

CHAPTER 3: CONTAGIOUS BODIES AND DESTABILISED IDENTITIES IN *THE HAUNTED TRAIL* BY PHILLIP CHIDAVAENZI

Chapter Two focused on conceptualizing the body in a context that is defined by HIV in the text *Unlucky in Love* (2005) penned by Tendai Westerhof. The chapter examined the significance of the body in our everyday understanding of HIV&AIDS in contexts that have come to be defined by the virus. It was established that the body of the infected is looked at negatively especially if it belongs to a woman and is infected. She is seen as a vector and potential killer and is now viewed as an abomination in her society. It was also established that the body of the affected is marked by symbols of decay. The body, far from offering stability, presents terrifying insecurity of to the continuity of human life due to the vicious nature of the virus. In this chapter I would want to look in more detail at some of the ways in which identities become destabilized in crisis situations leading to destabilised forms as represented in the text *The Haunted Trail* (2006) and how society deals with contagious bodies in their midst. Mercer observes,

..identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty' (Mercer, 1990).

Being HIV positive is an identity that most characters in the text being analysed subscribe to. Being HIV positive has become a crisis for many individuals who are seen losing hope for living and even contemplate suicide as a solution to ending their misery. The individual is riddled with identities that are weak representations of the self. These identities have been fostered on their bodies medically and socially. Caruth and Keenan (1995) assertion is that one's identity is reduced to the status of one being healthy or not. Healthiness takes prominence in

this case where society seems divided on who the health scare is and who is not. Differences are being marked out by one's health status in a way that is meant to make others feel less secure in themselves and as part of the human cosmology in society and reject these people as not belonging to normal society.

A destabilised identity means that an identity has been rendered less powerful, less safe or weaker through some changes in an individual's life. The contagious nature of the body contributes to loss of stability physically and socially as well as economically. According to Sanchez-Arce (2014,) illness is destabilizing due to the reason that it is regarded as a stigma. One can note that illness is being separated from daily life normal life and a contagious body is isolated because of fear, shame, and humiliation in the self who is seen as separate from the everyday life because of his or her HIV status. Illness fragments and destabilizes the self because one usually feels hopeless and frail and there is a tendency to look at the infected person as an invalid or potential invalid who will be a burden to the healthy family members. The HIV positive usually feel loss of independence because coming out usually resembles the act of airing one's privates in public. Society usually start to hypothesis on how one must have got the disease, if one is promiscuous or private matters like if they know one was going out with someone they jump to conclude that that person must also be suffering. The body begins to be seen as a contagious thing that should be propped up by medicines and body projects for its survival. The body being contagious is seen in terms its polluting potentials and this emphasis the fact that someone does not belong or deserve to be among the living.

Biblically, men were created in the image of God. This concept has helped to create strong images of men in society as they seem to possess more social power through patriarchal dividend. In the text analysis will centre on female and male characters and how their once

strong identities are made weak through being tested HIV positive in *The Haunted Trail*.

Hall (1996) argues that the self is reflexive and takes itself as an object and can categorize or name itself in a particular way in relationship to others. He goes on to argue that social categories in which people place themselves are already prescribed and human are just born unto them. In the text strong characters like Michael can be seen to be drawn to identities that speak of power and control socially, economically as well as physically. These categories (social identities) were already existent before they were born due to social stratification process and people place themselves according to how they may have chosen to be identified within certain classes. There are certain identities like gender identity in which biology and society play pivotal roles. Male characters identify themselves in relation to male figures present in their lives in most cases the father if he is alive. 'Identity belongs to the future as much as to the past' (Hall, 1990). The past is represented by all the influencing figures that impacted positively or negatively in an individual's life.

