



**MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY  
FACULTY OF ARTS**

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**THE PORTRAYAL OF BLACK WOMEN BY ZIMBABWEAN FEMALE  
PLAYWRIGHTS: THE CASE OF *IN THE CONTINUUM*, *WHO SAID I DON'T WANT  
TO DANCE* AND *SHE NO LONGER WEEPS***

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE BACHELOR OF ARTS HONOURS DEGREE IN FILM AND THEATRE ARTS  
STUDIES**

**NOVEMBER, 2018**

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**DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my big, blended family; the Makhazas, the Ngwenyas and the Sibandas; as well as the Father Ywh for divine provision, the Son Jesus Christ for divine protection and strength and the Holy Spirit for comfort and empowerment.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge my high school literature teacher Mrs Mashingaidze who sparked my love for reading and analysis. The character portrayal talks in Madame Moyo's French class, as well as the Ndebele literature studies with Mnumzana Thodhlana also moulded my character examination skills in plays and novels. Discussing novels, film and theatre productions with my aunt, Thobekile Makhaza and cousin, Imani Dlamini from as young as five years old set the foundation for what I would want to study at university. I would not have been able to complete this without the Black women that surround me, from my guide Dr. Parichi who has been very supportive throughout my four years at university; my friends, Nompilo, Kwenza, Nicole and Linda who have held me accountable; to my grandmother Ntombizodwa Makhaza and mother Sibusisiwe Ngwenya, who have been my pillars of strength. My father, Dumisani Ngwenya is my biggest hype man, and I thank you. A special mention goes to my supervisor, Dr. E. Vhutuza, for pushing me, being patient and encouraging me to do my best. God bless you all.

**Abstract**

This research investigates the portrayal of women by female Zimbabwean playwrights from different socio-historical backgrounds. The works that are analysed are *Who said I don't Want to Dance*, by Thembelihle Moyo, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *She No Longer Weeps* and Danai Gurira's collaboration with Nikkole Salter in *In the Continuum*. Analysis of Salter's female characters are presented in order to emphasise the universality of Black women's experiences; and to highlight the distinctions between the Africans portrayed by Gurira with the African Americans portrayed by Salter. The study also explores the subject of feminism as a universally shared experience, but also how the plays in question expose the conclusive presence of intersectional feminism. In addition, African Womanist and African Feminist theoretical approaches as well as qualitative research methodology are utilised in analysing the presentation of the women in the three plays.

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# **CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This study examines the portrayal of Black Zimbabwean women in plays by Zimbabwean female playwrights, namely; Tsitsi Dangarembga, Thembelihle Moyo and Danai Gurira, who collaborates with Nikkole Salter. The chapter will provide the reader with the background of the study, statement and assumption of the study, research questions, aims and objectives, justification and research methods. Additionally, an overview of the chapter organisation will be presented. The goal is to discover if and how women show, through their characterisation, that femaleness and the issues faced by women are complex in nature; whether or not femininity is both a universal and a deeply personal matter. Therefore, the chapter proposes the need to explore whether the portrayal of womanhood in plays is a kaleidoscopic rainbow, and if so, to examine a few of these feminine hues.

### **1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY**

This research aims at investigating the portrayal of Black women by female Zimbabwean playwrights from different socio-historical backgrounds. *Who said I don't Want to Dance*, by Thembelihle Moyo, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *She No Longer Weeps* and Danai Gurira's collaboration with Nikkole Salter in *In the Continuum* will be used as points of reference. Analysis of Salter's female characters will be presented in order to emphasise the universality of Black women's experiences; and to highlight the distinctions between the Africans portrayed by Gurira with the African Americans portrayed by Salter.

The study will also explore the theme of feminism as a universally shared experience, but also how the plays in question expose the conclusive presence of intersectional feminism. Different methodological and theoretical approaches will be used in analysing the presentation of the women in the plays.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

It goes without saying that at least one female character may be found within a play. However, the problem becomes not that there are no women in plays, but how the women are portrayed within the plays. Realistic character portrayals of women within plays are important because:

- They reflect the socio-historical positions of women during the period the play is set
- This therefore highlights the social constructions of womanhood during a certain period
- Social constructions expose the struggles faced by women who can not conform
- By attaining knowledge on social constructions of womanhood in the past, one can grasp present day challenges of womanhood
- By comparing the past with the present, an audience can be illuminated to new social constructions of womanhood
- The audience can then identify the struggle that the present day woman faces and
- Furthermore, the audience can recognise oppressive systems and misrepresentations that still exist regarding women.

The research will explore how female Zimbabwean playwrights from different backgrounds and experiences have portrayed the Zimbabwean woman's experience in their plays. More often than

not, male playwrights, who constitute the bulk of Zimbabwean theatre writers, such as Wiseman Magwa, Ben Sibenke and Cont Mhlanga have been given more attention in their bodies of work including their portrayal of women from a man's perspective. These playwrights have, in a few plays, attempted to plausibly represent everyday Zimbabwean women, but have also mistakenly embroidered them as lacking agency over their own lives through characterisation. Thus, there is need to shift the concentration from male writers, towards female playwrights to discover whether they have novel and plausible characterisations of Black Zimbabwean women in their plays.

### **1.3 ASSUMPTIONS OF STUDY**

The main assumption of this research is that most depictions of African women's experiences on stage have been inaccurately homogeneous.

### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

#### **1.4.1 MAIN QUESTION**

- How are Black women in Zimbabwe presented by Zimbabwean female playwrights from different socio-cultural backgrounds?

#### **1.4.2 SUB- QUESTIONS**

- What is womanhood?
- How do the playwrights portray Zimbabwean women?
- How does Salter's depiction of African American womanhood reveal universal themes of Black womanhood?

- Is the assumption that a playwright that has lived through an experience depicts it more truthfully than one that has not?

## **1.5 AIM OF STUDY**

The aim of this study is to examine the different manifestations of Zimbabwean womanhood in the works of three female Black playwrights.

## **1.6 OBJECTIVES**

1. To analyse how the shared experiences of Zimbabwean women are illustrated in the works of the collaborative work of Danai Gurira and Nikkole Salter, Tsitsi Dangaremba and Thembelihle Moyo.
2. To reveal the Zimbabwean feminine diversity that the plays evoke and finally,
3. To ascertain whether the writings are feminist in nature, or simply stories for entertainment.

## **1.7 JUSTIFICATION OF STUDY**

An array of diverse depictions of Zimbabwean female portrayal within plays remains an essential but rather under-theorised scholarly study. Furthermore, the female Zimbabwean in the Diaspora has been given very little representation in plays. Available literature chiefly explores the battered and poverty stricken Black woman or the angry feminist.

There are also a few international studies that highlight the portrayal of intersectional feminism within the African context in plays. Crenshaw (1989) introduced the theory of intersectional feminism.

However, her theory focuses on the African American's experience as a woman; and not necessarily the African's. Hill-Collins (1990) further expanded the focus from African American women to all women. Ngozi Adichie discusses African femininity and more specifically, tells the story of the Nigerian woman's experience.

While all this body of scholarship is important, there is a gap in literature that focuses on the depiction of Zimbabwean women by female playwrights. This study is thus a vital intervention on the studies of the portrayal of Black women in Zimbabwean plays. The research examines the dynamics of shared Zimbabwean womanhood as well as differences in experiences due to varying class backgrounds. In addition, the research will evaluate whether stories told by playwrights who are a part of the society within which they tell the story are more reliable than a playwright who are only outside observers of the situation they present.

Discussing female portrayals in Zimbabwean plays by Zimbabwean women playwrights is worth researching. Raisedon Baya (2018), Bulawayo playwright tweeted that "telling the story of the girl child is difficult." This assertion, coming from a renowned male theatre practitioner, reveals just how significant a study it is to therefore explore the ways in which the Zimbabwean girl child's story has been told through female lenses. This research connects the wide chasm on scholarship regarding the Zimbabwean girl child depictions in plays.

## **1.8 RESEARCH METHOD**

This study will be based on a qualitative approach. It draws on a two-tiered methodological approach: close textual analysis of primary source material (desk research); historical contextualization of both primary documents and broader socio-cultural framework through archival research and secondary histories.

This project is theoretically informed by some related literatures that form an interdisciplinary intersection: studies of femininity, feminism and character portrayals in plays. The proposed project will draw from recent inquiries in these literatures, contributing materially or theoretically to each.

Archival material in the form of past interviews, play texts and commentaries will also be analysed for the following performances under study:

- *Who Said I Don't Want to Dance*
- *In the Continuum*
- *She No Longer Weeps*

## **1.9 CHAPTER ORGANISATION**

The research project is divided into five chapters. Chapter one introduces the scope of the study. It presents the background of the study, statement of the problem, assumptions of the study, research questions, and the aims of the study, objectives of the research, justification of study and research method. Chapter two is the literature review and theoretical framework associated with the study. Chapter three explores the common themes raised in the three plays and chapter

four analyses the female characters in the three plays. Chapter five is the conclusion and it will provide a summary of the research findings as well as offer some recommendations.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this research is to gain clarity, explore and better understand the portrayal of women in three Zimbabwean plays by different female playwrights. In order to do so, an investigation on the theoretical foundations related to femininity and feminism is required. Furthermore, a review of the available body of knowledge in portrayals of women in plays is pivotal. This is what this chapter serves to do.

This chapter reviews feminist theoretical frameworks necessary for contextualizing this research project. The theories of Simone de Beauvoir and femininity will be briefly reviewed. Bell Hook's literature provides an international lens in bringing insight on marginalized Black women's voices. Lastly, and most significantly for an African study, the work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie will be used to explore the African feminist narrative, while Afrocentric-Womanism and Motherism will be the focal point influencing this study.

The final body of knowledge is the available literature that has been written by other scholars on the portrayal of women in plays. This chapter will look at a continental and a national scholar.

### **2.1WHAT IS PORTRAYAL?**

Portrayal, or representation, according to the Oxford dictionary, is "a depiction of someone or something in a work of art and a representation of someone in a particular way." Therefore, if something is a portrayal of something else, it stands for an object. For instance, the portrayal of



women in a play means how the fictional characters stand for real women. A portrayal is intentionally used, and Young (1998.p128) calls this “intentional condition.” Further, Young provides the quality of a portrayal by stating that “nothing is a representation of an object unless it can be recognised by someone else other than the people intending it to be a [portrayal] of the object.”

## **2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW: AFRICAN SCHOLARS**

Hulls (1982) presents the various factors which hinder the progress and attention to the literature of and by women in her editorial. Nfah-Abbenyi espouses on this and says:

*One of the dramatic changes in the literary world over the last decade has been the blossoming of a large corps of female writers, poets, critics. It is not that black women writers did not exist prior to this period, but the black literary scene had historically been predominantly a male preserve. On the one hand, a white male-dominated publishing industry hadn't seen fit to publish the works of black women writers, on the other hand, even though among the intelligentsia, only the male articulation of the black experience had been viewed as worthy of literary expression. In conjunction with the growth of a movement for women's liberation, however, this situation has dramatically been reduced in recent years (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997).*

Thus, there is limited but growing literature on the portrayal of women in plays written by women.

Selasi (2015) also investigates the portrayal of women. However, her study is mostly focused on the ways in which female playwrights incorporate feminism in their literature, and whether they associate with the concept of feminism.

Selasi describes an interview with Atta Aidoo which reflects female writers' stance on feminism. In it, according to Selasi, Aidoo states that feminist writing:

*...is bound to be radical. It is probably bound to be militant. It should be socialistic. I don't know about Marxist. If it is socialistic, it is probably Marxist as well. A book written by a woman is just a book written by a woman. It doesn't make it feminist, because feminism is a specific category, it is an ideology. Feminism is an ideology. So a woman writer is just a woman writer. A book written by a woman is just a book written by a woman. When we say that literature is feminist, then we are speaking specifically of a literature produced from a feminist viewpoint. And that means that literature, if it is feminist, has done more; it affirms women. If you write a book about women, which portrays women as being silly, giggly, ineffectual characters, that's not feminist (Aidoo, 1996).*

Selasi muses on common themes that women discuss in their works. These include barrenness, marriage, witchcraft. Chastity is also heavily portrayed in African literature regarding female characters. Selasi states that Female Genital Mutilation (F.G.M) by some African cultures to reduce the sexual drive of women is a symptom of African obsession with chastity. She cites Mabel Eweirhoma, who says "A close look at the various images of African womanhood...recalls that to considerable extent depictions of African women in literature by

African women writers differ from the images presented by their male counterparts.” (Ekwierhoma, 2001, p.26).

One can see this in the work of Egyptian writer and activist Nawal El Saadawi (1972) where she states that FGM is an assault against women’s bodies, and she therefore challenges this. Saadawi’s vocal activism on women’s issues seems to corroborate the evidence Selasi presents on the fact that African feminism exists, and that African feminist portrayals are present in African literature.

Methuselah (2010) believes that female African playwrights tend to characterize men as predators and women the prey. She believes that comparing this to men is unrealistic. Selasi on the other hand is of the notion that African women write about realities that serve as a focus, rather than personal experiences alone. She asserts that female writers acknowledge the economic significance of the woman as, “mother, farmer and trader” (2010,p.34). Selasi stands by the belief that female playwrights characterize women in ways which are affirming. She cites Nwapa, (2007) by stating that this brings awareness to male writers of “woman’s inherent vitality, independent views, courage, self-confidence and her desire for gain and high social status.”

Nfah-Abbenyi supports this statement. She says that men have portrayed women “as passive, as always prepared to do the bidding of their husbands and family, as having no status of their own and therefore dependent on their husbands” (1997. p. 4). Therefore, Selasi concludes that the portrayal of women by men is different from the portrayal of women by women.

In Bruner's preface to *Unwinding Threads: Writing by Women in Africa* (1983.p.39), she notes that:

*[t]he African woman writing fiction today has to be somehow exceptional. Despite vast differences in traditions and beliefs among African societies, any female writer must have defied prevailing tradition if she speaks out as an individual and as a woman. In order to reach an international audience directly, she often has had to cross linguistic barriers. She may well have confronted the dictates of societies in which the perpetuation of a tradition submerges the contribution of the innovator, in which the subservience of the individual to the community is reinforced by group sanctions. In such societies, the accepted role of any artist is to commemorate custom, in words, in song, and in the selection of the details that validate the accepted ethics of that society. Generally, then, the perpetuator is preferred to the creator. To be outstanding is to court rejection.*

Bruner reveals here that the literature of African women undergoes social and at times, political resistance (such as the work of Nawal El Saadawi). The work of African women challenges the status quos, but speaking their truth and the truth of other African women often brings negative consequences by society. However, although sticking with, and writing the norm brings social acceptance, it is not authentic or realistic.

Selasi believes that the literature of African women writers in her research demonstrates that they are not perpetuators but rather creators. They strive to "create a more egalitarian culture and

challenge the narrow-minded and patriarchal ethics of their respective societies.” She therefore examines the works of women writers, who she believes have been “under-scrutinised by readers and academic scholars. These include the work of writers such as Mariama Bâ (Senegal), Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Nigeria), Tsitsi Dangarembga (Zimbabwe), and Leila Aboulela (Sudan). She scrutinises this literature as she believes that western feminism has not yet included the works of female African playwrights. Selasi then goes on to specify that to her, Western feminism “refers to the movement inspired by writers such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Stanton, Simone De Beauvoir and Kate Millett with their principal focus on the social and existential problems confronting European and American women.”

