites |
| <i>mbonje</i> | scar |
| <i>masvosve</i> | ants |
| <i>nyuchi dzegonera</i> | wild bees |
| <i>zviriko izvi/zvemazuva ano izvozvi</i> | contemporary issues |
| <i>tsvina</i> | faeces/dirt |
| <i>rutsva</i> | veld fire |
| <i>ngwena</i> | crocodile |

2.3 Verbs used to name HIV/AIDS

| Verb | Meaning |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>kuroyiwa</i> | to have been bewitched |
| <i>kurohwa nematsotsi</i> | to have been attacked by thieves |
| <i>kurwara nguva ndefu</i> | to have been ill for a long time |
| <i>kurwara nguva pfupi</i> | to have been ill for a short time |
| <i>kubayiwa nepfumo</i> | to have been stabbed by a spear |
| <i>kuruma</i> | to bite |

Similarly, Eckert and MacConnell-Ginet discuss English metaphors that depict sexual related actions and feelings, some of which we list below:

"...scored; ...screw; ...bang; ...steamy; ...sex; ...burning up; ...hunger; ...appetites; ...devour; ...taste; ...eat; ...good as honey; ...flavour; ...she burns; ...she roasts; ...look at that oven; ...She is cold".²²

²² Eckert and MacConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender*, 220-224.

3 Functional analysis of the metaphors

This section presents analyses of the metaphors that women writers use in their stories. We shall begin by giving a detailed analysis of the metaphors in Shirley Gumbodete's story "Ndofireyi senge ndini ndakajuruja" (Why should I die as if I am the one who brought the Aids virus?) as we consider this to be a model of how metaphors are used in talking about sex and AIDS in this anthology. This story is unique in that metaphorical language is used appropriately from the beginning to the end. This is probably why the editor of the anthology made it the first story of the anthology. After this we attempt to group similar metaphors and related terms.

3.1 Model

In the story "Ndofireyi senge Ndini Ndakajuruja" the author uses the metaphors *kujuruja* "to harvest" (termites), *tidye* "let's eat" and *kupakwa* "to be forced to eat", all the three connoting the act of having (unprotected) sex. Termites are harvested by pushing a thin reed in and out of a termite hole. The termites swarm the reed resulting in a catch. In this story, the reed (not mentioned but understood from the verb — *juruja*) which symbolises a penis that is inserted and moved in and out of *kujuruja* (sexual intercourse) of the termites hole (the vagina) and gets infected by *majuru* (HIV virus). That the horrific experience resulting from contracting the HIV virus can be compared with the pain inflicted by termite bites is clear in Chimhundu's definition of a termite in his monolingual Shona dictionary *Duramazwi guru reChiShona*: "Juru kachinanairwa kakada kuita sesvosve, kane musoro mutsvuku nenyanga dzakatesva dzinoruma..."²³ (A termite is a crawling insect similar to an ant. It has a red head with sharp teeth that it uses for biting...).

The writer talks of Kurauone (the husband of the wife in the story) having arrived at an anthill to harvest *majuru* (*wasvika pachuru kunojuruja majuru*) meaning that Kurauone has visited his mistress (*nhonho*) in order to have sex with her. The description of how Kurauone contracts the HIV virus is vividly put across metaphorically as follows:

nhonho yake aiwana iripo ndiye dziure nhonho iya otanga kujuruja majuru ake

(Lit. "He finds his hole and he opens the hole and begins to harvest his termites").

"He begins to have sex with his mistress".

gaba rake tubu razara

(Lit. "He fills his tin with termites").

"He is now infected with the HIV virus".

The way Kurauone demands to have sex with his wife back home

²³ H. Chimhundu, ed., *Duramazwi Guru ReChiShona* (Harare: College Press, 2001): 415.

shows the vulnerability of women. He says to his wife, "*Iwe Mazviitireni, huya tidye majuru*" (Lit. "Mazviitireni, let's eat the termites" meaning "Let's have sex"). Knowing the promiscuous behaviour of her husband Mazviitireni refuses to have sex with him arguing that it is not safe for her to do so:

"Handidye majuru ako ini? ...Ndofireyi senge ndini ndakaenda kunojuruja?"