Identity is made up of the ways in which we see ourselves and how others see us. In the following analysis insight will be drawn from how the individual has constructed ideas about themselves in a context defined by HIV and where those identities are now being challenged and are being rendered weak by changes in the character's life. Beside the identities displayed by an individual care will be taken to zero in on how society defines the individual who is HIV positive. This framework will aid to illuminating a comprehensive analysis of individual destabilized identities thereby establishing links between the individual and the social world that he or she we inhabits. Hall (1996) is of the idea that people mark themselves out as the same as or different from others, and are so categorized, through the language they use, the way they speak, the words, images and symbols they

deploy, including the clothes they wear and the practices, rites and rituals in which they engage. In most of the cases one can notice that male characters would want to project images of one in total control of situations all the time and these identities are weakened when an individual discovers that he now has to battle to contain HIV as well as the social world and economic. This casts doubts on the individual who in most cases sees may not be able to see way out of this social milieu. The individual may not be able to juggle the contagious body and all its demands alongside these other images that demands that he is always on top of the situation. One's identity is a reflection of one's conscious self and the conscious self may not be able to accept a weakened version of the ideal self.

There is constant comparison of the ideal self in relation to the contagious self who exhibits a weak version of what the individual would like to become. Hall (1996) notes that the self exists in relation to the 'Other,' that is , in a relationship of identity and difference, which is shifting and hierarchically constituted. Hall (1996) goes on to emphasise that there is no end to this process of becoming, for one is constantly *becoming* in relationship to others. Identity exists not as an ontological reality, but as a linguistic practice where some dominant articulations normalize "ways of being." As a result one can note that through this analysis one can note that identity is constituted out of differences as well as the fact that it is not static and fixed states where one can talk of an unchanging character in an individual. These destabilised states of being in the characters that shall be analysed in the text *The Haunted Trial* are therefore natural in relation to Hall's statements of the changeability of an individual's traits in relation to his or her changing circumstances and situation in contagious environment whereby a lot is at stake. The contagious individual becomes an outsider in a world where everyone is being conscientised on his danger to humanity as a vector or carrier of HIV. The society sees the HIV positive as the other that is to be named and avoided and

this also weakens an individual's conceptions of his identity in relation to the environment that he is supposed to identify with. It is every HIV positive person's ideal to be rid of the virus and that is how in these instances one can talk of destabilised identities because the infected are seeking to define their identities in relation to the HIV negative which is their ideal states of being but these states can no longer be seen to be achievable.

Butler (1993) notes that identities are constructed and the process is never complete. This shows us that these identities on display by individuals in the text *The Haunted Trail* are not natural states but are freely chosen by an individual and there is effort to live up to those chosen standards. Kellner (1992) contends that it (choosing and ticking to an identity) becomes a freely chosen game, a theatrical presentation of the self. One can therefore argue that in this vain identity since they are not casts in stone they are open to changes and recasting or representations in accordance to changes in an individual's life. It therefore should not shock if characters in a text for example female characters, like Chiedza in *The Haunted Trail* and Rumbi in *Unlucky In Love*, re-configure their identities to accept less stronger identities or weaker forms of identities that also take into cognisance their diseased states of being. These are necessary measures that will enable them to deal with the presence of an infection in their body at the same time give them hope for living. In other words they are able to negotiate for a nurture hope for a brighter tomorrow as opposed to characters that deny their diseased status and try to live without acknowledging that there is something wrong with their bodies.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic can be described as one plagued by social meaning. Vara- Diaz (2005) defines stigma as the negative evaluation of a particular difference that may be associated with a person. Stigma can be seen as a way in which society tries to define an individual and attach an identity to that individual. These definitions of the HIV

positive in society in most cases have led to discrimination in relation to the contagious bodies that they inhabit. In this case one can note that HIV&AIDS have inflicted a pervasive and intrusive destabilisation of the entire society – individuals, families, communities and institutions.

Burr (2003) is of the opinion that each individual constructs their own version of reality and at the same time nothing is static. In text we are confronted by characters who try to write their own destiny and are active in the construction of their individual identities. One can note that this process that Burr alludes to aids the character in assuming responsibility for their actions when things go wrong. Where it becomes easy to blame men for infecting them as is the case for HIV positive persons where the blame game seeks to lessen one's responsibility for their diseased status. As a result, the female characters in the text *The Haunted Trial* can be seen to be coming from a position of inequality to assume more powerful identities where they are now the authors of their own destiny. In the text *Unlucky in Love* (2005) Rumbi declares that she is now happily married to her HIV. She seems happier and much more at peace and one can wonder if the result of being tested HIV positive means that all characters will end up with destabilised identities? One can see them negotiating for better identities even with though they are now largely seen or viewed as contagious bodies in their society. Society views them as individual that should be shunned or avoided or who should try by all means to bury their existence inside their homes. An individual's identities are born out of different situations. Burr (2003) argues therefore that people have no fixed selves but rather change as each situation changes which poststructuralist associate with modern trends of self-definitions. Holstein and Gubrium (2000) argue that in the twenty-first century, the self has become so fragmented and fluid that its very existence is seriously questioned. This on its own destabilizes identities whether one is positive or negative with HIV. The environment that