Thompson (2018) explores the representation of African women in the Diaspora. She analyses the works of Lynn Nottage’s *Ruined* (2009), Susan Lori Park’s *Venus* and Danai Gurira’s *Familiar* (2016). Her analysis reveals that African women are not always sexual victims or barely surviving on the poverty line, by the empowering portrayals. It is important to mention this work as it reflects Danai Gurira’s *In the Continuum* (2009). However, there is very little literature on Gurira’s latter play. Hence, this research will provide more investigation into Gurira’s work.

### **2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW: ZIMBABWEAN SCHOLARS**

Gaidzanwa (1985) presents a ground-breaking work that exposes the disparity in criticism in Zimbabwean literature. She examines the portrayal of Black women in Zimbabwean literature using classifications. These classifications include Rural and Urban Women, Women as Mothers, Women without Husbands and Women as Wives.

Gaidzanwa enlightens the reader on social hierarchies of women within Ndebele and Shona culture, and how this is portrayed through Zimbabwean literature. She explains how Zimbabwean literature by male and female writers reflect how women in Zimbabwe gain their status as their roles shift to wives and mothers; and as they mature in age. Therefore, single women are often portrayed as prostitutes, while childless are looked upon with contempt.

The scholar further highlights the struggling relationship between urban women and rural women in Zimbabwean literature. Rural women are suspicious of urban women, while urban women demean rural women. Gaidzanwa explains why this is the case by examining the socio-historical background of the migrant labour system of colonial Rhodesia, where rural Black men were not permitted to move to the cities with their wives. These men then began to develop relationships with the women of the cities and towns. Therefore, Gaidzanwa shows how the rift between urban and rural women is due to the attention, or lack of, of men. She further expands on this by saying:

*The unwaged women are much freer since they do not have much to sacrifice or to threaten men with so their important consideration is survival rather than responsibility. For this reason, it is the working class, mostly unwaged women, who are the most resilient, although not the most morally admirable. The middle-class, waged women still need men as husbands to legitimize their social position in the male dominated social order. These are the women most devastated when their relationships with men fail. (79)*

The stereotypical characterization of women by male Zimbabwean writers is also discussed by Gaidzanwa. Male writers depict adulterous wives, wayward single women and cheating girlfriends. These women are chastised by the authors in most of the resolutions. Financially independent women are portrayed negatively.

In contrast, stereotypical characterization of women by female writers is concerned with mostly hostility between women in domestic settings. These include polygamous settings where sister-wives battle for the attention of their husbands and battles between mother-in-laws and wives. Sisterhood is rarely depicted, and when it is, it is between sisters or mothers and daughters.

Gaidzanwa argues that male authors' negative portrayal of women in colonial and post colonial Zimbabwean literature, invalidates their struggle for basic human rights like health and education. Her solution is to create gender sensitive writings by portraying women's access to basic rights a necessity.

Martin Shaw (2007) analyses sexuality in her review of *She No Longer Weeps*. In traditional Zimbabwean society, sex is seen as sacred and reserved for the confines of marriage. Infringed in the sacredness of sex, chastity is seen as the moral sexual choice (or lack of) for African women. The act of sex should be in the confines of marriage. Sexuality in the play shows how the daughter directly battles with her mother and father for a new sexual morality in newly independent Zimbabwe ( Martin Shaw, 2007). Shaw identifies Dangarembga's use of socialist and radical feminism in "telling her story and projecting her message" (Martin Shaw, 2007, p.19).

Moyana (1996) believes that Dangarembga's work was pioneering in bringing about a new perspective on Zimbabwean women. However, Gapa (2014) believes that Dangarembga excludes the African woman in adopting a feminist approach. Gapa is of the stance that western feminism is the reason why, as she agrees with Furusa (2006) Zimbabwean women's portrayals of gender relations are harsh.

Vhutuza and Mucheke (2017) analyse a shift in gender power relations in newly post-colonial Zimbabwe of the 1980s. The study discusses the ways in which Dangarembga's portrayals challenge as well as resist the existing social norms and domestic settings. The paper also explores how the play instigates social change and reform. It also supports Womanism over Dangarembga's radical feminist portrayals as a better tool for social transformation.

Vhutuza (2014) further investigates the work of Danai Gurira, where he discusses the shift in social issues, as well as the remaining struggles portrayed by playwrights of the new millennium. However, *In the Continuum* is not mentioned alone on the portrayal of women in this research. Hence, this study will bridge the gap and analyse the play.

## **2.4 WHAT IS FEMININITY?**

It is important to discuss femininity in this research as the study examines the different characterisations of femininity presented by the playwrights. In *Who Said I Don't Want to Dance*, (2017) Thembelihle Moyo explores femininity in the context of the protagonist



questioning her sexuality and her gender roles. Therefore, to understand the playwright's portrayals of women such as these, femininity needs to be understood.

According to the Oxford encyclopaedia, the words femininity and womanhood are first recorded in Chaucer around 1380. In Africa, femininity was an important part of the Mau Mau army of Kenya, a concept taken in Hollywood's film *The Black Panther*.

The term femininity, or womanhood, according to the Oxford dictionary, generally refers to "the attributes, behaviours, interests, mannerisms, appearances, roles, and expectations that we have come to associate with being female during the socialization processes. Gender role socialisation relies on modelling and reinforcement – girls and women learn and internalise socially expected and acceptable feminine traits and behaviours and are rewarded for gender-appropriate behaviour." A female is a member of the sex that produces ova or bears young. The term feminine describes one characterised by, or possessing qualities generally attributed to a woman.

In 1949, French intellectual Simone de Beauvoir wrote that "no biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society" and "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," an idea that was picked up in 1959 by Canadian-American sociologist Erving Goffman and in 1990 by American philosopher Judith Butler, theorised that gender is not fixed or inherent but is rather a socially defined set of practices and traits that have, over time, grown to become labelled as feminine or masculine. Goffman argued that women are socialised to present themselves as "precious, ornamental and fragile, uninstructed in and ill-

suited for anything requiring muscular exertion" and to project "shyness, reserve and a display of frailty, fear and incompetence."

Second-wave feminists, influenced by de Beauvoir, believed that although biological differences between females and males were innate, the concepts of femininity and masculinity had been culturally constructed, with traits such as passivity and tenderness assigned to women and aggression and intelligence assigned to men. Girls, second-wave feminists said, were then socialised with toys, games, television and school into conforming to feminine values and behaviours.

American feminist Betty Friedan (1963) writes that the key to women's subjugation lay in the social construction of femininity as childlike, passive and dependent, and called for a "drastic reshaping of the cultural image of femininity." Those who view society through the backdrop of hegemonic masculinity believe that "Femininity is constructed around adaptation to male power. Its central feature is attractiveness to men, which includes physical appearance, ego-massaging, suppression of "power" emotions such as anger, nurturance of children, exclusive heterosexuality, sexual availability without sexual assertiveness, and sociability."

People who exhibit a combination of both masculine and feminine characteristics are considered androgynous, and feminist philosophers have argued that gender ambiguity may blur gender classification. Modern conceptualisations of femininity also rely not just upon social constructions, but upon the individualised choices made by women. Although focusing on H.I.V./A.I.D.S, Yule and Vhutuza (2017) state that the "masculine (male or female) impose[s] themselves on the feminine (female or male)." However, the feminine is not passive as she "[accepts] the imposition as a societal norm..."(p3)

Dutch psychologist and researcher Geert Hofstede (1998) writes that only behaviors directly connected with procreation can, strictly speaking, be described as feminine or masculine, and yet every society worldwide recognizes many additional behaviors as more suitable to females than males, and vice versa. He describes these as relatively arbitrary choices mediated by cultural norms and traditions, identifying "masculinity versus femininity" as one of five basic dimensions in his theory of cultural dimensions. Hofstede describes feminine behaviors such as "service", "permissiveness", and "benevolence", and describes those countries that focus on equality, solidarity, quality of work-life, and the resolution of conflicts by compromise and negotiation as countries promoting femininity.

Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) believes that women are the "other." Beauvoir points out that, "Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man. And she is simply what man decrees; thus called 'the sex', by which is meant that [...] she is sex – absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other,"(p39). Beauvoir says that women are the "Second Sex" because they are secondary to men. Her coining of the "eternal feminine" solidifies this idea of ideal femininity. She was stating that a woman's femininity determines her worth and that a woman's value is based on the man's default. This "eternal feminine" was constructed because, as she points out, "They are women in virtue of their anatomy and physiology. Throughout history they have always been subordinated to men, and hence their dependency is not the result of a historical event or a social change – it was not something that occurred."In order to understand the ideal feminine, one must understand the social constructs that made the ideal feminine.

Friedan, (1963) also weighs in on the subject of the ideal feminine. She notes that, "The feminine mystique permits, even encourages, women to ignore the question of their identity. The mystique says they can answer the question 'Who am I?' by saying 'Tom's wife... Mary's mother.' – a woman no longer has a private image to tell her who she is, or can be, or wants to be," and that women are not considered female if they do not abide by these societal norms and mores. Friedan thinks that "the core of the problem for women today is not sexual but a problem of identity – a stunting or evasion of growth that is perpetuated by the feminine mystique." At the time this book was written, women were constantly shown their roles were that of the homemaker and the nurturer – if they wanted to be considered feminine, they would prescribe to these roles.

If ideal femininity is a woman who accepts and encourages femininity in all its forms, the opposite of the ideal feminine would be a lesbian. They may shed the feminine identity in order to build their own identity and fight the "feminine mystique". Wittig (2005) writes, "Lesbian society destroys the artificial (social) fact constituting women as a 'natural group.' A lesbian society pragmatically reveals that the division from men of which women have been the object is a political one and shows that we have been ideologically rebuilt into a 'natural group.' In the case of women, ideology goes far since our bodies as well as our minds are the product of this manipulation." She goes on to say, "as individuals as well we question 'woman,' which for us, as for Simone de Beauvoir, is only a myth." Wittig believes that women must reject the definition of "'woman', which is imposed on them, just as the lesbian community has.

Gender stereotypes influence traditional feminine occupations, resulting in micro aggression toward women who break traditional gender roles. These stereotypes include that women have a

caring nature, have skill at household-related work, have greater manual dexterity than men, are more honest than men, and have a more attractive physical appearance. Occupational roles associated with these stereotypes include: midwife, teacher, accountant, data entry clerk, cashier, salesperson, receptionist, housekeeper, cook, maid, social worker, and nurse. Occupational segregation maintains gender inequality and gender pay gap.

## **2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.5.1 ROLE CONGRUITY THEORY**

Role congruity theory proposes that people tend to view deviations from expected gender roles negatively. It supports the empirical evidence that gender discrimination exists in areas traditionally associated with one gender or the other. It is sometimes used to explain why people have a tendency to evaluate behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman.

Feminist philosophers such as Butler (1990) and de Beauvoir (1949) contend that femininity and masculinity are created through repeated performances of gender; these performances reproduce and define the traditional categories of sex and/or gender.

Many second-wave feminists reject what they regard as constricting standards of female beauty, created for the subordination and objectifying of women and self-perpetuated by reproductive competition and women's own aesthetics.

Others, such as lipstick feminists and some other third-wave feminists, argue that feminism shouldn't devalue feminine culture and identity, and that symbols of feminine identity such as

make-up, suggestive clothing and having a sexual allure can be valid and empowering personal choices for both sexes.

Serano (2011) notes that masculine girls and women face much less social disapproval than feminine boys and men, which she attributes to sexism. Serano argues that women wanting to be like men is consistent with the idea that maleness is more valued in contemporary culture than femaleness, whereas men willing to give up masculinity in favour of femininity directly threatens the notion of male superiority as well as the idea that men and women should be opposites. To support her thesis, Serano cites the far greater public scrutiny and disdain experienced by male-to-female cross-dressers compared with that faced by women who dress in masculine clothes, as well as research showing that parents are likelier to respond negatively to sons who like Barbie dolls and ballet or wear nail polish than they are to daughters exhibiting comparably masculine behaviours.

## **2.6 FEMINISM**

“There isn’t just one feminism. There are feminisms”- Ruth Enid Zambrana. Director of the Consortium on Race, Gender and Ethnicity at the University of Maryland.

The term “feminism” may never be specifically defined. There seem to be as many definitions for feminism as there are feminists. This is why exploring the works of different female playwrights serves as an interesting discourse. The Second Wave feminism ideal of the personal being political is the basis to which this research adopts; as the various portrayals of women by the female playwrights are varied but all important. They allow the definition of the term to be adaptable by allowing each playwright’s voice to take her own meaning of what feminism is.

A definition I have chosen in better understanding the concept of feminism is by Baumgardner, Richards (2006.p.56) Here, feminism is, “in the most basic sense, exactly what the dictionary says it is: The movement for social, political and economic equality of men and women.” The three plays being analysed all have a common struggle: The equality and equity of women in socio-political spheres. This struggle is demonstrated through the female portrayals, where the stories challenge social practices and beliefs.

### **2.6.1 INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM**

Feminist movements and theory have often overlooked the concept of intersectional feminism. Bell Hooks (1991) articulates that intersectional feminism “challenged the notion that ‘gender’ was the primary factor determining a woman’s fate.” Analysing the portrayal of women in the lenses of different female playwrights helps in illustrating the fact that, unlike early feminist movements, women are not a homogenous group; women confront multiple forms of vulnerability.

Feminism itself can become exclusionary. This occurs when various forms of social stratification such as sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, tribe, disability, language and class are separately categorized rather than interwoven; it marginalises the less privileged women in society. Zambrana (1982) explains that “if feminism is advocating for women's rights and equality between the sexes, intersectional feminism is the understanding of how women's overlapping identities... impact the way they experience oppression and discrimination.” Thus, there is a need to expose various struggles that women face; and this study is inclusive as it analyses the portrayal of women according to women of varying social stratifications. Racism, sexism,

homophobia, transphobia, ableism and xenophobia are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another.

Black feminism is a critical social theory that Black women self-define and design to oppose a system of racial, gendered, sexual and class oppression. Black feminism resists negative images of Black womanhood existing in patriarchy and discriminatory social practices.

Long before the term, “intersectional feminism” was coined, the concept of intersectional feminism existed. For instance, Sojourner Truth’s *Ain’t I a Woman* (1851) speech is her critique on essentialist ideas of femininity from a racialised position as a former slave. Likewise, Anna Julia Cooper’s “The Colored Woman's Office”, (1892), articulates how Black women are the most pivotal actors in social change movements, because of their experience with multiple facets of subjugation.

Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) gave a name to the face of compounded oppression of women by becoming the first person to use the word “intersectionality” in her seminal. Here, she discusses Black Feminism, which highlights how being Black and being a woman do not exist separately, but reinforce each other.

Crenshaw identifies three aspects of intersectionality that affect the visibility of Black women:

1. Structural intersectionality
2. Political intersectionality
3. Representational intersectionality.



Structural intersectionality tackles how Black women experience domestic violence and rape as compared to the White woman's experience.

Political intersectionality examines how feminist and anti racists laws and policies have paradoxically decreased the visibility of violence against women of colour.

Finally, representational intersectionality delves into how pop culture portrayals of Black women can obscure the actual, lived experiences of Black women.

Bell Hook's (1988) focuses on gender, race, intersectionality and capitalism. She describes how these themes are able to create and perpetuate class domination and oppressive systems. It examines the roles of, and portrayal of women in the media. In addition, it looks at the devaluation of Black womanhood and the marginalisation of Black women.

*Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984) further talks about the issue of Black women being marginalised. Hooks asserts: "To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body."(62)This literature provides a platform for inclusivity in feminist theory. It does this by advocating for women to accept each other despite their acknowledged differences. Further, she promotes the idea that involvement of men is significant in the feminist movement. This is necessary to eliminate separationist ideology.

Hill Collins (1990) hypothesizes two central themes found in Black feminist studies made of Black women's works. The first is "how Black women's paid work is organized within intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender" (p74) Furthermore, she highlights how the "concerns [of] Black women's unpaid family labour is simultaneously confining and

empowering" (p76). Collins states that the unpaid household work is viewed by Black women as a tool of resistance against oppression instead of oppression by men.

Black feminist thought suggests that Black feminist philosophy may be recorded by others but it is created by Black women. Additionally, the definition deems that Black women have a unique standpoint on their experiences. This unique outlook is shared amongst Black women. Black feminist thought further highlights that although Black women have commonalities in their perspective, individual diversity in language, tribe, region, social status, sexuality results in Black women expressing these shared outlooks in different ways. The book also reveals how Black women may not be aware of their different standpoints. Hence, Collins encourages Black intellectual women to produce more factual material regarding the Black woman experience. Presenting this theory in this study is therefore important as it helps understand different expressions of common themes by the female playwrights. .

### **2.6.2 AFRICAN FEMINISM, WOMANISM AND MOTHERISM**

Nigerian author Chiamamanda Ngozie Adichie, who has been labeled as the modern face of African feminism, gives examples of what the African feminist agenda is in her enlightening TED Talk “We Should All Be Feminists” (2012). She explains African feminism in her own personal context by stating that, “Gender matters everywhere in the world, but I want to focus on Nigeria and on Africa in general, because it is where I know, and because it is where my heart is.” This is the basis of the intersection of feminism, which, in her context, is African feminism.

Adichie further uses an incident to make her audience better understand feminism in the African context and her dispute of feminism being “un-African”:

*...Then an academic, a Nigerian woman told me that feminism was not our culture and that feminism wasn't African, and that I was calling myself a feminist because I had been corrupted by "Western books."... But anyway, since feminism was un-African, I decided that I would now call myself "a happy African feminist." At some point I was a happy African feminist who does not hate men and who likes lip gloss and who wears high-heels for herself but not for men. Of course a lot of these were tongue-in-cheek, but that word feminist is so heavy with baggage, negative baggage. You hate men, you hate bras, you hate African culture, that sort of thing.*

Feminism, therefore, according to Adichie is just essential to African women as it is to other parts of the world. African feminism reflects the issues faced by African women, and it in no way imitates the white woman and her struggles.

Steady (1981) describes African feminism as "emphasizing female autonomy and co-operation; nature over culture; the centrality of children, multiple mothering and kinship Steady's definition of African feminism is to a great extent, its meaning to plenty of African (female) theorists. African feminism to many of these scholars is not separationist, but rather is an all-inclusive concept for women, children and men. African feminism solicits men to help out in empowering women, rather than an antagonistic ideology against men.

Womanism, on the other hand is:

*the philosophy of daring black daughters on the well – being of the entire Africa-African and African-American communities, (fe)-male, adults and children, canvassing support for the importance of the African woman's trajectory by challenging the madness of all oppressive forces impeding Black woman's struggle for survival, which will include unacceptable stance of*

*poor quality of life of the African woman and family freedom. Basically, it is black feminism against racism, sexism, classicism, sexual preference, physical disability, and caste* (Alkali, et al, 2013, p. 3).

The aim of African womanism is to cancel out the western definition of feminism. Instead, it strives to affirm the exceptional identity of the African woman. It also includes women in the Diaspora. Mangena (2013) believes that the African-centred and African-Womanist theory is the African woman's remedy to the limitations that Feminism and Black Feminism embody. This is because it is informative and knowledgeable in understanding African and African American women's writing.

The core of womanism is that both culture and identity are pivotal to a woman's existence. Ogunyemi (1985) agrees with this in her article, where she states that "the womanist vision is to answer the ultimate question of how to equitably share power among the races and between the sexes." However, Walker's definition of a "Womanist" (2005,p.11-12) is:

1. From *womanish*. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A blackfeminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to femalechildren, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous,audacious, courageous or *willful* behaviour. Wanting to know more and in greater depththan is considered "good" for one. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to begrown." Responsible. In charge. *Serious*.

2. *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciatesand prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as naturalcounterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men,sexually and/or non-sexually.

Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a universalist, as in: “Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige and black?” Ans. “Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.” Traditionally capable, as in: “Mama, I’m walking to Canada and I’m taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.” Reply: “It wouldn’t be the first time.”

Motherism would refer to an Afrocentric feminist theory: “. . . anchored on the matrix of motherhood . . .” (Acholonu, 1995). She says that it is based on the ability of women to manage their homes, and to nurture their children into adulthood. Godono (2005) further expands on this when she explains the concept of Motherism as stemming from Africa, the Mother Continent of Humanity. She then explains that “the Motherist is the man or woman committed to the survival of Mother Earth...” by citing Acholonu (3).

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has established the theoretical framework influencing this research. It consists of the branches of feminism found in the texts to be analysed. In addition, the concept of femininity has been explained in order to understand the portrayal of women. Portrayal has been defined; and then a review of literature in parts of Africa as well as in Zimbabwe has been discussed. Although there is literature concerning Tsitsi Dangaremba’s *She No Longer Weeps* and a few regarding the work of Danai Gurira, there is no available research on the work of Thembelihle Moyo. Therefore, this study will go a long way in bringing to light this Bulawayo playwright.

After reviewing the available research, there is a common trend in the literature concerning the portrayal of African women: It is socially conscious as well as reactionary.

## **CHAPTER THREE: OVERVIEW OF COMMON THEMES IN THE THREE PLAYS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter outlines brief backgrounds of the playwrights, as well as an understanding into the personal views they have concerning womanhood. This is done to help in showing that socio-cultural, geographical and generational differences influence a writer's perception on similar themes. An insight into the portrayal of women is given, as illustrated in the plays. It dissects portions of the texts with regards to the portrayal of women. Next, analyses and explanations regarding the dissected texts are given. Descriptions of the plays in the context of feminist literature are provided, as well as exposing gender stereotypes. The social and political background of the plays which tells the place and time the plays were written is provided. In addition, sequential arrangement of events, or plot summary is provided to give forehand knowledge of the events that occur in the text.

### **3.1 PLOT OF *WHO SAID I DON'T WANT TO DANCE***

*Who Said I Don't Want to Dance*(2017) is a One Act, Eleven Scenes stage play by Thembelihle Moyo, which follows the life of a young widow who faces challenges as she tries to rediscover herself after the death of her beloved husband. It explores an aspect of ancient but still existing Zimbabwean cultural practices, where if a woman wants to keep resources acquired during her marriage, she must find a suitor among the late husband's clan. This story highlights the African woman's subjugation and oppression in a patriarchal society.

Gina, a young widow in her mid-thirties is faced with the dilemma to remarry within her husband's clan in order to continue enjoying the benefits she had when her husband Sipho was still alive. Her only way of salvation is to marry her husband's younger brother Buyi; despite the fact that there is only platonic love between the two. The instigator responsible for enforcing this union is the unsupportive and harsh sister-in-law, Mala. Mala is convinced her brothers are too gentle with Gina, and wants her to feel the inferiority of being a daughter in law in the Magwaza clan. Gina also has to choose to fight or succumb to gender-specified roles as her mother MaDube and sister Zothile explains to her. They fear that she will not be accepted by society because of her unconventional way of being.

Unknown to the people and to Gina herself, is the fact that Gina is in the process of rediscovering herself, her ambitions, her identity and her sexuality. She decides that she wants to have her ovaries permanently tied as her method of contraceptive, but the society she is in requires a man's blessing before making such a decision. The sweet village clinic nurse Noluthando explains this to her, and she is frustrated. Noluthando and Gina strike a friendship, but soon one realises that there is more to it, the two women have an unexplored sexual connection. Above all, Gina has had a yearning for several years to explore the land beyond her rural home; which has been the only place she has known.

The plot twist occurs when the audience or reader discovers that Noluthando, Gina's potential flame, is an old flame of Buyi's; who is Gina's husband-to-be. During the Passover ceremony, where Gina is officially passed over from her late husband Sipho, to the care of Buyi,



Noluthando arrives. Her arrival brings confusion between for the Magwaza clan, but clarity and freedom for Gina; who can now choose how she wants to live her life.

### **3.2 BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY**

Table readings for *Who Said I Don't Want to Dance* where done in February 2017 at Amakhosi Theatre. However, plans of production where stopped prematurely by the Censorship Board of Zimbabwe as they felt that the issues tackled in the play were unconstitutional according to the law of Zimbabwe. Therefore, the production abruptly ended with the hope that in the near future production would resume. Basically the story can be set anywhere in the world with just two set-ups representing different homes and the open stage to allow for transition of other settings. The play is due to be showcased at United States based Pulley & Buttonhole Theatre Company for its 2018-2019 Season amongst plays by Oscar Wilde and Teresa Miller. Ina direct interview with Moyo, she explains the inspiration behind her play:

“I was inspired by the patriarchal society that we live in, whereby male privilege always dominates and our dreams are limited by where we're born. There is a vast world waiting for us to explore, so this play was a way of challenging the universe that there is more to life than being a housewife.”

### **3.3 ABOUT THEMBELIHLE MOYO**

Thembelihle Moyo was born on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October 1983 at Mpilo Hospital in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. Her father was an industrial worker and her mother is a housewife. She was raised in a township in Bulawayo, and managed to get a college arts education at Amakhosi, where she was taught by renowned Zimbabwean actor, playwright and theatre director Cont Mhlanga. She is a producer (currently working as an Arts and Culture consultant) and playwright based in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. She has been working in the arts and culture industry for the past 10 years. Thembelihle Moyo is an arts enthusiast who is passionate about writing and dance. She is the founder of Gitiz Arts Organization, an arts organization based in Bulawayo Zimbabwe and is the Director of Total Traditional Expo, Dance Remedial and Dance Zimbabwe. She has written plays that include *I want to fly*, *Big Girls Don't Cry*, *Sibahle Nje* and *Let It Out*; directed plays that include *Song Of A Woman* and *Color Black*; and written a book: *Total Traditional Dances*. The television dramas *Isipho sami*, *Voice of Madwaleni* and *It All Matters* have also been penned by her. She is also one of the African female playwrights published by Methuan Publishers under the collection *Contemporary Plays by African Women* .

### **3.4 PLOT OF *IN THE CONTINUUM***

Continuum refers to a relationship of continuity, of which no separate parts are discernible. As is the meaning, *In the Continuum* (2004) is a One Act, Seventeen Scenes tragic comedy centred on the feminisation of H.IV/AIDS through the juxtaposed actions and experiences of the archetypal characters of Abigail Murambe and Nia James. The play is about the linked history of, and how the two female Black protagonists come to terms with their H.I.V diagnosis; even though they are from two different societies. In the Continuum has many actors on the stage, but their roles are played by two actors on the actual stage. The comparative tool in the entire play is the

juxtaposition between Actor One and Actor Two. The settings are juxtaposed between Harare, Zimbabwe, Africa; where Actor One is positioned; and Los Angeles, California, U.S.A; where Actor Two is stationed. Abigail and the characters surrounding her is Actor One while Nia and the characters in her sphere is Actor Two. Their worlds are physically apart, but share similar thematic concerns. The third character is the target audience of the play. Each actor addresses her in her invisibility, even though she is physically absent from the play. This third character is the last recipient of the themes conveyed by the two actors.

At the beginning of the continuum, is a flashback of young Abigail and Nia playing the same game but located on opposite sides of the world. The theme of H.I.V/A.I.D.S is exposed here when the scene ends with the children tormented by the fact that their generation is one that is affected by the H.I.V/A.D.S pandemic. The next scene brings the third actor to the present day of Abigail and Nia, where they try to navigate life as young adults whose expectations of life as children were shattered. Abigail's shattered expectations are that her ideal pictures of what marital life would be like have not been met. She is aware that her husband is unfaithful, and wants to salvage her marriage through providing him with another child; preferably a son. She tells this to a supporting flat character, Evermore, who is her co-worker. On the other side of the world; Nia is disappointed by Darnell, who she has dressed up and snuck out for; but he hasn't showed up to the club. She tells her friend Trisha, who's main role is to advance the plot. Nia also reveals her insecurities by stating that even though plenty of women throw themselves at his feet (as he is a coveted basketball player with a seemingly bright future) he always goes back to her. She also suspects she is pregnant, and hopes for a son.

A call by the hospital for Abigail's review, and gun violence at the club where Nia is; lead the actors to the hospital. Here, they discover that they are both H.I.V positive from a distracted, uncaring Nurse Mugobo. The protagonists now have to deal with the fear of telling their partners, even though these partners are responsible for infecting them. This fear is heightened by Probation Patti and Petronella, who play upon their confusion with their self-righteous facts on life. Abigail seeks African medicine, a sex worker and even her maid for answers and comfort; while Nia seeks counsel and comfort from her mother, her cousin Keysha and even her mother-in-law Gail, who offers to buy her silence with five thousand dollars. At their lowest, the characters turn to God in prayer. They are conflicted as to whether to walk in and speak their truth despite the repercussions, or to conform. The stakes are too high and they choose the safer route of silently conforming.

### **3.5 BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY**

Gurira and Salter collaborated on *In the Continuum* while they were in a post-graduate acting program at New York University. A well-received production at Primary Stages in Manhattan on September 11 to October 30, 2005 led to an extended five month off-Broadway run at the Perry Street Theatre. The production then toured from April 2006 to August 2007 at Harare International Festival of the Arts (Zimbabwe), Baxter Theatre in Cape Town, Market Theatre in Johannesburg (South Africa) all the way to, among other places, Traverse Theatre in Scotland, Yale Repertory, Centre Theatre Group in Los Angeles and Philadelphia Theatre Company. This tour was a cultural exchange tour sponsored by the US Department of Cultural Affairs and Bloomberg. Salter's trepidation was that she would alienate her African audience through the characters she created and describes as "lewd and raw" and how "They curse [and] make

references to genitalia.”However, her fears were put to rest as audiences both in Africa and the West received the play well. The play has won several awards which include the Global Tolerance Award from the Friends of the United Nations as well as the Best New American Play in the 2006John Gasner Outer Critics Award.

### **3.6 ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHTS**

Danai Gurira was born in the United States to Zimbabwean parents. She was raised in Zimbabwe, where she attended an all girls’ school, the Dominican Convent in Harare and became interested in drama. She has a Masters of Fine Arts from New York University. At the United Nations on Women’s Day, Gurira shed light on her writing by stating that, “Everything I write is about trying to give voice to those who have been denied a platform to just be heard and be seen in their full humanity.”

Nikkole Salter is a Los Angeles born actress with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Arts from Howard University, and a Masters of Fine Arts from New York University. Nikkole is socially responsible and is a founder of the In the Continuum Project, Inc. This program is about artistic innovation and community empowerment.

The playwrights co-wrote and acted in *In the Continuum* doing what critics have described as “marvelous mimics, deftly shuffling accent and countenance to create a memorable gallery of characters, virtually all of them women.