(Lit. "I don't want to eat your termites. Why should I die as if I am the one who went to harvest them?")

"I don't want to have sex with you. Why should I die as if I am the one who brought the AIDS virus?"

The author gives us a picture where the husband insists on having sex with his wife despite the wife's strong refusal as shown below:

Husband: "*Ndati uya tidye majuru*"

(Lit. "I said let's eat the termites").

"We will have sex no matter what comes".

Wife: "*Maiwe, maiwe ndofireyi senge ndini ndakajuruja*"

(Lit. "Why should I die as if I am the one who went to collect the termites?")

"Why should I die as if I am the one who brought the AIDS virus?"

The wife is finally raped (*Mukadzi opakwa majuru* literally meaning "the husband forces the wife to eat the termites"). The author illustrates the gravity of the matter by saying that the woman is raped everyday:

Zuva nezuva majuru ongodyiswa.

(Lit. "Every day the wife is forced to eat the termites").

"The wife is raped/(forced to have sex) every day".

When the Kurauone falls ill and his wife suggests that he goes for AIDS testing he refuses, saying all that is women's talk gotten from their social clubs. The writer uses a Shona proverb *rega zvipore akaonekwa nembonje pahuma* ("Experience is the best teacher"), to indicate that Kurauone refuses to go for AIDS testing because he knows that he is likely to test positive. The author dramatises Kurauone's deteriorating health when she says:

Majuru akati, "Unopenga, isu tinongoruma chete".

(Lit. "The termites continued biting Kurauone").

Kurauone's health continued to deteriorate.

When Kurauone dies, his grandfather Mandizadza mourns saying:

Ndakakutaurira Kurauone kuti gumbo mumba gumbo panze zvinouraya:

(Lit. "I told you Kurauone that having one leg in the house and the other outside is dangerous").

"Kurauone, I told you that promiscuity kills".

Promiscuity is implied in the proverb *gumbo mumba gumbo panze* which literally means "one leg in the house and the other leg outside". It is important also to note the meaning of the name of Kurauone's grandfather, *Mandizadza* which literally means "you have spread (AIDS) to me". It is the wife's voice heard in the name, complaining that she has contracted AIDS because of her husband's promiscuity. Even the name *Mazviitireni* (you have done this to fix me) speaks volumes. The author deliberately uses this name to depict a woman who is saying "you (my husband) have deliberately infected me with the deadly disease".

At the end of the story the wife also dies complaining *Ndofireyi senge ndini ndakajuruja?* "Why I should I die as if I am the one who brought the AIDS virus?" The author uses this rhetorical question to illustrate that the wife in this story is innocent; she is a victim of circumstances.

Two related issues derive from the discourse in this story. First, the writer portrays the painful reality that married women often become victims of AIDS from their promiscuous husbands as well as victims of marital rape. In the absence of legal instruments that protect women against marital rape innocent women continue being casualties of a socio-cultural system that socialises women to be loyal, faithful and obedient to their husbands. Second, it is clear from the story that the asymmetrical power relations between husband and wife makes it difficult for the later to convince the former to go for an AIDS test. The woman is therefore depicted as helpless. Hence, the image of a helpless woman ravaged by AIDS "has potential to reinforce the erroneous belief that women are passive actors in the national efforts to fight AIDS".²⁴

3.2 Quenching sexual hunger

In the story, "Mukore Uno here?" (Not in this time) Chateuka satirises Shona men who still want to practice the *kugara nhaka* custom (wife inheritance after the death of a brother) in spite of the risks posed by AIDS. In most Shona communities a man (married or not married) can inherit the wife of his deceased older brother. However, it is not uncommon for a woman to experience sexual advances or harassment from any of her husband's brothers during her husband's illness, especially where the illness is prolonged and terminal. Such advances are often instigated under the pretext of protecting the brother's marriage by fulfilling his conjugal obligations on his behalf or discouraging the sexually deprived wife from sleeping with an outsider. The concept of *kugara nhaka* is based on the same reasons, often expressed in various ways. Gundani says "This form of marriage was also meant to maintain family stability in terms of the movement of the estate, as well as the purity of the clan. Shona marriage was meant to ensure that the