we are living in is so hyper tense that the existence of stable selves is in question. At the end of the day one can note that identities are already destabilised but the HIV positive can use this trend to negotiate for better identities because they are now surer about what choices they have open unlike the negative person who is confronted by a myriad of choices.

Mahoso (1999) reasons out that destabilised identities are prevalent in society because HIV-related diseases attacked the psychological and spiritual health of society and destroyed relationships and institutions long before it finally destroyed the infected body. In this case one can note that the mind is an HIV positive person's number one enemy. Defeat is being achieved in the mind long before bodies have been destroyed by the infection. Chapman, (2000) notes that is not surprising considering that the HIV or AIDS body has been conceptualized as a site of death and contagion. To society the HIV positive are walking cadavers and if an individual thinks likewise one can notice that the prevalence of destabilised identities will become many. This chapter will carry out psychological analysis of the infected individuals in a bid to understand how individual come to have the cadaver-mindset when they are tested positive. Burr (2003) notes that the self is created in the context of different social circumstances which require different responses. An analysis of those social circumstances is necessary in understanding destabilised identities in each and every character. As a result one is able to understand each response to the differing social circumstance that created that individual.

As earlier discussed in the introduction, destabilized identities are those identities that come out as weak representations of the self. People who are ill having been diagnosed with HIV often exhibit destabilized identities. Sontag (1978) notes that everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. She notes that although we all prefer to use only the good

passport, sooner or later, each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place. In the text *The Haunted Trail* Michael has risen from rags to riches and has worked hard to improve his meagre background. He is presented as a Mbare prostitute's ill begotten child whose father is said to have died in violent circumstances due to criminal and shameful activities. This is the background he inherits from his parents, a background that forms the basis of the identities that he forms in later life as an adult. Michael Denga represents the worst that society can produce in an individual who seeks to win in everything in life. When his mother dies, he walks away from her corpse but he does not know that he will find himself in the same situation when the wills of fortunes seems to be running away from him. He is tested positive with HIV and is back to being poor when his empire crumbles due to corrupt tendencies and a failing national economy.

Woodward (2002) notes that adulthood is seen as an effect of childhood. In this vein one can note that adult lives are controlled by our past childhood experiences. Woodward (2002) notes that individuals often seek the security of a named 'true' parentage that confirms the ties of kinship as well as seeking the revelation of their 'real' 'true' self. Micheal is curious about his past especially the lack of a father in his life. He is constantly told that he was just a criminal. Micheal in *The Haunted Trail* said that he felt 'marked' being a fatherless son of a prostitute. At School he felt marked because all the students had fathers but, '...he did not have a known father like everyone else.' He sees his life destined to be poor or mediocre because his parenthood had comprised of two of society's unscrupulous individuals; a dealer named Taruza and a shabbeen owner and former prostitute called Stella. Micheal sees his mother as a failure in life because she was destined to a life of struggle and poverty and vows that he will never be like her. According to the street gossip he is able to gather, his father had died as a result of stab wounds sustained from

a gang fight over a young prostitute called Melina. Gabriella Gobbi (2013) has indicated that children growing up without a father are far more likely to abuse substances, or to be involved in antisocial behaviour and criminal activity. A father is a human model for his son. A son looks up to the father to provide support and guidance in his early life. McLanahan (1994) is of the opinion that a boy's search for the self-starts with his father. She notes that without a father, most boys have a harder time knowing who they are and where they came from. There is constant feeling of 'being different' in Micheal's life due to the absent father and can see to be true of Micheal through his fervent search for belonging in the amassing of wealth and his determination to be a person of worth. It is noted, 'He suffered the absence of his father who could have shown him the ritual pathways into manhood. 'This fatherless identity destabilised him firsts before his HIV status did further harm. He searches for belonging in all the wrong places and is too determinist to a point where it leads to his destruction as he tries to run away from the poor background he inherited from his parenthood.