### **3.7 PLOT OF SHE NO LONGER WEEPS**

*She No Longer Weeps* (1987) is a play centered on Martha, a young female university student who falls in love with Freddy, who is a bachelor slightly older than her. Martha has her first sexual encounter with Freddy, and falls pregnant. She is told to leave her home by her father, a reverend minister. The play begins with Martha unpacking her clothes in her bedroom, which in turn leads to a flashback showing us that she is back at home after having been driven away by her family so as not to disgrace her father. She mentions having stayed at her sister Mercy's, but explains that her father commanded Mercy to kick her out and stay with Freddy. The flashback also shows that Martha has been mistreated and abused by Freddy, who has relationships with other women like Gertrude and Chip. The abuse leads to Martha running back home, and that's where we find her unpacking her belongings in her bedroom.

On discovering that her daughter has ran away from her baby's father, Martha's mother Ma'Mercy urges her to return before her father arrives. An argument ensues, where Martha expresses her discontent and her feminist views. Her father walks in on this and tells her to leave. In the process, Freddy arrives demanding Martha to return to his apartment. However, Martha's parents realise how abusive he is and let her stay. Martha's father still wants to protect his reputation and cannot have Martha stay with the family. Ma'Mercy pleads with him to allow her to stay as she needs support, but Ba'Mercy's decision is final and they take her to a relative's.

The third act begins years later, when Martha is now an independent, financially stable single mother. She is in a relationship with Lovemore, but is guarded and emotionally unavailable to him. For her, the relationship seems to benefit her sexually, but she could do without it. Her daughter Sarah is now seven years old, and she showers her with affection through materialistic

objects. She is regarded by the community as an Ice Queen, and her unconventional life is the topic of disdain amongst married women. Martha refuses to be the poster child or role model to all single mothers, and would rather live her life in her own terms.

Despite being unavailable throughout her life, Freddy arrives at Martha's demanding custody of their child. He highlights how the law is on his side because he appears to have a more stable environment to raise a child, since he is now married and she is not. Sarah is taken by Freddy, leaving Martha with the wrath of a woman scorned. Martha's wrath leads to her decision to invite her parents as well as Freddy, with the goal of stabbing Freddy and hiring thugs to harass him in the presence of her parents. After this, she tells her father to call the police on her.

### **3.8 ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT**

Tsitis Dangarembga was born on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 1959, in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia). Her early childhood occurred in Britain, where she did her education. She then moved to Rhodesia to complete her secondary school. Dangarembga then studied medicine at Cambridge University, and then moved back to Rhodesia shortly before independence due to feeling isolated and experiencing racism. In Zimbabwe, she studied psychology, and was a member of a drama group at the university. She has worked as a copywriter at a marketing agency. Dangarembga has been a member of Zambuko theatre group. Research in African Literatures (Vol. 38, p14) has described Dangaremba's views on feminism:

For Dangarembga, feminism stands for voice, personal integrity, assertion of self, socially productive uses of the erotic, and recognition of the value of women's productive and reproductive labour.

### **3.9 CONNECTED PORTRAYALS OF WOMEN IN THE PLAYS**

The playwrights, as shown, come from different backgrounds, varying physical locations and relatively diverse life experiences. What they do have in common is that they are Black women; and as Black women, comparable themes are present in their existence. In *In the Continuum*, there is a scene where Abigail is at Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation studios in Harare, drops some tissue paper, and Nia, who is at a night club in Los Angeles picks it up. This imagery demonstrates the shared pain that Black women have universally dealt with. Further, Nia, who is American is described as wearing her, "big chain, with the medallion of the motherland," while going to the club. This illustrates her resonance to Africa, amicably referred to as the "motherland" by African Americans, even though she has never physically set foot on African soil. The connection that all Black women have is further sealed when American Probation Patti asks asks Nia, "if you were in my shoes, what would you do? And immediately after, Petronella, who is driving in Harare Central Business Distirct, describes her Western label Stella McCartney pumps. As presented in Chapter Two regarding Hill Collins (1990) assertion that Black women have commonalities in their perspective, the playwrights' portrayals of women in the three plays share common depictions and experiences, due to a common history, due to globalisation and due to neocolonialism. These similar portrayals will be explored, showing, just as Hill Collins explained, that the shard outlooks are explained differently due to individual diversities of the playwrights. .



### 3.10 THE PORTRAYAL OF MOTHERHOOD

The plays exhibit elements of the Motherism ideology discussed in Chapter Two, which Acholonu (1995) describes as the ability of women to manage homes and to nurture their children into adulthood.

*In the Continuum* however portrays a struggle in raising children, through the prickly and fickle relationship between the Black American family of Nia and her mother, whose name we do not learn but is only called Mama. Mama's opening line is, "Hey! Hey, get offa my grass," and she mutters "Nasty kids." This sets the tone for Mama, who depicts a fed up experience on motherhood as a Black American woman living on the peripheries of the poverty line in the ghetto. Even though in the opening line Mama is shouting at the children from the neighbourhood, this opening line also suggests a deeper groaning within her; her desire for space, her need to breathe, her longing to have a name outside of being a mother; her cry to belong to herself again; a moment of self-care. She is marking her boundaries and crying to own herself when she tells the "nasty kids," to get off her grass. However, her reality is that there are children under her care, who need her nourishment and her habitation so they will not be getting off her "grass," (grass interpreted as nourishment, life-giving and shelter) any time soon. Mama's disadvantaged economical condition has made motherhood a depleting rather than rewarding experience, a condition that her niece, Keysha describes as a, "hood-rat, baby-mama, walkin' around with cold sores and house shoes, buyin' government cheese with food stamps..." Motherhood for a poor African American woman is therefore portrayed by Salter as a straining experience of constant sacrifice.

The very fact that the name of Mama is never given, and that her role has become her name, illuminates on a bigger issue of how women are stripped of their identity once they become mothers, and their whole existence is limited to the role of motherhood. Mama has five children, and her youngest is a six month old infant called Imani. She is exhausted by motherhood, and cannot wait for them to grow up and leave. She expresses this when she says, "I'm tired of coming second to ya'll. I can't remember the last time I had me some lotion or some new clothes." This statement is similar to de Beauvoir's (1949) theory, discussed in the previous chapter; of women being the "second sex," or the "other," and playing secondary, after-thought roles in socio-political structures. We also see this when she tells Nia that she cannot stay with her as she is an adult now; and that now that Nia is out of the house, there are "four to go." She is counting down to the day that little Imani and her siblings leave the house, the same way a prisoner would count down to the last day of a jail sentence. Maybe then, she will regain her identity and attain freedom to be a whole woman with other interests and roles outside of motherhood.

Despite Mama's sombre outlook on motherhood, she has not faltered on her responsibilities as a mother. This is shown in the way she lovingly talks to, and cares for crying Imani; giving her attention even as she has a serious conversation with Nia. The conversation with Nia depicts Mama as a caring, albeit tired of her troubled child, mother. She admonishes Nia to learn from her mistakes and not to repeat the cycle of getting caught up in ghastly consequential activities or getting pregnant at a young age as she did. She expresses this when she says, "I was in love too, okay...five times/but don't end up pregnant Nia. Cuz once you turn this switch on, you can't turn it off." In this statement, Mama also reveals how different men father her five children; and hopes that Nia learns from this by protecting herself. However, Salter also exposes the difficulty

for women to be assertive in contraceptive methods; because just like Mama, Nia is now pregnant.

The portrayal of the mother and daughter relationship between Nia and Mama is one that is ironically threatened by the child-protection laws of America. Probation Patti urges Nia to mend her relationship with Mama when she says a powerful statement on the significance of a mother's availability in a young girl's growth, "A girl needs her mother, Nia." Here, we learn that Nia has been estranged from her mother because she reported her for abusing her. Nia has therefore had to raise herself while moving from foster care to rehabilitation centres, while Mama has had to go to family court and take anger management classes. Mama, however, sadly explains that disciplining Nia was not to hurt her but to protect, "I already been everywhere you been, Nia. I was just trying to keep you from goin' to half of them places/Real love lasts forever, but so do real mistakes." Salter therefore portrays how Nia has had to learn life lessons from the streets and not from her mother; and this could possibly be the reason for her hard character and her poor decisions. Further, Salter depicts how although the law is rigorous and helpful in identifying and protecting children who are genuinely abused, it has blurred the lines between discipline and abuse; and led to the breaking up of the family network. Parent-child relationships in America are as fickle as one phone call to child-protection services, in the way Nia and Mama's has been disintegrated.

Similarly, the portrayal of the relationship between Martha and Ma'Mercy in *She No Longer Weeps* is strained, not by the law, but by culture and religion. Ma'Mercy's will to protect and care for Martha is confined by her obligation to honour her husband's decision to send Martha away; as he is the head of the house. The family set-up is very patriarchal, influenced by Christianity, where a woman must submit to her husband, and also influenced by the Shona

culture of honouring the man, whose authority should not be questioned. Therefore, when Ma'Mercy gives her opinion about how they cannot "send away [Martha] when she needs [her] the most," it is no surprise when she gets a threatening reply from her husband, who says, "Are you questioning my judgement?" Ma'Mercy therefore loses her daughter because she has no final say on how to raise her children, her husband does. Martha is therefore sent away.

Tsitsi Dangarembga also exposes how mothers in Zimbabwean society get lost in the role of motherhood, as we never learn her name either. Instead, Martha's mother is called Ma'Mercy, which translates to Mercy's mother, as her identity. Even in an intimate bedroom setting alone with her husband, he never mentions her by name; and she therefore never gets a chance to escape from this role and explore her intimacy as a lover. She also calls her husband Baba wa Mercy in the bedroom and never his name; so much that it is ingrained in her mind even in the bedroom that this is the father of her children, the head of the house and he should always be honoured and respected. Parenting is given precedence over everything; and it constricts the woman from exploring her sexuality or attaining pleasure in her sexuality; as she is reminded even when alone with her sexual partner that she has a conjugal duty and her main purpose for sex is to please the man and to bear him children.

MaDube's relationship with her daughters Gina and Zothile in *Who Said I Don't Want to Dance* is also influenced by Christianity and the culture; but in this instance the culture of the Rhodesian colonisers. Just as Ma'Mercy has taught Mercy to conform to the gender assigned roles of womanhood, MaDube has also trained her daughter Zothile to choose to conform so as to be socially acceptable. She believes that, or has been taught that, "it is not healthy for a woman to be alone," and therefore pressures Zothile to get married. MaDube tells Gina, who she is worried does not fit in, that she needs to be domesticated in the way her former Rhodesian boss Mrs

Nixon, taught her skills on being a “lady” when she was a domestic help. MaDube further encourages Gina to be a “Proverbs 31” woman and to “not tempt God” by her unconventional character. Similarly, Ma’Mercy encourages Martha to conform, by “keeping quiet day and night and watching, watching what her man does, letting him enjoy himself like a child who does not know that soon it will be time to go home.” The relationships between the mothers and their daughters are clouded by having to tip-toe and walk on eggshells around the male ego; and so they cannot enjoy and accept their daughters for who they are; or gain meaningfully personal relationships with their daughters. Even Mama in *In the Continuum* does not allow Nia to stay at home, and would rather give her money to rent a room for the night, because she “ain’t gonna let [Nia] scare [her] man away.” Thus, the natural ability for the mothers to raise their children in the healthy way with which the ideology of Motherism prescribes is disrupted by the rules of the law, culture and religion.

### **3.11 PREGNANCY AND NATURE**

The pregnancies in Abigail and Nia’s storylines in *In the Continuum*; as well as Martha’s in *She No Longer Weeps*, depict how the characters are symbolically pregnant with societal pressures and expectations; as well as the anxiety caused by the gender-specified role of being nurturers. Abigail’s pregnancy is not only symbolic of her hopes to save her marriage, but also her unfulfilled dreams of the ideal life she had envisioned for herself. The witchdoctor gives her a potion that can terminate this pregnancy, but Abigail would rather hold onto the hope of actualising these dreams. Likewise, Nia views her pregnancy, if it s a boy, as her way to hold onto Darnell. She however deliberates on getting an abortion when she discovers her HIV status. This deliberation signifies the fact that Nia knows that being infused by, and conforming to society’s expectations on women only births sickness; and produces women who do not live up

to their full potential and who are displaced in the margins of society. This could explain why Gina in *Who Said I Don't Want to Dance* wants her ovary tubes tied, so that she can be free to live her life.

Martha's pregnancy leads her to attempt to become domesticated by learning how to knit. She exclaims, "Ha! I shall spend the rest of my life knitting at this rate...But it's bad-I've started too early." Pregnancy means that she needs to alter her personality and become more nurturing, a skill which does not come naturally for her as expected of a woman, which frustrates her. MaDube in *Who Said I Don't Want to Dance* seems to have mastered the art of knitting, as she knits for her grandchildren and her husband, calling it "taking care of one's man." She further talks about the symbolic nature of her knitting:

*Gina, knitting this scarf is a symbol. A symbol of honour, love and submission towards the head of the house...your father is the head, and I am just the neck that turns the head. This is why I have a successful marriage of thirty-three years."*

The playwrights' emphases on knitting in the two plays highlight how the characters struggle and work hard to fit into gender-specified roles of being nurturing and socially-agreeable. These elements in the plays reflect Butler (1990) and de Beauvoir's (1949) assertions that femininity and masculinity are created through repeated performances of gender. We see this through the older generation of female characters, who now want to pass on what they were taught regarding femininity to the younger characters; and just as the younger characters now battle with whether to uphold or halt/ terminate (as symbolised by the pregnancies) what they were socialised regarding womanhood.

### **3.12 FATHERLESS DAUGHTERS**

The playwrights portray their female Black characters as fatherless daughters. Gina in *Who Said I Don't Want to Dance* has a conversation with her mother and sister, but we never get to see the father her mother brags about successfully keeping for thirty-three years. Abigail in *In the Continuum* is uprooted from her family and is surrounded by her in-laws; while Nia is warned by her mother to desist from any connection with her step-father, as he “ain't [her] daddy.” Martha in *She No Longer Weeps* does have her father physically, but he only serves as an authoritative figure, and is emotionally unavailable for his daughter. She expresses her reason for falling for Freddy being due to the fact that he made her laugh and told her she was beautiful, something that she did not experience with her father, who “tells one of his stupid religious jokes...and [they] all laugh because [they] feel obliged to.” This shared portrayal of physically and/or emotionally unavailable fathers to Black young women by the playwrights reveal a bigger social problem that requires to be addressed in order to raise confident young women who have healthy interactions with men. Unfortunately, Martha's embittered character is influenced by her lack of connection with the first man she knew, her father; Nia seeks love, a sense of belonging and affirmation from her boyfriend Darnell who she makes her world; while Abigail is desperate to cling onto a promiscuous husband than remain alone, so that her children grow up with a father.

### **3.13 THE IMPORTANCE PLACED ON RAISING SONS**

The playwrights reveal the importance placed in raising sons by society through the depictions of the characters. Gina, at the beginning of *Who Said I Don't Want to Dance*, appears to fear raising her sons alone, as she tells her dead husband, “You know how stubborn your boys can be, they only listen to you.” This reveals how Gina feels that her authority is undermined by her sons, who seem to have respected their father more. Moyo shows here how boys are conditioned very

young to respect a man's decision over a woman's, and the huge patriarchal presence which exists in society.

Gail, Darnell's mother, in *In the Continuum* has raised her son into becoming an irresponsible man who is never held accountable for his actions because his mother cleans up his mess. She justifies Darnell infecting Nia with H.I.V by saying, "he's just a boy, he's a baby. How is he supposed to know when you all keep tossing yourselves at him?" Therefore, instead of holding him accountable, she blames Nia for contracting the virus from her son. She feminises H.I.V by placing the burden on women, a mirror into how society views the issue.