²⁴ M.T. Vambe and A. Mawadza "Images of Black Women in Popular Songs and Some Poems on AIDS in Post-Independent Zimbabwe" in *Orality and Cultural identities in Zimbabwe*, ed. M.T. Vambe (Gweru: Mambo Press, 2001): 57-72.

bereaved wife would remain loyal to the family into which she had been married".²⁵

HIV/AIDS has forced most Zimbabwean families to abandon the *nhaka* custom and many gender or women activist organisations actively sensitise society in general and women in particular, of risks posed by the custom. Chateuka portrays a man who despite the knowledge that his older brother is dying from AIDS makes sexual advances towards his wife in the name of *kumuponesa* (satisfying her sexual needs on behalf of his ailing brother). Hence the statement:

mukoma arwara kwenguva refu saka muri kupona nei?

(Lit. "My brother has been ill for a long time, so how do you survive?")

My brother has been ill for a long time so how do you satisfy your physiological needs?²⁶

In Shona idiomatic speech and slang, sexual intercourse is portrayed as consumption. The man is often depicted as the doer, '*anodya*' (one who eats) and the woman is the one who is 'done' (*anodyiwa*). Chimhundu says "the language is so structured that activities relating to courtship, marriage and sex are described in the expressions in which the men are the subjects who 'Do' and the women are the objects who are 'Done'".²⁷ The man's subject role is reflected in the manner in which he is able to satisfy (*kuponesa*) his wife sexually.

Because of the embarrassing nature of a sexual advance, especially towards a sick brother's wife, the metaphor *kupona* serves to save both the speaker and the listener's face. The metaphor serves two functions. One, it denigrates the patriarchal attitude of using cultural practices to control and manipulate the sexual behaviour of women. Two, it caricatures men who perpetuate practices that promote the spread of HIV, since the one who is making sexual advances could be married already. Hence, the 'inheritor' exposes not only himself, but his own wife and any unborn children as his ailing brother's wife would most likely be infected also.

Elizabeth Zembeni uses the expression *kurarama* (to survive) implying sexual satisfaction, in the story "Murume zvaafa", *ndorarama sei?* (Since my husband has died, how do I satisfy my physiological needs?) The female character asks a rhetorical question:

Zvino murume zvaafa, ndorarama sei, nhai Mwari?

(Lit. "Since my husband has died, how do I survive, God?")

Who will satisfy my sexual needs since my husband is dead, God?

²⁵ P. Gundani, "Continuity and change in the Zimbabwean religio-cultural landscape in the era of HIV/AIDS" in *Zimbabwe: The past is the future: Rethinking land, state and nation in the context of crisis*, ed. D. Harold-Barry (Harare: Weaver Press, 2004): 86-105.

²⁶ Zimbabwe Women Writers, *Totanga Patsva*, 17.

²⁷ Chimhundu, *Duramazwi Guru ReCbiShona*, 5.

The author addresses the emotional challenges women face after losing their husbands to AIDS or AIDS related diseases. The challenge often involves the need to satisfy sexual needs and to avoid getting infected or infecting someone else, especially in the context of a generally negative attitude towards use of condoms among Zimbabwean men. The use of *kurarama* or *kupona*, both referring to satisfying sexual needs, is appropriate in the contexts since the characters in the stories cannot directly put across their concerns as Shona culture does not expect women to overtly express their sexual feelings.

3.3 Happiness and sex discourse

The universality of the concept of happiness is striking in women sex discourse in this short story anthology. Georgina Samhu in "Tete Teresa" (Aunt Teresa) alludes to *kufara* "to be happy" when she uses the term *kudya nyika rutivi* literally meaning "to enjoy earthly pleasures". The female character in the story uses this metaphor to mean that she was very happy and had many sexual partners before she contracted the AIDS virus. Similarly, Resi Mafongoya in "Angave Ani?" (Who can it be?) uses the word *kufara* to describe having sex. She seems to be gender sensitive as she makes her character use the term in a manner that portrays the reciprocity in the act of having sex. This is demonstrated in the following:

tofarana zvedu tiri vaviri
(Lit. "The two of us enjoying each other".)
"Then we would have sex".