Hall (1990) asserts that, 'identity belongs to the future as much as to the past.' In looking at Micheal's past life and parentage one is able to understand why he is always accumulating women and money around him. As a rich man he is able to commandeer his life to greater levels. His greedy nature does not allow him to refuse opportunities be they good or bad which led to his downfall with Chiedza, his empire and his health. McLanahan (1994) notes that growing up with one parent also deprives children of important economic resources ultimately undermining the children's chances of future success. In Micheal's case, he is able to prosper due to the help of scholarships but one can note that he is determined never to be poor again. In this sense adult identities are derived from childhood experience. Identities premised on wealth creation are never stable and once the money is gone as when Micheal's empire falls so does the identity he had built

around his affluence. It is said he 'thrives on challenges' and, '...nothing stood in the way of his insatiable yearning for wealth.' It is only inevitable that one of the challenges and insatiable appetites are bound to form the cornerstone of his demise.

He cannot see himself living as a poor person with nothing. As result one can note that childhood experiences have aided in the construction of weak adult identities that fails to sustain him in times of crisis. Woodward (2002) states that conflicts within the self are best understood through retelling stories of childhood, and especially of relationships with family members. Michael's relationship with Chiedza looks solid on the outside but one can note that it is destabilized by Michael's past relationship with his mother, Stella. He grows up with the constant image of men trampling on her life and never staying for long. She is used like a 'condom' by men and one can say that this forms the basis on which Michael's relationship with women is premised. He uses Fiona's body to settle office business, he sleeps with his girlfriends' friend, Jackie and many other women that he just takes on only to use and discard. He sees women as 'pawns' that he moves around in a game of chess in which only he has total control. In a context which has come to be defined by HIV one can see that the Casanova identity can be fatal if the individual does not practice safe sex and he ends up infected and taking his own life.

Chiedza in *The Haunted Trail* comes across as someone who knows where she wants to go and how to get there. She is depicted as a more stable character as compared to her friend Jackie who sleeps around indiscriminately. Chiedza works hard in school and even at work she does not use her privileged background as an unfair advantage as she is able to prove her mantle at the prestigious accounting firm where her mother manages to use her influences to secure a place for her. Hall (1996) is of the idea that people mark themselves out as the same as or different from others, and are so categorized, through the

language they use, the way they speak, the words, images and symbols they deploy, including the clothes they wear and the practices, rites and rituals in which they engage. In this case Chiedza is different from other women or girls in that she is morally upright and refuses to engage in sex before marriage with Michael her fiancé of many years. She is principled and one cannot help juxtaposing her to her friend Jackie who is the exact opposite. This is a big feat in a world where sexual immorality has become the norm for modern women, a world in which women have fought and won the rights to determine their sexuality and exercise it without restraint as symbolised by the character Jackie whose sexual immorality even surpasses men's. Sontag (1989) decries the fact that Christianity has made sexual behaviour the root of social virtue. Catherine Hakim (2004) makes the pertinent observation, 'sex is no more a moral issue than eating a good meal is.' In other words being a morally upright person should be divorced from issues of sex. In Chiedza's case, she is naive in her love-worship relationship of a tycoon like Michael who is busy getting what she withholds from other women. In this case the author can be seen to have highlighted the instability of identities that are built on issues of sexual virtue in these modern times. Chiedza is taken by surprise when she is raped and infected with HIV and her good girl image is tarnished in the blink of an eye. Girls like Jackie who are sexually amoral come out as the moral ones because they are able to protect themselves and are better prepared in a world where one needs never let one's guard down. Jackie notes in a discussion with Chiedza on their sexual practises, 'At least you are safer because you don't sleep around.' She goes on to joke that AIDS is probably closer to her but she uses protection all the time. Chiedza has been brought up to expect the best in all humans but this trait proves to be her undoing. She is too trusting of Micheal and believes being good will rub on to him but she fails to change him. Giddens (1991) stresses the autonomy of the self as an agent who is engaged in producing accounts of oneself. The account that Chiedza produces about herself are rendered unstable in a