Abigail is very affectionate towards her son Simbi, whom she treats like a prized possession and a prince. She is very proud to have a son, and hopes that she is pregnant with another boy; whom she hopes will prevent her husband from being promiscuous. She expresses this desire when she exclaims to Evermore, "He'll come around, he just needs another boy. A girl? What am I going to do with a girl in this world?" Similarly, Nia hopes that she is pregnant with a son, and describes her fantasy to Trina about Darnell finding out that she is pregnant:

*Then, he gon' get on his knees and put his ear against my belly and listen. Umm, hum. And then he gon' look up at me and say, 'My son in there?' and I'ma say 'umm-humm.' Then, we're gonna get married.*

Both women see sons as a form their salvation and a key to the men in their lives treating them with respect. Gail also sees her son as a ticket out of poverty and her way into financial freedom; and this is why she spoils him. Her son is an investment, as she explains to Nia, "I made sure he played in all the right districts, with all the right coaches." The same way Simbi is treated by



Abigail as a prize, Darnell is treated by Gail as a trophy; when she says “Look at his trophies. Look at them. Does this look like AIDS to you?..A scholarship for outstanding athletic achievement-to my son.” The characters are therefore portrayed as women and mothers who value and dote on their sons, perpetuating male privilege and maintaining patriarchy. The women in the plays fear having daughters because of their own struggles as women; and because females are placed with heavy burden, blame and responsibility by society; while males are allowed room to err.

### **3.14 HEALTHCARE SYSTEM, LAW AND BLACK WOMEN**

A common mirror in society that all three plays depict of its treatment of women is how the healthcare system has failed women of colour. In addition to the feminisation of H.I.V/A.I.D.S that *In the Continuum* presents through Nia and Abigail, they encounter poor health services from their opposite ends of the world of Harare and Los Angeles with the aid of the character of Nurse Mugobo; who becomes the symbol of healthcare for both characters. The feminisation of H.I.V is a recurring theme, and is shown when she blames her patients, “Ah...you women. You go and get this HIV then you want to have a baby or two? It’s not good, munoziwa, it’s not good.” She further urges the women to either abstain, or to “please protect others,” instead of urging them to protect themselves. This portrayal is that of women being infectors rather than the infected. She says this even though she admits that the virus is “usually coming from him, but sorry you tested first.” The theme is further highlighted by Gail’s denial of her son’s irresponsibility, and blaming it on women who “throw” themselves at him.

Nurse Mugobo (*In the Continuum*) and Noluthando (*Who Said I Don’t Want to Dance*), in addition to advancing the plot, represent the failure of global healthcare system with regards to

Black women, who are globally the most disadvantaged in society. Nurse Mugobo is characterised as a bossy, overworked and distracted health practitioner. She reflects her bossiness as the nurse in Los Angeles when she admonishes Nia, who is on her phone on the other side of the world, by her disinterest in learning her patient's name correctly, when she mixes up the personal details of Abigail and another woman, and also her impatience when calling a patient who does not respond. A very important motif is in her repeated statement, "*vanhu vatema vanonetsa*," (Black people are a burden) which beyond its literal meaning regarding her impatience with the unresponsive patient in the queue, reflects on the society's view on healthcare provision for Black women: Black women are treated as burdens rather than as priorities to be cared for both in America and in Africa. Nurse Mugobo's mixing up of names and personal details not only reflects that she is possibly overworked, but also suggests how Black women are not given personal individual care, but are painted with the same brush and given the same secondary treatment; Black women's identities do not matter; the healthcare system only sees them as an obligation.

Petronella further elaborates on the secondary treatment that Black women receive; and how they are unable to access good treatment when she says that, "Okay, they are manufacturing some drugs here, but believe me they're not the best kind and how is anyone supposed to be able to afford them long term in this economy?" Nurse Mugobo shows this when she tells both Abigail and Nia in this scene where both characters are at a hospital, that the hospital does not have any drugs; and further when she gives her patient three male condoms, as the hospital is running out of condoms.

To be noted is the fact that male condoms in *In the Continuum* are supplied instead of female condoms. This indicates the passive sexual roles of women in the societies of the play, where

providing a female condom seems impractical; and further suggests that the condom is to protect the man than it is for the woman. In the village world of *Who Said I Don't Want to Dance*, although Noluthando is a caring and attentive nurse unlike Nurse Mugobo, she emphasise on how women are not in control of have very little say in their reproductive choices. Gina is told by Noluthando that she cannot have her ovary tubes tied without consent from her male sexual partner, as the law requires the consent of her husband. In *She No Longer Weeps*, Freddy boastfully tells Martha that the society is more inclined towards him in taking their daughter Sarah, because he appears to have more stability (a wife and family) than Martha, a single mother. He flexes this male privilege by saying, "Whatever the law says, society will remain on my side? Do you think any court in the country will give a child to a loose woman like you?" Gina's reply to Noluthando, therefore paints the injustice of the constricting societies the women have to survive in, when she replies, "Can't I make my own decisions?/Who created the laws of my body? Why laws? It is my body; give me what I want woman...Who gave you the right to choose for me when you haven't been where I have been in life?" Even though Gina is addressing Noluthando, she paints a bigger picture into the discriminatory nature of the healthcare system and the law; and addresses it with this statement. The failure of the government in providing efficient facilities is further shown when Gina complains that she has had to walk a distance of twenty kilometres to get to the nearest clinic; and this is the reality of the environment of this character. The playwrights depict what Friedan (1963), as mentioned previously, describes regarding the socialisation of femininity in the world, when she says patriarchy conditions women to be sexually available without being sexually assertive. This is seen in the healthcare system as well as through individual characters in the plays.

### **3.15 THE GAME OF LIFE**

The first scene of *In the Continuum* begins with both the main characters, young Abigail and Nia, in two opposite sides of the world, playing a game of hopscotch, or *nodo* in their respective worlds. The game itself, which requires one to draw a circle, alludes to the repetitive cycles that the girls inherit from the generation before them. The game shows how Black women are born into oppressive systems that already exist; even though Nia and Abigail pick the game to play, they have not created it. Therefore, although the characters as girls seem to be in charge of their destinies by choosing which game to play, assertively finding chalk to set the circle boundaries of the game, they are both unable to win at the game they have chosen. Abigail throws a stone in the air, tries to catch it but it flies behind her, while Nia is frustrated that the stone did not “land in the middle of the circle.” Both children therefore quit the game, with Nia concluding that, “That’s not the way you play the game/ Then nobody’s playin the game then. Ain’t nobody playin’.” This implies that there is a glass ceiling for Black women, both in Africa and America; that even in the modern world where it is said that the sky is the limit; women are constricted by the responsibilities exerted upon them. Impossible societal expectations they will have to fulfil as they grow up have made young Abigail and Nia lose in the game of life, before they have even lived. This is the reality of the girl child.

Gail refers to life as a circle when she shouts at Nia. She says, “You kids don’t think. You don’t think beyond your own little circle of existence. You think this is a video game? This is life. You don’t get to start over.” Martha in *She No Longer Weeps* further evokes the portrayal of the characters’ fight for survival in life’s game when she describes her relationship with Freddy, “I’m making such a habit of running in and out of his life. No, he was the one who was running. He never really stopped- I just started running with him, and of course, I lost the race. But Jesus, it was fun.” In both these instances, the characters are portrayed as young women excited by the

thrills and passions of life as they come of age, but how youthful naivety and reckless decisions have grave consequences.

In *Who Said I Don't Want to Dance*, Mala the head aunt who is respected by the clan and given a seat at the men's table, angrily questions Buyi's refusal to marry Gina by saying to him, "Is this a game to you Buyi? Why shame the family?" Here, Moyo depicts the character of Mala as having a grim outlook on life and placing grave importance in upholding and perpetuating the patriarchal practices the clan has had for generations. Any deviation or adoption of new cultural practices is seen as a reckless "game." To her, "game" symbolises improvement in the women and men's lives within her clan, it is defiance of her culture, it is a threat to her and she therefore will prevent this "game" from ever occurring, because by providing liberty for other women in her clan, she loses her sense of power, privilege and superiority over them.

### **3.16 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has shown the shared experiences the characters are painted as having, despite the different plots and settings with which the plays occur; and in spite of the fact that the playwrights have different social backgrounds. It proves what Crenshaw (1989), as highlighted in Chapter Two, explains about how being Black and being a woman does not exist independently but is tied together. Therefore, what one can take out of the concept of Black feminism is that the playwrights reveal Black women as having a common thread which binds them in their encounters. These commonalities reflect what de Beauvoir (1949) asserts as the personal being the political; as the individual characterisations done by each playwright is a bolder statement of Black women's' experiences.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE CHARACTERS IN THE THREE PLAYS**

### **4. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will explore the protagonists, as well as the minor characters, who will be grouped into their many distinctive character traits.

### **4.1 THE PROTAGONISTS**

#### **4.1.1 GINA: WHO SAID *I DON'T WANT TO DANCE***

The scene begins with Gina reciting a poem which gives us a frame of her character. She says:

I don't want a black dress

It's not a nice colour on me

It's heavy on me

I can't see through it

I don't want the black dress

It is suffocating me

I can't see the light through it

I can't even see the sun through it

I don't want the black dress. (p3)

Gina's first lines in the play not only set the identity that society has defined her by, but also her defiance to accept this identity. The opening line, "I don't want a black dress," suggests that a black dress has been imposed upon her and she is associated by the black dress. According to Bourn 2017, black is the symbol of death, mourning, grief, and may produce feelings of

emptiness, gloom or sadness. Through the black dress, therefore, Gina is portrayed as a grieving widow, who has a void in her life; and she does not want to be defined in this light. Moyo, through introducing Gina the widow to us in the exposition, reflects Zimbabwean society's portrayal of women without husbands; that they are pitied. Gina does not want to be pitied and does not accept society's representation of her, and she expresses this when she says, "it is not a nice colour on [her]". Therefore, her displeasure in being pitied reveals that prior to her husband's death, she has had a reputable character within her community; and therefore she now craves the honour she once received. Gina has therefore been a respected member of her community as a wife, but has fallen from grace as a widow. Moyo thus shows the fickle way in which society places worth on women depending on the presence, or lack of, of men in their lives. Hence, Gina expresses how suffocated she feels by her label as a widow.

Gina's dislike of the black dress also reveals her fear of the unknown. Bourne discusses the psychology behind the colour black by enlightening that it is associated with fear, power and the unknown. Therefore, when Gina says she can't see through the black dress, it may imply her apprehension regarding the mysterious future she now faces alone, the newfound power to choose her own course may be frightening and also the thought of her in-laws controlling her life is a dreadful feeling for her. The future is scary as it is a mystery which she "can't see the light through." Even more frightening is the choice with which Gina has to make; whether she will defy her in-laws and society's expectations of her, or whether she will rebel. Bourne reveals how the colour black also symbolises actions of rebellion. Gina may therefore have a brewing desire to rebel, and a burning desire to not conform; and this is why she feels burdened by the black dress. She cannot sit and accept it anymore. The black dress may also be a burden for her

because the colour is symbolic of secrets, according to colourpsychology.com. Gina has skeletons in her closet, and cannot live her truth until she strips away the mask, or is rid of the black garment (secret) she keeps. Therefore, Gina is portrayed as a woman to be pitied by her society, but also as a mysterious woman with a brewing desire for a change in her life and in her identity.

Gina is portrayed as a woman unsure of whether she can be independent at the beginning of the play. This is seen by her speaking to her dead husband Sipho and asking him how he expects her to raise their children on her own. Here, Moyo shows single motherhood as a nearly impossible role, which Gina even wonders how she will “carry on with life.” The depiction of grieving Gina also shows the emotions a woman has to go through while grieving, and in Gina’s case, she is in the angry stage of her grief. Moyo therefore paints Gina as an emotionally expressive woman, unafraid to show that she is hurting. When her sister in law Mala comments on her mourning for ten months, Gina responds by asking, “is there a stipulated period for mourning?” This not only shows Gina as having a free-thinking mind that doesn’t necessarily follow stipulations, but it also reveals the society’s demands for Black women to conceal their hurt. On a bigger scope, Moyo shows the African Black community’s ignorance regarding mental health issues such as depression.

Moyo further suggests the possible root cause of some mental health issues with Black women, which is the fact that they lack of control over their lives. Mala shows how Gina is treated as a juvenile by her in laws when she ironically tells her, “I only came to tell you that the elders have decided your fate. There will be a meeting tomorrow to set you free, you will be able to take off



the black dress.” The portrayal of Gina is that of a vulnerable grown woman, who is treated as a juvenile and whose important life decisions are in the hands of her in-laws. The line which mentions the elders’ decision to set her free indicates that she has been shackled; even though Mala does not realise this. Moyo therefore portrays marriage in this rural Ndebele set up as a prison for women; and in particular Gina; with the in-law elders as the guards who hold the key to freedom.

Financially, Moyo illustrates how rural Black women tend to have no security or certainty as the goods acquired in marriage, whether they contributed to the purchase or not, are taken by the man’s family when he dies. Mala emphatically warns Gina regarding her property, “You are not taking any of my brother’s blood, sweat and tears to your maiden home. He worked hard for us Gina, not you.” Through Mala’s view about Gina, women are portrayed as financial opportunists whose aim is to steal, or take from their romantic partners. Muzi highlights this more when he tells his siblings that Gina cannot inherit the land and cattle, and when Mala agrees by saying, “We have to protect our brother’s wealth.” The only means by which Gina can maintain ownership of her property is marrying into the clan, even though the play reveals that just like her husband, she worked and “split the costs equally.” Despite this, Gina is told that she “will have to fight for [her] inheritance.” In this instance, the fight for her inheritance is to agree to an arranged marriage to her late husband’s younger brother. Women are portrayed, through Gina’s situation, as only ever getting a chance at financial stability through the institution of marriage, to the extent that in spite of contributing towards the household finances, and being intellectuals who are aware that they have rights as widows, the in-laws’ approval is the way to access their resources, including their demands for an arranged marriage.

Spiritually, Gina is depicted as a Black Ndebele woman that believes in the supernatural and the rural setting in general seem to show a community believing in portions and magic. Mala tells her that her mother in law has been seeing Siphon, her deceased husband's spirit; and this does not surprise Gina. Instead, she takes it as a grave issue, which she wants to find out more about. Further, Gina is accused by Mala for feeding her late husband with a love portion, because his love for her was too dear. Moyo shows how the supernatural world is a major part of the African rural woman's experience; she believes in a life beyond the one on earth. In addition, through Mala's accusation that Gina cast a spell on Siphon, Moyo depicts how Black women are viewed as unlovable unless they manipulate a man into loving them; because Mala cannot fathom that Siphon loved Gina naturally. Mala even goes further in saying that Gina manipulated Siphon through her sexual skills; how "she obviously knew her way around the bedroom and that's why Siphon stayed." Therefore, according to Mala, Gina could only be loved by using supernatural magic or her sexuality as a weapon. Again, this depiction of Black women and love reveals how society has placed Black women last when it comes to being easy to love, and have rather depicted Black women as hard-hearted.