Carona Chikwereveshe in "Zvakatanga nekupindwa nechando" (The illness started with me feeling very cold) also uses the same metaphor when the female character in the story reminisces about her sexual relations. The character recollects:

Kufara ndakambofara hangu veduwe
(Lit. "I was very happy").
I had many sexual partners/I was promiscuous.

The use of colloquial language is in some cases effective depending on the communicative context. In the story "Pfira mate pasi" (Stop being promiscuous), Beauty Savala uses some colloquial metaphors to describe having many sexual partners and enjoying herself. A typical example is when the female persona talks of *kunonga joy sechakata* (lit. "to enjoy like picking *chakata* (juicy wild fruit), meaning "enjoying oneself with many sexual partners". We are given a picture of one who becomes happy upon finding the juicy *chakata* fruits in the forest (of sexual partners) and who begins to enjoy eating them.

The terms *kufara* and *kunonga joy* have positive lexical meaning but negative connotative meaning. While the lexical meaning refers to the conceptual reference of an item, the connotative meaning is "the semantic

content a linguistic expression may have of all those connotations which an individual language user may attach to it".²⁸ When *kufara* or *joy*, are used in the context of promiscuity to refer to moral perversion and uncontrolled self-destructive happiness, they index the speaker's desire to mitigate the pain caused by the consequences of the destructive behaviour. The use of such slang expressions as *kunonga joy* reflects the general tendency of Zimbabweans, especially in the early eighties, to laugh off HIV when the discovery of the new virus was announced. During that time, says Gundani, "rumours of the disease neither disturbed the regular revellers who patronised the trendy night clubs of Zimbabwe's towns, the popular beerhalls and shebeens that infest the 'locations' in the urban centres and growth points in rural areas".²⁹

3.4 'Eating' sexually

In section 3.1.1 we showed how Gumbodete effectively uses the metaphor *dya* "eat" to describe the act of having sex. In this section we return to the same metaphor and its related senses, citing how they have been used by other writers in the anthology. Moto observes that, "the physiological and psychological need to have sex has at times been compared to the body's requirements to be replenished with food from time to time".³⁰ Elen Chiramba in "Dzinoruma" (They bite) captures how men usually describe women they consider to be very good sexual partners because of their physical build or shape. They use the metaphor *dya*, "eat", as if they are describing a sumptuous meal: Consider this example from Chiramba:

Inga vamwe vanodya havo shamwari
(Lit. "Surely some men eat (good food), my friend").
Some men really enjoy having sex (with such a good woman).

Such remarks as *Inga vamwe vanodya havo* are common in male Shona sex discourse and they are usually unsolicited street remarks which, more often than not, are offensive.

Ruby Magosvongwe employs some cynical humour in her story "Chaita Musoro Uteme" (What has caused the headache). She likens having casual sex to having only one morsel of sadza³¹ 'dipped' in a plate of relish. Although she does not mention the word sadza in her story, the word *kuseva* ('to dip') collocates with sadza and refers to the act of eating, at least from the Shona culture. Her main male character cannot believe that the only one time he had casual sex could have been the cause of the illness he now suffers or believes he suffers from. He complains to himself:

ndakaseva kamwe chete
(Lit. "I dipped (the sadza morsel in the relish) only once").

²⁸ Leech, *Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*, 12.

²⁹ Gundani, *Zimbabwe: The past is the future*, 87.

³⁰ Moto, *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 16.

³¹ Maize porridge cooked until stiff and wieldy [Editor's note].

I had casual sex only once.

and

kamwe chete ndiko kangandibayise nepfumo rerufu here?

(Lit. "Is it true that doing it only once can bring death?")

Is it true/fair that having casual sex only once can make me contract the deadly AIDS disease?