world where instability is the order of the day. In modern times that naivety and innocence have been shown to lead to devastating effects. She fails to identify Michael with the mafia leader he is, the man who masterminded Leslie Gatsi's murder just so that he can take over his ailing bank. She negotiates a lifestyle that proves to be bigger than her in choosing Michael as a partner because Michael would have fared better with a partner like Jackie who is wise in the ways of the world. Choosing to live in Harare meant that Chiedza had to be tougher if she was fare better. Her innocence proves to be fatal in that she would have suspected that Michael was the devil that her family warned her against. Harare is described in the image of a 'spent harlot' and it is not a place where one can retain her innocence or incorrupt nature. In moments of crisis when Chiedza is told about her HIV positive status she had contemplated taking her own life but her morals had saved her sanity and she realises that she cannot be cruel to her unborn child. She begins to see Michael for what he is. Her identity begins to change. Javangwe (2013) substantiates this when he states that 'The self is ever changing...' Whereas before she had seen her life stretching further than the horizon, as an HIV positive person she explains that she began to feel like a cripple. She talks of having deep scar that have blemished her once untarnished image of the well brought up child. She now sees her life as over and one can see how these self-images aid in destabilizing the self. She begins to see herself as a victim and according to Maureen Kambarami's (2006) women are portrayed as 'innocent' and naïve recipients of the disease and she notes that these narratives limit the sexual options available to women in and out of marriage, and stereotype men as callous agents of the disease. In this case Chiedza's agency is taken away from her and one can note that there is an attempt to define her identity in terms of her enemies or the perpetrator who is Michael. Delanty and Kumar (2006) have noted that victimhood is divisive and there is an attempt at imposing an artificial hierarchy in which one side is said to have suffered more than the other. In this case the author Chidavaenzi has built Chiedza's

identity in relation to Michael's and there is an attempt to portray her as the innocent untainted virgin who was more wronged because she was infected the day she got deflowered. This has the negative effect of perpetuating existing hatred against men as the spreaders of HIV by failing to recognise that both men and women can be the victims as well as the perpetrators. In this case Michael is a bad guy through and through and there is a tendency at condoning Chiedza's innocence and blaming it on the wine she consumed at Michael's place before she was raped. The author failed to look further into problems that Chiedza would have faced had she waited to be deflowered after marriage because in marriages it has been noted that couples are at a higher risk of infection because they do not use protection. As long as she carried that overly trust in Michael one way or the other she would have been infected. This goes against the image we had created of her to be intelligent individual because one realises that the self consists of multiple selves in different situations. Burr's (1995) theory of social constructionism stresses the fact that:

Instead, then, of people having single, unified and fixed selves, perhaps we are fragmented, having a multiplicity of potential selves which are not necessarily consistent with each other. The self which is constantly on the move, changing from situation to situation...'

These new forms of consciousness and selves are at the core of an individual's identities. Hall (1996:4) makes distinct and important observations in this regard:

...identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicisation and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. We need to situate the debates about identity within all those historically specific developments and practices which have disturbed the relatively 'settled' character of many populations and cultures, above all in relation to the processes of globalization, which I would argue are coterminous with modernity...and the processes of forced and 'free' migration...(Hall;1996)

Erikson (1968) is of the view that Identity is sometimes used to refer to a sense of integration of the self, in which different aspects come together in a unified whole. In the end it is all those different pieces that make up the composition of an individual's unique identity.

In our society one's identity can be determined by the society, what people say about the individual can be seen to aid in identity of the infected. Sontag (1989) shows how the metaphors and myths surrounding certain illnesses, especially cancer, add greatly to the suffering of patients and often inhibit them from seeking proper treatment. Sontag (ibid) goes on to note that HIV is seen as a 'plague' and as a 'judgment' on the individuals suffering from it despite the fact that it is a heterosexual disease as well as a global issue, it is still often discussed as a consequence of decadence and a punishment for 'deviant' sexual behaviour. Erickson (1968) argues that social identification is the process by which we define ourselves in terms and categories that we share with other people. Identity is clearly developed in relation to others and individuals often have to negotiate their way into societal categories. Jane Crisp (1995) talks about the power of others in determining our identities. Identity can therefore be seen to comprise of self-definitions as well as definitions by society at large. In most cases people living with HIV are defined by their status and as a result become non-persons. HIV positive and HIV negative are all identities and categories that have become ways of defining individuals in our society. It seems like society has been divided into two camps that people identify with. The negative and the positive and these are some of the categories that people use to define those who are contagious. Sabat and Harre (1992) have theorised that the negative reaction of others to contagious people brings about loss of self in the identity of the sick. Thus in the case of *The Haunted Trail* Chiedza is told to stay away from a club they formed when she was negative. Sentiments in the club are that she had become a prostitute when she was infected in Harare. There is an attempt at just