Moyo portrays the contrasting body beauty standards for women in the Ndebele village compared to the Western one, while adapting western personality attributes associated with womanhood. Mala tells Gina that although she is beautiful, she needs to gain some weight. Gina is therefore beautiful, but doesn't meet the curvy requirements that the community finds appealing. Ndebele women are therefore painted as taking pride in having what Mala describes as "flesh," and therefore subtle body shaming exists for slim women, a contrast with western

standards of the ideal body for a woman. However, Gina is depicted as having an “unorthodox approach to life, unladylike ways,” according to her mother. Her candid personality leaves her misunderstood, and even described as “cruel” by her mother, only because she directly admonishes her family on encouraging her sister’s marriage of convenience. Her These traits are unconventional in traditional western gender role specifications, because Gina does not sit up straight, is not overtly domestic and is does not necessarily practice the meekness described in the Bible for a woman, unlike her mother who was taught that womanhood contains these attributes by her white boss Mrs Nixon. Even though these standards were brought to Africa from the west through colonialism, Gina, an African Ndebele woman, is censured for not having the traits that white women are traditionally encouraged and conditioned to have.

Gina is depicted as a woman who is unsure of, but has a growing curiosity to explore and to take ownership of her sexuality. Her first quest to achieving this is by being in control of her reproductive health, by enquiring on permanent birth control methods. However, the clinic does not permit her to do this without a husband’s permission, even though the body is hers. The clinic where Gina becomes proactive about her reproductive health is also where she meets and connects with another woman; with more of an intimate understanding than a platonic one. She finds herself flirting with Noluthando, and even telling her that, “even I, a woman, would marry you.”The obstacle threatening to stop Gina from pursuing this connection is her husband’s claim over her reproductive choices and sexuality. Moyo portrays the objectification of married and widowed women through Mala saying, “Gina is the property of the Magwaza family, we have the right to know if she is pleasurable or not.”

Gina is faced with the dilemma of settling in her dysfunctional comfort zone, as she admits that it is difficult imagining a different life from the one she knows; or she can choose to defy all the demands placed upon her to be the ideal woman for her family and community. After talking with her family, her conflict is made more apparent as she realises, “I don’t know if pleasing the family is worth my sacrificing my freedom.” At this point, rebellion seems to be the only alternative to a life of liberty. When Noluthando asks her whether she is ready to take the plunge into an unknown but scary future, she finally takes charge. At the denouement therefore, Moyo portrays a courageous woman who decides to rip off the black garment of fear of, and who chooses not to conform. Gina reaches her epiphany of a life beyond the village life she knows when she says, “I don’t know but I’m willing to find out,” and when she chooses to pursue a journey of self-discovery by asking, “Who said I don’t want to dance?” At the beginning of the play, Gina knows that she does not want the black dress, and by the end of the play she has discovered what she does want out of life, to discover her true identity, and doing a taboo act such as dancing with another woman at what is meant to be her arranged marriage ceremony is the first step; she wants to dance.

#### **4.1.2 ABGAIL: *IN THE CONTINUUM***

“...next time I want to be dressed by Truworths/ Because Edgars keeps bringing these clothes that make me look like I have grandchildren or something. I know I’m a married woman but that doesn’t mean I have to look like I am selling vegetables paroadside...They must know that I am their model, saka they’re supposed to make me look good.” (p63)

The above quote by Abigail in the first scene of the play portrays her as an urban Zimbabwean woman, who is not afraid to splurge on material goods and is very class and label-conscious. Abigail places great importance on how she presents herself to the world, and strives to conform and get social approval. The witch doctor says about Abigail's physical appearance: "You are a professional woman, very well dressed what what." She even mentions using Woolworths sheets, which is a high-end South African lifestyle brand, just as Edgars and Truworths are expensive Zimbabwean brands. Further, she is keen to move to a more expensive suburb, which is not "too filled with too many muboi," and where she will be surrounded by "the poshy...Stamford can drive the Pajero because [she] will drive the Benz...and the kids will learn the best these whites can teach..." By her own admittance and the witch doctor's observation, Abigail's depiction is that of a third world African woman who is a slave to capitalist consumerism thanks to globalisation and western influences. Her statement, "they must know that I am their model," reveals how women become almost like mannequins, where society and the global community at large dictates and moulds how they should carry themselves. Through her words, she is portrayed as a product of neo-colonialism, her goals aligned with the capitalist American dream and climbing of the class social ladder.

Abigail emphasises on correcting the way her son has represented her in a picture where he has drawn her with thick, natural afro hair, which further depicts her as a woman programmed to adapt to western standards of acceptable hair for Black female professionals. She corrects him, "But Simbi, next time you draw mummy don't draw her with hair that's going all over the place like that. Mummy's hair doesn't do that beby. Just draw me with simple hair, one two three, four, five neat little strokes that's all." Abigail denies her African roots by claiming that her hair does

not frizz and curl up like an afro but is rather straight. In not owning the natural state of her hair, Gurira reveals an identity crisis for this African woman, who cannot own her Blackness. However, in neo-colonial Zimbabwe, where to survive and to be a socially acceptable professional one has to adhere to certain physical representational requirements, Abigail may be placing importance in finer, possibly chemically treated hair as a means of professional survival and acceptance; as natural and dreadlocked hair has been dimmed by the colonial and neo-colonial masters as unkempt, associated with dagga and given plenty of other negative connotations. Emphasis on straight hair not only suggests Abigail's need for conformity and hunger to fit in, but also reflects her need for control and simplicity ("simple hair"). When she demands to be painted by her son as a woman with simple hair, she has just discovered that she is HIV positive, her life is out of order and she has no control. Therefore, her denial of an afro and desire for fine hair shows her denial of her status, which has blind-sighted her; and her longing for a simpler outcome. As a mother, she never wants her son to perceive her as an irresponsible woman, and always wants to give the impression that she has everything under control. Gurira shows how hair in this instance may be a facade; a mask that this Black woman wears to the world, giving the view that she has it all together. A woman's hair choice here may depict her denial of her natural roots, but may also show a Black woman's freedom to choose how she wants to look and present herself.

The protagonist's social background reveals that her maiden name is Moyo, and we know that she was born in the 1980s, at the height of HIV stigmatisation and media sensationalising the virus and causing fear; because in 1994 she was at Malbereign Girls' High. This could justify her panic in receiving the diagnosis, where being HIV positive feels like the end of the world and a death sentence for her. Her confidence in her sensuality, where she is not afraid to show a little

skin, could be because she went to a girls'-only school. She has come from a middle income household, hence her desire to enrol her children at a more elite school than the one that she attended. Teenage Abigail is depicted as an excellent student, who is an accolade receiving public speaker. This background information shows her as an ambitious girl, who believed that she could be anything that she dreamed of becoming, and how she could defy societal pressures. Ironically, adult Abigail has become the opposite of all that teenage Abigail envisioned in her speech, "The New African Woman-Modernising and Post Colonising." The speech describes a ferocious woman, a "freedom fighter," and alludes to Mbuya Nehanda and Winnie Mandela. However, Abigail does not have the courage to walk away from an unfaithful husband and is too afraid to start over. Further, she mentions female freedom fighters who fought for the rights of Black women to attain freedom to be who they were, but her adult self is quick to refuse to be portrayed in her natural afro state. The speech shows how modernisation did away with polygamy, "I am no longer the third of four wives, but the first of the first," but ironically remains stuck with a promiscuous man who infects her with HIV in spite of being in a theoretical, western monogamous relationship. When teenage Abigail says in her speech, "I was once denied the usage of the same toilet as you-yet I chose to rise," Gurira depicts flag independence for this Black Zimbabwean woman, whose definition of independence was to adopt the class systems that the colonisers have, rather than to create equality one for every Black person. Therefore, teenage Abigail reveals in her speech the sub-conscious desire for the previously colonised Black woman to become like her former white mistress/ white master (to finally be able to use the same toilet), and adult Abigail shows this by the way she obsesses over brands and class, and also by how she treats her colleague, Evermore as a subordinate.

Abigail is portrayed as a woman under a lot of pressure to be the model Shona wife and to please her in-laws. This is shown by her telling Evermore that her in-laws have been pressuring her to focus less on her career and more on her domestic life. She also reveals how as a daughter in law, she is the property of the family and how the family culture requires her to share “everything.” As a wife, her conformity to submit and be a long-suffering wife is shown by her fantasy of telling her husband that he is forgiven for infecting her, but that he shouldn’t cheat anymore. Gurira therefore reveals here how women are made to accept whatever marriage has to offer, and are made to feel guilty for being ambitious in their careers and for working long hours.

In addition to being the longsuffering wife, Gurira portrays Abigail as having the Saviour complex. This is seen through her motive for getting pregnant, “I think another baby will make him act better, Auntie always said showing the husband you are a good and fertile wife will keep him indoors.” Abigail therefore believes she has the power to transform her husband’s mistreatment for the better, and places responsibility for his actions on her shoulders. On a broader scope, this portrayal reflects the burden society places on Black women to accept and be responsible for the misbehaviour and abuse they experience at the hands of men, while this behaviour by men is normalised.

As a Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation news reader, Abigail is depicted as a perfectionist and well trained professional in the poorly ran state owned network that is dubbed by the general public as “Dead BC.” She is quick to identify typos made and able to correct jargon. She also pays close attention to detail, by fixing silly mistakes such as the wrong names typed in her script for political leaders. She is a frustrated journalist, who is stuck in an unrewarding job due to a



small and inconsistent salary against the crumbling Zimbabwean economy, outdated studio equipment, and delivery of news which is not objective. As she runs through her script, which includes denial of Zimbabwe facing a famine and blame-shifting of Zimbabwe's socio-economic disparity on the West before going live, she laments, "It's getting harder and harder to even say this stuff." In this statement, Abigail therefore reveals that she does not wilfully desire to deliver propaganda to the nation, but rather that she reads the news with a metaphorical gun on her head and a threat to get fired and blacklisted in the event that she chooses objectivity. Her statement may also infer that subconsciously in her personal life, it is becoming more difficult to live out a lie in order to please her in-laws and society; it is getting harder to wear a mask and pretend that she is content in her marriage and in her overall livelihood. Abigail is therefore painted as a woman who lives in fear and subjugation both under the hand of the government meant fulfil her basic human rights, and the family meant to protect her; in spite of freedom of expression which exists in the Zimbabwean constitution. Abigail is doubly shackled, not only as a Zimbabwean journalist, but also as a Black, Shona wife. She is also a mirror of the government she works for in that, just like the government denying the fact that Zimbabwe faces challenges, she denies facing challenges in her own life.

Abigail's spirituality appears to be in conflict as she navigates between the Christian religion and traditional Shona ancestral beliefs to answer and aid her with her life. At the peak of her despair in discovering her H.I.V status, she goes to her local Christian church to enquire about a witch doctor from Sisi Thembi, who is part of the congregation. The irony in her actions clearly reflect the shame associated with believing in the ancestors for this African Black woman, which highlight how even in post-independent Zimbabwe, her mind is still enslaved to colonial

vilification of being African. Therefore, she would rather secretly visit a witchdoctor but openly practice Christianity. Her need to look for spiritual nourishment outside of the Christian religion also shows that Abigail is unfulfilled by Christianity and has to seek exterior answers. Her frustration in her Christian walk is depicted through her prayer, where she asks God why she her life has taken a negative turn in spite of living according to Bible teachings. On visiting the witch doctor, he tells her that her ancestral roots have been angry with her for seeking other cultures for her answers. However, Abigail does not gain complete closure even as she turns to the ancestors. She receives potions to prevent her husband from beating or leaving her; as well as assurance that certain roots may aid with the H.IV symptoms, but the witch doctor tells her that even traditional medicine has not found the cure for H.I.V/A.I.D.S. Gurira shows how religion is prejudiced against Abigail. Her adherence to Christianity's encouragement of meek, submissive wives has put her at risk and subsequently led to her contraction of H.I.V, while ancestral religion perpetuates the abuse she may endure as a wife by encouraging and expecting her to stay in her marriage and use a potion to keep her abusive husband, rather than empowering her to stand up for herself and walk out of the abusive relationship.

As a mother, Abigail is affectionate and sweet to her son; but as a female Harare resident, she is wary, cold and perhaps afraid of the street kids who ask for her help. Her contrasting personas when speaking with her son and the homeless children suggests that she is maternal and caring in nature, as she even cuddles a stranger's infant when she walks through the congregation in a different scene. However, in order to survive as a woman in urban Harare, she has to kill that maternal part of herself because she is a potential victim to theft, verbally abusive cat-calling, physical and even sexual harassment from the desperate street children who are products of

poverty in Zimbabwe and view women as easier prey to attack due to a generally weaker physical disposition. Abigail therefore has to harden as a defence mechanism when addressing the street kids, and soften when chatting with her son.

The playwright reveals Abigail's fun character trait when she begins to relive her youthful days by showing her colleague Evermore how she used to dance. Abigail also reveals her sassiness by telling Evermore that she used to be the desirable Ice Queen before marriage. However, her light, jovial character has been muted by adult responsibilities, wifely obligations and societal pressure. She seems to crave this part of herself, because at the end of the play, she says, "And you must look at me and see me, Abigail Moyo Murambe." She knows that in order to rediscover herself, she must get out of her marriage and move "forward, forward, forward, forward." Sadly, nevertheless, such a radical life choice of leaving all that she knows and all that she feels she has invested in is too high a risk. Instead, she chooses to remain in conformity and pretence; and the play ends with her false claim that she is happy, "Tinofara," and a haunting laugh into a blackout.

#### **4.1.3 NIA: *IN THE CONTINUUM***

"I'm not a tramp. Everybody is doin' it" – (p92)

Nia's statement clearly describes her conflicting quest of self-discovery, sexual exploration and of defining her identity as a Generation Z, Los Angeles-born Black American young woman. She

is depicted as a carefree, sexually aware, sexually expressive young woman who is at the point in her life where she makes decisions with very little thought and with reckless abandonment. It seems that she is has only just began being sexually active. Her youthful sexual liberty is influenced by Hip-hop and popular culture, and this is seen when she freely dances like a Hip-hop video girl, and in the way she easily tells her friend Trina about her plans to have sex with her boyfriend Darnell. However, at the beginning of the play, Nia does not realise that even though theoretically, she is a citizen of America, the dubbed “land of the free,” she still has limitations with regards to her freedom. Unlike a woman or a man of different racial disposition, or even a Black man, Nia is unaware that as an African American woman she is heavily judged and stereotyped as a loose “tramp” if she chooses to be adventurous.

The adventures that Nia is at the beginning of experiencing are not only sexual ones, but she is keen to experiment with whether she can get away with breaking the law without any repercussions. She not only steals a purse which leads to her being fired at an adequately paying upmarket department store called Nordstrom, but she also does not adhere to rules and regulation of a free house at a largely White suburb called Westwood, which leads to her dismissal. Further, Nia drops out of an educational programme that her social worker enrolls her in, which could earn her a diploma. At the beginning of the play, we are introduced to her at a night club, as she has snuck out of Good Shepherd, a home for girls with social or family problems. Nia is therefore depicted as a rebel without a cause, because she is given opportunities to empower herself but seems to be ignorant to this. Probation Patti, her social worker, says to her, “You’re telling the universe that you want to be an uneducated, unemployed, homeless, kleptomaniac, soul-train dancer.” Nia’s conviction that she is having fun because everyone else is, in essence

portrays her as a self-sabotaging character, and the social worker's reference of her being a soul train dancer infers that she will end up being another statistically unskilled Black American woman whose only skill is dancing well at night clubs.