The persona here is concerned about the frequency of having casual sex and to him having done it only once (*kuseva kamwe*) does not justify the punishment of contracting (*kundibayisa* "to have me stabbed") the AIDS virus (*pfumo rerufu* "spear of death"). To him this is unfair because he knows *varidzi vetsoro* (lit. "the experts of the game"), the promiscuous, who most probably are not ill. It is the comparison that the character makes of oneself and *varidzi vetsoro* that brings about the cynical humour in this story.

Magosvongwe goes on to use the metaphor *rutsva* "bush fire" to describe AIDS as in *kupunyuuka murutsva* (lit. "to escape narrowly from a bushfire"), "having a close shave" and *handichateyizve mariva murutsva* (lit. "I will never set mouse traps in the bushfire"), "I will never have casual sex again". She also draws the reader's attention to the deadliness of AIDS by referring to AIDS as *ngwena*, "crocodile":

.Munoti kutakura ngwena huida

(Lit. "No one likes carrying a crocodile").

No one likes having AIDS.

The polysemous nature of *dya*, "eat", is also found in "Hamburamakaka" (A huge man) by Beauty Savala. Describing how the two lovers in the story spent one night together, Savala writes:

Vakadya rudo rwavo kusvika kwaedza

(Lit. "They ate their love until the morning").

They had sex until morning.

When the male character dies of AIDS, the author uses the metaphor *akati sarai mudye* (lit. "he bade them farewell") meaning "he died". This is a more polite way of saying someone died among the Shona.

In "Munhu Munhu" (Do not be fooled by outward appearance) by Ennet Ndhlovu, the metaphor *dya* also pertains as it is used in the following sentence:

Ainge (Petros) adya muchero wepakati akakoromora mukoko une nyuchi dzegonera

(Lit. "He had eaten the forbidden fruit and had disturbed wildly stinging bees from their hive").

He had had unprotected sex and had contracted the AIDS virus.

By using the phrase *muchero wepakati* 'the forbidden fruit' the author alludes to the biblical story of Adam and Eve. The intended message is that it is morally wrong to "eat" the forbidden fruit, especially when one ends

up in danger by contracting AIDS (*nyuchi dzegonera*). The effectiveness of using the metaphor *nyuchi dzegonera* (wildly stinging bees) to refer to HIV/AIDS cannot be questioned. The expression shows the devouring and inexorable nature of AIDS. Ndhlovu goes on to describe how the HIV virus was destroying Petros from within. In the following examples the author shows that outward appearance may not immediately show that someone is infected with AIDS:

guyu kutsvukira kunze mukati muzere masvosve

(Lit. "a ripe and attractive fig but with ants inside")

Outward appearance (in this case Petros') did not show that he had AIDS.

The metaphor used here of an attractive *guyu* "fig", which has *masvosve* "ants", gives a vivid picture of how people may be fooled by the good and inviting outward appearance of sexual partners without realising that they have AIDS. In reality ants do eat and damage figs from inside even though this image is used to describe how the AIDS virus destroyed the infected from within. The author emphasises this point by further noting:

masvosve mukati meguyu anga achifenga mukati mose

(Lit. "Ants had been damaging the fig from inside").

The AIDS virus has been destroying his immunity.

To illustrate that most people usually remain silent about their HIV status, Ndhlovu uses a common metaphor in Shona which is in the form of a proverb. It goes like this:

chinoxiva ivhu kuti mwana wembeva anorwara

(Lit. "It's the soil which knows that the child of the mouse is ill".

"It is an individual who knows his/her own secret". (In this case, Petros knew that he was HIV positive, but never told anyone.)

The use of the metaphor 'small house' in this story gives the impression that it is becoming more accepted in Shona discourse to denote a man's mistress or secret sexual partner. The use of the term 'small house' whose associative meaning differs from its lexical meaning is a way of legitimising promiscuity and accepting HIV as inevitable. The attitude to take the problem of HIV/AIDS casually is also evident in the several cynical jokes about the disease that abound among the urbanised ghetto people in Zimbabwe.³²

3.5 Muck

One of the favourite metaphors that Shona speakers use to describe bad things is *ndove* "muck". Hornby defines muck as "excrement of farm animals, especially used for fertilising" usually used to refer to "dirt, filth or something

³² Gundani, *Zimbabwe: The past is the future*, 88.