identifying her in terms of being unhealthy and contagious to others which are negative identities that further destabilize for new found hope for rebuilding her life. The society is afraid of her infection and Shildrick (2000) defined contagion as unclean, notions where the disease can be spread by touch or proximity. Those who are infected are stigmatised as unclean in an effort to emphasize that they must be removed from society and that they contain something that people should stay away from.

There is an attempt at talking through the infected in society. Shildrick (2000) notes that those who are sick are talked about by their society as if they are not there and in so doing deny them space to create viable identities. Fungai, Chiedza's mother discusses her daughter's life with her boss and other women as if Chiedza is not there. It can be noted that she made efforts to thwart Chiedza's need for going public. Fungai contends that Chiedza had to learn to live with the virus without drawing in people. In this case one can note that people do not want to be drawn into the shame that comes from identifying with a daughter or neighbour who is HIV positive. Society would rather that the infected suffer on their own. Society perceives the infected as risk agents because they are interpreted as a threat to others. Risky lifestyles different from everyday life like prostitution are blamed for the spread of HIV by the society. Prostitutes inhabit those spaces that are wild, free and uninhibited by morality that govern others. Goffman (1994) views the body as the material property of individuals, yet they are defined and made meaningful by society. So society is heavily involved in ascribing meanings to the individuals but it can be noted that those identities attached to positive people have negative meanings that shows that society is afraid of the contagious bodies that it cannot deal with using available medical science. Society usually sees the diseased as frail bodies that will later become a source of societal burden that it cannot afford to live with at the rate at which humans are becoming infected. According to Rose (1991) in this sense,

the self, like the body becomes a project to be 'worked on' and improved so that the individual can go on without overburdening the society. Chiedza goes on strict diet and her mother supervises her ARV uptake to make sure that her body is prepared to fight the virus. The insistence that the person living with HIV have their "own dish, spoon everything that you are using must be 'different' demonstrates the imagined danger, which the person living with HIV poses to the rest of the family and to society at large. This actually weakens their conceptions of the self because society at every turn the individual is confronted with a lifestyle that is discriminatory and a sense of being different from the normal healthy person next-door. Those who stigmatize people living with HIV falsely believe that the virus is highly contagious and that they could easily become infected. Society views HIV positive women and men as a threat to social moral integrity.

The chapter analysed contagious bodies and destabilised identities in the text *The Haunted Trail*. It was established that society and the individual are all afraid of the contagious body, and in most cases, seeks to attach negative meanings to the identity of the individual who has been infected. The discussion centred on the weak identities that were displayed by characters in the text through the analysis of Michael, Stella and Chiedza during the times that they had been diagnosed with HIV. It can be noted that Michael's background as a rootless and fatherless loner who was running away from poverty, were the causes of the factors that destabilised his identity leading to his decision to take his life when he was now facing the demise of his powerful identity. He had been advised that every men fights alone by his mother and that the individual does only favours for itself thus in a context defined by HIV lonely figures often seek to end their life because it can be noted that HIV needs the support of the family members and society. When faced with the demise of his body he fails to apply those principles that had made him a winner in life because

they could not sustain his new identity as a positive person. He fails to look beyond his present calamities and thus it had spelled disaster. In the case of Stella she is also a strong woman who succumbed to HIV but she is not able to get the medication needed to save his life. Chiedza in times of the HIV crisis folds but it can be noted that her firm family background helped her achieve a stable identity even though she had to deal with the same stigma and discrimination that led to the demise of her fiancé. She is able to construct a new identity that is based on acceptance of her HIV status.