In spite of her flaws, Nia is loveable, as she is depicted as not only a girl with a funny sense of humour, a loving nature but also a talented young woman, who effortlessly and naturally expresses her thoughts and feelings through poetry, without having been taught by anyone. Her poetry has earned her accolades, with judges saying that she is 'full of potential' and she says that she does not find it difficult to create poems, but that it comes to her, "just like flowin." Her fairytale-like expectations regarding her relationship with Darnell reflect her innocence and youthful naivety. Her caring trait is revealed when she cracks jokes and makes her friend laugh at the hospital, to make her feel better. Nia is a diamond in the rough, and has plenty of amicable traits which are overshadowed by her lack of self-motivation and self-determination to better her life. She does not realise her potential and does not see a life beyond her impoverished environment unless her boyfriend saves her from it through his talent in basketball, instead of being her own hero through her poetry talent.

Salter reflects the contradictory way in which Nia proudly identifies with her African roots when it is trendy, but denies, reflects ignorance and appears to believe she is superior to Africans when in crisis. Probation Patti describes how Nia proudly wears her "big chain with the medallion of the motherland," when at the club. However, Nia exposes her negative view of being African when she is told she is H.I.V positive, "Do I look like a junkie? Do I look like I'm from Africa? No. Everytime we come here y'all try to make us feel like we're dirty or stupid or something."

This depiction of this African American woman shows how American popular culture appropriates African art and trends, commoditise it; yet still gives a negative image of Africa in the media. Therefore Nia associates Africa with stupidity, filth and the source of H.I.V, and uses these connotations to deny being H.I.V positive since she is Black American and not African.

Just as Abigail views natural Black hair negatively, Nia mocks Black hair in a poem when she teaches her friend poetry. In her haiku, she warns women who show interest in her boyfriend by characterising them with natural hair: “Dirty old skank/Wit yo crunchy hair/Leave Darnell alone.” This poem indicates how for this Black youth, kinky hair is ridiculous and sneered at. Nia is therefore a character that is a product of slave-conditioning from those who came before her, where possessing nappy hair makes one socially unacceptable. She therefore subconsciously identifies her Black hair with negativity, and endorses straightened her more.

Additionally, Nia is a victim to American consumerism, and this makes her appear as vain and opportunistic. This is shown by her need to fit in by buying expensive high end Guess jeans, her fantasy life of driving a Mercedes Benz and how she imagines herself “dressed and draped in Calvin Klein.” She quantifies the accumulation of material goods with success; and this is why she has all her hope in her boyfriend Darnell; because if he makes it in basketball, he will make plenty of money. Gail, Darnell’s mother, says that she has seen Nia, “salavatin’ with dollar signs in [her] eyes” at the thought of being with Darnell. Here, Gail depicts Nia as an opportunist, and Nia’s opportunist trait stems from her capitalist society; where she needs to do what she can to get by. Due to this Black American girl’s desperation to survive, she ends up putting herself at

risk of pregnancy and diseases and regretfully, says “I should have protected myself.” Unfortunately, she has to live in regret because her actions are irreversible.

Nia ‘s slavery to capitalism further results in her portrayal as a thief. She is constantly exposed to media preaching the “pay yourself first,” capitalist doctrine which she says Oprah Winfrey has educated her with through her talk show. The capitalist mantra that anyone can be rich if they work hard enough seems unachievable for her as a Black American woman, who statistically is the most marginalised and the highest demographic group living under America’s poverty line. Therefore, Nia’s act of stealing a bag at a White owned store could indicate a Black woman trying to get back what “The Man” or the white system has taken from her and historically her Black ancestry. She describes herself as a “playa” which is Black American dialect for a street-smart person; and to survive in her capitalist environment, she has had to do what she can, including stealing, to survive in her dog-eat-dog world. However, by the end of the play, Nia considers returning to Nordstrom and asking for her job back, which could suggest that as much as this Black American girl tries to rebel and fight against this white system, she cannot escape it. She even expresses wishing to fly away; but her awkward placement in the margins of capitalist America as a Black woman is something she cannot change.

Salter depicts Nia as a young woman who knows that she is precious, but has to accept the devalued worth that has been placed on her because of her disadvantaged background. Gail pays her for her silence with five thousand dollars, and she says to herself and her foetus, “I’m worth more than this money.” However, she takes the money anyway, because she realises that no one would believe a poor, young, Black woman over the word of her successful, promising, athlete

boyfriend; who has a backing of powerful people that have invested in him. Nia says to herself and her foetus, “We gotta eat but we don’t need no lights.” Her mindset beyond the literal, expresses character that has her back against the wall, she is taking what is offered in order to survive. She admits, “I sold myself for five thousand dollars,” understands that she is worth more than that, but is aware that she needs it to survive “eat,” even though that means sacrificing the enlightenment and her ability to use her voice to tell the truth, or “light” about Darnell. Nia is depicted as an undervalued, underappreciated young Black woman in a very classist America.

Nia is guarded and wary of revealing her true identity to society, so she therefore masks her experience as a Black woman. This is reflected when she admonishes her friend Trina for giving the hospital her real information. Here, Salter touches on an underlying theme of the no-snitch Black culture which exists in African American communities, where giving of information about oneself or a fellow Black person to any government authority is seen as selling out. This in essence, reveals how Nia does not trust that she is safe and that her information is treated with confidentiality even at the hospital, and this is why she lies about who she is. Nia seems to be cautious around the hospital staff because she explains that the system makes her feel “dirty” and “stupid” as a Black woman. It is no surprise, therefore, when Nia reveals in a different scene, “I guess I’m a good actress. Liar, actress, whatever.” As a Black American woman, she feels that she has to protect herself by concealing her identity, and she has mastered the art of concealment.

By the end of the play, Nia is a shattered, young Black girl who still has to veil her pain. She says this prayer and cry for help:



Please keep me from this constant grind

Help me see, although I'm blind

Help me breathe despite the slime

Help me live, if you're inclined. (p89)

This prayer paints her experience in the play. As a young Black American woman from the “hood” or high density, low income residency, she has had to constantly “grind” or work tirelessly to get by on very little. She has had to be a street smart, “playa” but does not have the wisdom to accept the truth, but instead tries to “blindly” run from it, which could doom her to run aimlessly in her life. Her prayer to see could also suggest her need to gain financial freedom; because as long as she remains dependent on Darnell and his mother, she is like a blind person. Sight represents her independence. Her request to “breathe” in spite of the “slime” suggests that she lives in a society that not only infects her with its conditions and expectations, but that the standards and marginalisation acts as pollutants which deter her from meeting her full potential. In spite of this, she hopes to thrive. Finally, she asks God to help her live, and this suggests that she has only been getting by, trying to survive. The play ends with Martha laughing into a blackout with Abigail, and this laughter creates a haunting mood because the audience knows that she is actually hurting. The mood portrayed at the end depicts how Black women, whether they are in Africa or America; have a deep pain that they carry with them but that they disguise to appear strong, unfazed and in control.

#### **4.1.4 MARTHA: *SHE NOLONGER WEEPS***

I'm a bit too lusty to be good in the way you want me to be. I like to shudder with pleasure, and sob with desire, and know that tomorrow will come and we'll all be more beautiful because of what has been today. I like to feel myself actually living every minute of my life. – (p25)

Martha, at the beginning of the play, is portrayed as a passionate twenty-year-old woman, who is boldly and purposefully all that her society disproves. She does not subscribe to Christian doctrine to be sexually prudent, nor does she care to conform to Zimbabwean cultural norms that expect women to be passive in their sexuality. She expresses how exploring her sexuality awakened her, rather than embarrassing her, when she says, “the discovery didn't make me ashamed of my femininity...it made me feel good and fertile and clean to know that my body could make Freddy happy...and make me happy as well.” Joe, her boyfriend's friend, describes her as a “spitting fire,” which further contributes to her characterisation as a passionate young woman whose fervour and fever intimidates and confuses the people around her.

Even though Martha is undaunted by her sexuality, like most young women, her motive to become sexually active was less to do with her own curiosity, and more to do with an attempt to earn the love of her boyfriend Freddy. She asks her mother whether she would understand that her choice to have sex with Freddy was because she loved him, and seven years later in the play describes her younger self as having been in desperate need for something to hold on to. In addition to trying to earn Freddy's love, Martha is depicted as having to pretend to enjoy sex with Freddy, when in actuality; she says that she “couldn't tell him that [she] didn't think it was wonderful at all. It was almost horrible, really. One of the things [she] did because [she] loved him.” Dangarembga shows here, through Martha, the inhibition women have in assertively

telling their sexual partners what they do and do not enjoy, and how women are conditioned to pretend to be satisfied around their sexual partners.

Because she gets pregnant, Martha is slut-shamed and victim-blamed by not only her religious family, but ironically her sexual partner, Freddy. When she is a virgin, Freddy views her as a prize and a conquest, but when they do eventually have intercourse, he says to her, “If you had kept your mouth and your legs closed you wouldn’t be in this shit now,” and he goes further by questioning her sexual body count by stating, “that child you are carrying could have a dozen fathers.” He even perceives the consensual sex that he has had with Martha, and that she has had with him, as process where he “spoil” or tarnished her; rather than an empowering experience for Martha, where she chose to explore her sexuality. Slut- shaming is when society shames a woman for the amount of sex that she is, or is not having; (her real or presumed sexual activity); and this play, Martha’s consent to engaging in sex with Freddy suddenly makes him view her of less moral value, even though he himself is an active participant in the sexual activity with Martha. Martha is made to feel ashamed of being a sexual being, when her sister Mercy says, “Decent girls don’t sleep around or at the very least they don’t get pregnant. You have done both. You will have to suffer the consequences.”The consequences that Martha suffers, or the social punishment that she is given for being a sexual being, is the reproach she faces. She says to Freddy, “So now I’m dirty hey? I was clean enough for you.” She is denigrated for having sex with Freddy, while he is celebrated for having sex with her.

Martha is given the derogatory term, “bitch,” and “mad woman” because she does not fit into gender-specified roles, but chooses to live as she chooses. For instance, the prostitute Gertrude calls her a “bitch” because Martha does not retaliate rudely when Gertrude is rude to her, but chooses to remain polite. Further, Gertrude perceives her as a “bitch” because she has great taste

in art and seems to be an intellect, and because Martha states that she bought her art prior to ever meeting Freddy, and never to win him over. To Gertrude, this independence and graceful nature, which is completely different from her personality, makes Martha a bitch. Joe says that Martha is “an interesting woman, but who wants an interesting woman- you just end up confused.” Martha is interesting in that she freely does what she desires without considering that she is a woman. When she has something to say, she says it, she is intelligent and when she wants to drink a beer, she expresses her desire to drink a beer. Freddy frames Martha’s character because of these traits by telling his friend Joe he thought she was a bitch because of her unconventional behaviour and by asking her:

*Anyway, what sort of woman would drink? /Only a bitch would do that. You are a bitch, Martha. Never forget that. No man will ever want you, even if I hadn’t spoilt you. You even wear trousers like a man, you drink like a man, you argue like a man and challenge men as though you were not a woman yourself. What you don’t know is that that education of yours is good for only one thing, it lets you earn money. That’s the only reason men like women like you, otherwise you are useless. But even that education of yours is gone now. You are finished. Women like you have no place in Zimbabwe.*

Freddy’s idea of what he perceives as “natural” roles that Martha should perform as a woman, pushes her into a box she cannot fit into. She detests doing housework but expresses her desire to be career-oriented. To Freddy, this makes her a bitch. Martha is marginalised because she refuses to be pushed into prescribed female roles. Her intelligence threatens Freddy, and his only way to get over his inferiority around her is to verbally and physically abuse her.

Martha soon realises that her passionate nature and revolutionary mindset should be harnessed well, in order for her message to be effective; when she is faced with the difficulty of being a young, pregnant, unemployed Black woman. Her realisation occurs when she is sent to stay with relatives, and she tells her mother in a letter, “I’m beginning to realise how big a person has to be in mind and spirit to do any of the things that are important and I know I am not ready yet.” The young woman experiences growth as a character when she understands that although her ideas and actions are well-meaning, rushing into things discredits the message she is trying to deliver to her community. Seven years later, she describes this phase of her character as “young, headstrong and naive.”

The protagonist is also depicted as an unloved woman, in search of acceptance and support. Instead, the abusive relationship that she has with Freddy leaves her confused, and her youthful naivety makes her infatuated with him. She knows that Freddy can never meet her emotional and intellectual needs so she goes back home; yet she considers going back to him because of the occasional physical intimacy she experiences with him. Therefore, the pain she feels as an unloved young Black woman is significantly painted in the scene where she “weeps quietly,” as she tells Freddy that she is tired of giving of herself and getting no emotional support in return; and says “But I want you to love me too.” This scene, which shows a rare aspect of Martha being emotionally vulnerable, is important because it is a turning point for her, where she becomes a numb and hardened, because instead of gaining sympathy from Freddy, her tears become a triumph for him. Freddy’s inability to reciprocate emotional support to Martha is because he says, “We are afraid of women because they are no longer our mothers.” Martha therefore weeps because she is drained by being more of a maternal figure to this grown, irresponsible man, than an equal partner and spouse.

Martha tries to conform to the conventionality and conditioned expectations of womanhood in the beginning of the play, but soon realises that the key to her independence as a woman is through financial freedom, after having endured abuse from Freddy because he supported her financially. At first, she promises Freddy to be more silent and obedient in order to earn his love, but later tells her mother, “I must work hard. I must get my degree and live a productive life. But it will also be a satisfying life. I don’t believe that just because I’m a woman I must sacrifice my potential to look after an idiotic man and his offspring.” For Martha, Freddy becomes a life lesson rather than her form of salvation. To her family, however, a man is her redemption for shaming them when she got pregnant, and a means of social approval to have her baby.

Martha is zealous in her philosophical beliefs that there is more to womanhood than domesticity. She expresses her need for “companionship and conversation, intellectual stimulation and basic human rights,” in her romantic relationships, while she enlightens her mother on her “discovery that the object of life is not to get married like they taught, but to celebrate our existence.” She has a naive youthful conviction, and a seemingly undeterred spirit that she can be the agent of social change to a patriarchal system that has existed for centuries. Her radical feminist outlook and the wrathful way in which she delivers her feminist ideology therefore leaves her misunderstood, resented and isolated; with Joe explaining that, “you can’t take her seriously if you don’t understand her.” As a result, Martha’s isolation and the rejection she faces at the hands of her community because they do not understand her, slowly dims the excitement and hope that she has for change, and by the end of the play, she is emotionally numb and callous; she “no longer weeps.” She does not feel herself actually living every minute of her life as her younger self expresses, or having succeeded in her “revolutions and women’s rights,” but rather, seems to be only existing and surviving as a woman in the maintained stronghold of patriarchy. She has

not achieved her goal for women's equality and equity that her youthful, enthusiastic, activist younger self believed was possible; so instead of conforming and fitting in, she chooses to be self-serving and apathetic.

As a parent, Martha is depicted as an overcompensating mother. She expresses her love for her daughter Sarah materialistically through presents. In addition, she is moulding Sarah into a feminist, skill she believes Sarah will need in order to survive in her society. She is proud that Sarah's role model is Zimbabwean war hero Joice Mujuru, whom she refers to by her nom-de-guerre of "Teurai Ropa," which translates to "spilling of blood." Martha is therefore raising her daughter into a radical feminist, a fighter, strong and not flimsy, ready to spill blood if need be, and this is also shown when she admits rewarding Sarah with gifts for not crying even when she gets hurt. Martha's parenting skills therefore focus less on emotional development and more on resilient survival skills that a Black, African woman will need to excel.