disgusting".³³ In the story "Dzinoruma" (It pains) Ellen Chiramba uses the metaphor *ndove* to refer to AIDS in *hupenyu hwave mundove* which literally means "My life is stuck in muck". The picture of the persona's "life being stuck in muck" is likely to conscientise the reader to the dangers of promiscuity. Related to this metaphor, we find Dream Sithole referring to prostitution contrastively as *basa* "job" and *tsvina* "faeces" in her story "Chakandidya" (That which caused my suffering). The first metaphor lessens the gravity of prostitution and is in line with the gender sensitive use of the euphemism "sex worker" when referring to a prostitute in English. Sithole's female character remarks:

Basa riya randaiiita raindibhadhara zvokuti ndakanga ndisingafungi kana zvokutsvaka rimwe basa

(Lit. "The job I was doing was so well paying that I did not think of looking for another job").

Prostitution paid me so well that I did not think of another job.

The second metaphor *tsvina* "faeces" is the antithesis of the first metaphor *basa* "job". This is brought out clearly when the same character regrets what she used to do and says she would not repeat her mistakes (*tsvina* "faeces") if she was given a second chance in life. She bemoans:

kana zvainzi upenyu hunodzokorodzwa ndanga ndisingaiti tsvina yakadai.

(Lit. "I would not play with faeces if I had a chance for another life").

I would not be promiscuous if had another chance to live again.

There is a close similarity between *ndove* and *tsvina* in the ways they are used in these two stories.

3.6 Other indirect terms of maintaining face

This section deals with other forms of indirect language that is used in the stories for the sake of maintaining politeness. As already noted in some stories, Chateuka does not directly call the pandemic by its name. She uses a number of metaphors which are in line with the generality of the findings of this study. She notes that people often use the following terms when talking about the disease:

varwara kwenguva ndefu kana pfupi

(Lit. "He/she has been ill for a long or short time").

He/She is suffering from AIDS.

or

ndizvo zviriko izvi

(Lit. "current issues").

AIDS

or

³³ Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, 813.

Akaroyiwa

(Lit. "He/she was bewitched").

He is suffering from AIDS.

or

akarohwa nematsotsi

(Lit. "He/She was beaten by thieves").

He/She is suffering from AIDS.

The metaphor *chiredzo* "hook" brings about the non-selective behaviours of both men and women who have many sexual partners. This is clearly demonstrated in "Hazviitwe zviya vasikana" (Never do it) by Synodia Mufukari. The female persona in this story says:

Ini ndaingwe chiredzo chaingoda chero zvayo hove mudziva

(Lit. "I was like a hook which could catch any kind of fish").

I slept with many sexual partners/I was promiscuous.

Further still, Mufukari's persona does not want to say directly that she had been promiscuous in her life, but uses the metaphor *kupinda nedzakawandawanda* literally "to have been involved in many bad dealings". This metaphor is another shade of the common Shona metaphor *kupinda-pinda* which means "having many sexual partners". Having many sexual partners is what Carona Chikwereveshe in *Zvakatanga nekupindwa nechando* colloquially refers to as having "maregular customers", a term borrowed from Zimbabwean English for Business Purposes. She says about the many sexual partners:

vakange ave maregular customers

(Lit. "They had become my regular customers").

They were now my regular sexual partners.

So when she contracts the disease she cannot tell who of the "maregular customers" had passed it on to her. Thus, she pays the price for being promiscuous. Promiscuity is also referred to as *kuwanza* "having many sexual partners" by Beauty Savala in "Pfira mate pasi" (Stop being promiscuous) in which she also warns people to stop having many sexual partners (*zvekuwanza pfira mate pasi*).

When people say *hande* or *handei* in Shona, they mean "Let's go". The word *hande* is used metaphorically in this story to mean "Let's have sex". The female persona here describes how, after contracting AIDS, she no longer attracted sexual partners as no man wanted to go out with her:

hapana akamboda kuti hande

(Lit. "No one asked me to go with him").

I did not attract sexual clients.

Samhu also uses the word *pereka* "to give" to refer to the willingness with which the female character gave herself to her sexual partner when she says:

Ndakapereka feya-feya pasina kondomu
(Lit. "I gave him without a condom").
I had sex without using a condom.

The term *pereka feya-feya* (to give herself freely/abundantly) gives a picture of a person who does not have much concern about the consequences of what she is doing. To show that the situation she had created for herself was irreversible, the author describes it as *chakabaya chikatyokera* and *hakuna munamoto seri kweguva* which both mean that "Once one gets the HIV virus, she cannot change her status". The author uses two proverbs metaphorically to send the message that AIDS is incurable.

Sarudzai Ndamba in "Goremucheche" (One who does not accept the she/he is old) warns readers about the deadly disease by using a proverb *chisi hachiyeri musi wacharimwa*, which means here "AIDS symptoms do not show promptly". In other words, the author is sending the message that people should not be fooled by outward appearance. In this story, the author also uses the common phrase *kuita flu* "to have flu" to refer to AIDS.

Different metaphors are used to refer to promiscuity or insatiable sexual appetite among the Shona. One such metaphor which Chiramba uses to describe Thomas' promiscuous behaviour in the story is *akatemerwa chitemo chaicho*. *Kutemerwa chitemo chaicho* suggests that Thomas' sexual desire is abnormal; it appears to have been an induced desire, like someone who has taken an aphrodisiac. He goes beyond what is culturally accepted as normal as far as sexual desire is concerned.

Pelagia Kaseke in "Tikaramba takadaro, tinokunda" (We shall conquer the effects of the pandemic if remain resolute) uses the word *moto* "fire" to connote AIDS. In her narrative of how she contracted the disease, the female character in the story remarks:

Ndainge ndazvisikira moto muziso
(Lit. "I had put fire in my eyes").
I had caused trouble for myself.

Describing how promiscuous her sexual partner was, the female character gives the reader a picture of a male dog. She says:

Kana imbwa hono hayaidaro
(Lit. "Even a male dog did not behave like that").
He was very promiscuous.

To lessen the gravity of the reality of testing HIV positive, the female character accepts her fate using the metaphor *denga rainge randiseka*, literally meaning "the heavens had mocked me". She seems to suggest that

there is nothing she would have done because it had been allowed to happen by some power beyond her control, probably by God. And when she and her husband try to come to terms with the disease, they blame each other, *kunakurirananyoka mhenyu*, literally meaning "to throw a live snake at each other". The use of other ailments or diseases to refer to AIDS is common in order to maintain face. We see Sharai Ndlovu in "Ndinokurangarira" (I remember you) using *marariya* "malaria" to refer to AIDS in *kurwara nemarariya* "to suffer from malaria". Eresia Hwede describes the AIDS pandemic as *mhindo* "pitch darkness" in her story titled "Mhindo, mhindo, mhindo" (Aids pandemic). This is not normal darkness, but that kind of darkness that is associated with heavy cloud cover. The repetition of *mhindo* throughout the story is used to reinforce the seriousness of the disease. *Mhindo* frightens at night and no one wants to walk in it. So does AIDS. She also refers to the disease as *zvemazuva ano izvozvi* "contemporary issues", now a common term used in Shona discourse related to HIV/AIDS.

4. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Shona culture places restrictions on direct communication in matters concerning AIDS and sex because such direct communication is considered as taboo. This has been done through exploring different metaphors and other idiomatic expressions that women writers use in writing about AIDS and sex in different stories on the two subjects.

It is clear from the discourse women use in the stories that existing metaphors and new ones have been used to communicate rhetorical messages on AIDS and sex. Both categories of metaphors have been largely drawn from the linguistic repertoire of the Shona people, thereby making it easy to interpret meaning. In other words, these indirect linguistic devices or figurative expressions do make sense because of the communicative competence speakers of the Shona language share. In sum, the study confirms the symmetrical relationship between language and culture.

The contexts in which the metaphors are used in the short stories make it easy for Shona speakers to decipher the meanings. The discussion presented in this article has also offered insights into attitudes towards HIV/AIDS and sex and the implications of cultural values, beliefs and customs and gender asymmetry on HIV/AIDS prevalence and prevention in Zimbabwe.