Later in her romantic relationship with Lovemore, Martha is a defensive and emotionally reclusive partner. She never opens up to him, and he even expresses to her that he has never seen her laugh. Instead, she shows him that she needs him only for her sexual needs; but that the only affection she has is for her daughter. Martha does not have time to fully invest in a man, even one whose name and actions characterise him as a loving, affectionate man; she has become too self-reliant to fully receive the love any man has to offer.

Martha becomes more and more emotionally anaesthetised as the play advances, and the only glimpse of emotion that she shows is when she is excited about her daughter, but even then, her love expression is materialistic rather than emotional. She is described by Mrs Chiwera, a lady from a women's organisation as "so rude" and "so unfriendly." She even admits to "no longer

feeling pain or pity or sympathy.” She attributes the root to this being her experience of abandonment by her family and her community, when she needed support the most. She tells her romantic partner, “I am a woman Lovemore. There’s nothing you can tell me about violence and sadism.” In spite of having achieved financial success and a budding career as a lawyer, the young passionate, hopeful girl that once thought change for women was possible, now views womanhood as a violent and sadistic experience seven years later.

Martha’s breaking point occurs when Freddy returns after years of being unavailable, to threaten taking her daughter Sarah. He says that she always wanted to be superior to men, a statement which she responds by, “No, what I wanted was side by side.” Freddy’s verbal harassment, along with the possibility of losing Sarah, who has become her only source of joy and pride; turns Martha into an enraged maniac, a complete personality switch from the emotionally deadened character a few scenes before. Freddy triggers years of trauma that she has bottled up, and her hardened mask is broken by Freddy’s re-emergence in her life. When Freddy takes Sarah, she hires some thugs, invites Freddy and her parents over; and creates an awkward scene where she is passive aggressive with everyone. Eventually, she tells her thugs to attack Freddy, and proceeds to stabbing him. Martha’s last words are, “Phone the police. Tell them to come and take me.” Impossible standards society has prescribed for Martha result in her journey in the play ending with the spilling of blood, but unlike Teurai Ropa, who was fighting for racial equality, Martha is fighting for gender equality; and she is unapologetic. The play ends with being a full portrayal of the proverb, “hell hath no fury like a woman scorned,” her fury has left her broken and manic.

#### **4.2 THE SUPPORTING CHARACTERS**



#### **4.2.1 Trina: *In the Continuum***

Trina is the stereotypical troubled female Black American adolescent with huge potential to do great things, but very stifling socio-economic circumstances. Her name itself, according to Scandinavian Artefacts (2018) translates to “pure.” She is younger than Nia, and in need of a good maternal role model. The play descriptions state her as a character “wrapped up in her own problems and could choose a course that is dangerous to herself and others.” We know that she is from a broken family because Nia insinuates it when she asks her why she did not call her mother to pick her up at the hospital after getting shot. This could be the reason why she looks up to Nia, and begs to go clubbing with her. She longs for an older female guide, and unfortunately ends up with Nia, who is street smart but is just as lost and broken, and therefore is not a good role model. She becomes the supporting character in the play, and Nia’s confidant.

She is also portrayed as an innocent, naive character that has not been exposed to the rough streets of Los Angeles as Nia has. This is revealed when Nia calls her a “scaredy cat,” and when she gets shot at the club Nia asks her, “Aint you ever heard gunshots before? You supposta get down. Duck, stupid.” However, it is because she is not street smart that Nia discovers her H.IV status; because her getting shot leads them to the hospital, where they both get checked. Her most important role in the play therefore occurs because of her infantile character flaw, because of getting shot, the plot is greatly developed. Trina also serves as an example of how youthful Black women have their purity tainted by the marginalising societies that they grow up in, and how they end up becoming stereotypical statistics.

#### **4.2.2 Evermore: *In the Continuum***

Just like Trina, Evermore plays the supportive character role in the play. She is the “plump” character that Abigail orders around to fetch her tea, and is also the first person Abigail confides in about her pregnancy. Through the relationships between Nia and Trina, and Evermore and Abigail; the playwrights seem to paint a picture of Black female leads that validate their power by ordering around delicate, sweet subordinates. This may mirror modern popular culture sisterhood, which began to appear around the time the play was written, which reflects a strong female character who has a side-kick, non-power threatening D.U.F (Dumb and Ugly Friend). In depicting this new social trend, the playwrights add some interesting variety in Black female portrayals, and draw in Generation Z and millennial age- group audience who can resonate with these amusing portrayals.

Evermore is an ambitious single mother, who we learn chased a man when she caught him with another woman. This is in sharp contrast with Abigail, who tells her, “that’s not the answer man...No it’s not because then that other woman, witch that she is, will get everything you’ve been working for.” In spite of this Evermore seems to be fairly comfortable, and these actions which are spoken of in passing show her to be a character self-assured enough to walk away from a situation that does not serve her. Unlike Abigail, she is not afraid to start over. To be noted is the difference in Zimbabwean social conditions depicted between the 2000s setting of *In the Continuum*, and the 1980s setting of *She No Longer Weeps*. In the 1980s world of Martha, single motherhood and dating as a single mother was an anomaly which she heavily got judged for and had her morality questioned. In the same setting of Harare in Evermore’s world, she can freely discuss how she chased a man who was cheating, and is comfortable and accepted as a single mother.

The character Evermore also mirrors the Zimbabwean woman's Diaspora ambitions in the crippling economy of the early 2000s. She explains how she has no money, and grumbles, "This is what we get for working for the government." Her somewhat comical ambitions are to work at South African Broadcasting Corporation (S.A.B.C) and she even pictures herself as a news anchor for American Cable News Network (C.N.N). Gurira may be showing the yearning for Zimbabwean Black women to express themselves and their socio-political views under an authoritarian government, through Evermore, who works at a propagandist Z.B.C but fantasises about being in liberal South Africa or America, 'the land of the free.' Evermore, whose two-word amusing name is typically very Zimbabwean, is also a stereotype of an average, professional Black Zimbabwean woman, who is sweet and is doing the best she can to get by.

#### **4.3 THE MINOR CHARACTERS**

##### **4.3.1 THE SOCIETY KNOW-IT-ALLS/ PHILANTHROPISTS**

##### **4.3.2 Mrs. Marceline Mutsika and Mrs. Susan Chiwara: *She No Longer Weeps***

"I'm Marceline Mutsika, Mrs Mutsika, and this is Susan Chiwara, Mrs Chiwara. We are representing the Women's Association for Protection of the Illegitimate Mother." – Mrs Mutsika (p35)

From the first words Mrs Mutsika says in the play, she displays judgement in her character. Her words, "Hello, Mrs...er Miss...er...Martha," paint her as a woman who already has a preconceived degrading view of Martha because she is unmarried. The playwright portrays her comically, even when Martha corrects her on how to address her, her response, "Sure, Martha. I'm very sorry," which humorously shows how she pities Martha because she is simply a "Martha," without a title to make her socially approvable. Mrs Mutsika is the typical portrayal of

a socially cautious woman, who finds breaking the status quo an abomination. Because her society has prescribed that marriage will give her the respect she needs to be of value, she emphasises on the fact that she is married. Even when introducing herself and Mrs Chiwara, she does not mention her maiden name; nor does she simply introduce herself by her first name. This suggests how she finds validation in being a married woman; and does not find wholeness in her single identity. She finds completeness in being Mrs Mutsika, than in being a simple “Marceline.” This is why she seems sorry for Martha, that she is just, “Martha” and this is why she places grave importance in Martha knowing that she is Mrs Mutsika. To her, to be unmarried is to be a victim. Hence, she believes her organisation is an important humanitarian effort because being an unmarried mother to her is mortifying.

Historically, a marceline is a light taffeta-silk fabric usually used for dress linings, while Susan means “lily flower” in the Oxford Living Dictionaries. Using these definitions to characterise these self-perceiving philanthropists, one can say that Dangarembga portrays them as hyper-feminine characters that use hyper-femininity as a weapon against women who do not fall under socially prescribed definitions of femininity. Murnen and Byrne (1991) define hyper-femininity as an exaggerated adherence to a feminine gender role as it relates to heterosexual relationships. These women exhibit compliance to women’s subordinate roles through their hyper-femininity. This is why Mrs Mutsika describes Martha’s role as a single mother an “unfortunate experience” and a “struggle,” single mothers ‘unlucky women” and “poor things.” She speaks condescendingly to Martha, and masks her passive aggression with terms of endearment such as “dear.” Mrs Mutsika attempts to make Martha feel inferior because she is an unconventional woman and therefore in Mrs Mutsika’s standards unconventionality is immorality.

The two female characters are there to depict traditional neo-colonial standards of Black womanhood, which is influenced by Christianity and its moral standard of sexual prudence. Mrs Mutsika mentions that Martha was “the daughter of a respectable pastor,” but that she was “led astray and fell pregnant at an early age.” Here, she reveals her perception of Martha as a woman who tarnished her father’s image by exhibiting her sexual nature in getting pregnant, and also that she views premarital sex as a sin. Mrs Mutsika refers to Martha’s pregnancy as, “[going] wild” while Mrs Mutsika denies viewing Martha as “loose” even though she condemningly brings up how Martha seems not to have learnt anything from her “child’s father and the others that followed.” Further, the two characters distastefully watch as Martha and Lovemore kiss in their presence, and have more revulsion when Martha suggests to them that he is only her lover. The two characters are sexually passive and view female sexuality as a transgression which needs to be subdued instead of a natural aspect of being human which needs to be tapped into and explored.

Mrs Chiwara is portrayed as a woman that speaks without censor, and therefore appears to be politically incorrect in her statements. In the scene, her statements are consistently edited by Mrs Mutsika, who excuses her by saying, “what Mrs Chiwara is trying to say.” Her hilarious judgemental crassness is however, a mirror of Mrs Mutsika’s own views; but Mrs Mutsika tries to soften her judgemental blows by picking and choosing her words carefully. Mrs Chiwara, on the other hand, expresses herself dramatically, and sensationalises single motherhood. She even tells Martha that her story is “something out of a novel.” This shows how ignorant and disaffected the humanitarian women advocates are in the cause they believe they are activists for. Here, Dangarembga exposes the irony and danger in universal rather than intersectional feminism; when one woman is made to represent every woman. In this instance, Mrs Chiwara

and Mrs Mutsika, in their own words, represent single mothers, when they actually have no clue, except sensationalised sympathy, on what it is like to be single mothers. This is very apparent because even the name of their organisation negative connotations of single motherhood, calling single mothers, “illegitimate mothers.”

The two characters are depicted as the patriarchy gatekeepers and perpetrators in their glorification of the gravity of men’s presence in the lives of women. They are there to maintain and uphold the patriarchal system.

#### **4.3.3 PROBATION PATTI and PETRONELLA: *IN THE CONTINUUM***

##### **Probation Patti and Petronella Siyanayarambazinyika**

Probation Patti and Petronella are described in the scene titled, “Chatterheads,” and this description already paints them as characters that speak more than they listen.

##### **4.3.4 Probation Patti**

“It doesn’t matter your race or your gender, or where you’re from, it’s where you’re going. But I think you want to stay in the ghetto because no matter what I show you, no matter where I put you, you carry it with you in your mind.” – Probation Patti (p75)

Probation Patti is depicted as a well meaning, caring social worker who comically and unfortunately uses a lot of clichéd affirmations to encourage the troubled Nia. This makes her message less impactful, because it then seems to be flimsy, unrealistic and impersonal. A prime example is when she tells Nia that “there are no shortcuts in life,” a true statement which has however been said repeatedly that it does not seem to provoke Nia to any real change. Probation Patti’s corny words of encouragement also seem to be because she is from a completely different

and more affluent social background than Nia's; and therefore has textbook knowledge on Nia's struggles, but cannot relate with her. For instance, she says a powerful statement such as, "you tell the universe exactly what you want to experience by the choices you make every moment," and then diminishes the power of her statement by relating it with how she made a bad choice of having two helpings of macaroni and cheese instead of one. Compared to Nia's tough life, Probation Patti then appears to have what is termed in urban culture, as "nice life problems." This is probably why she cannot have a break-through with Nia; because Nia cannot take her seriously.

Nia calls Probation Patti as having a "bougie mouth." Again, this is an African American urban term for upper-middleclass eloquence, something which disconnects Probation Patti from the African American youth she is trying to aid. Nia uses plenty of urban Black American dialect when speaking, while Probation Patti uses correct grammar and therefore appears more literate. Salter brings out the Black American theme of how appearing to be educated within the Black community is viewed as selling out of African American culture; and regarded as "talking White." Probation Patti's use of what the African American community view as White mannerisms therefore alienates her from any resonance with Nia. Therefore, even though she should be the first person Nia should naturally be turning to for help, she is actually the one that Nia avoids the most, and the one that Nia rejects; choosing to confide in more relatable characters such as her cousin Keysha. Probation Patti has not learnt to remain connected with her African American heritage in the process of gaining education, and she is unable to adapt to a different, youthful way when interacting with Nia.

Probation Patti is there to show the different classes of Black American women and how diverse Black womanhood is and should therefore be treated. She is from Ladera Heights, what the

play's text describes as the "Black Beverly Hills, a rich area. Anyone who lives there knows that they have made it." She however, hilariously claims to be from the "hood" because she drove past Crenshaw (1989), a suburb described as one that is dominated by gangs and one of the most violent neighbourhoods in the area. In claiming to be from a violent Black suburb just because she drove past it on her way to her suburban bliss, Probation Patti reveals the issue of the relevance of intersectional feminism, where Bell Hooks (1991) challenges the notion that gender alone, rather than other different social stratifications determine a woman's fate. Patti, as a social worker, is ironically the mouthpiece for an experience she is completely ignorant about because she is Black elite standing for the poor Black community of. The huge contrast between her life and Nia's is that while she is worried about missing her flight to a lovely "Journey toward Self-Discovery Conference," Nia's worries include the lack of a place to stay.

Probation Patti therefore highlights that, in spite of her belief that social stratifications do not matter, it does matter where one is from; and it does affect how their life will probably turn out. The evidence is in how differently her life has turned out as compared to Nia's; she worries about get-away trips to better herself, she thinks she knows ghetto life only because she drove past it, and her version of childhood trauma is that her mother never "cultivated her garden of talents." Contrastingly, Nia has had to be a street smart, self proclaimed "playa" to survive the ghetto, she has moved from foster care to rehabilitation centres, her childhood trauma involves a tired mother raising many children, and inconsistent father figures coming in and out of her life. It is no surprise, therefore, that Nia finds herself relying on a man as her ticket out of poverty, while Probation Patti's only problem is possibly changing her flight ticket to a lovely destination. In spite of these striking differences, Probation Patti ironically is Nia's life-coach; even though she has no life experience.



#### **4.3.5 Petronella Siyanyarambazinyika**

“I have been really focused on HIV and Southern African women and of course all the big organisations abroad are going to hire me right? I am like this perfect poster child.”- Petronella Siyanyarambazinyika (p74)

Petronella, just like Probation Patti, is depicted as a superfluous character that is difficult to relate with due to her airs and graces. Unlike Probation Patti who was born into affluence, however, Petronella is more of a character seeking to become affluent and climb the social ladder. She enjoys attention and fame, to the extent that she comically married the younger brother of a prestigious man who was popular when they were young; so that she can be associated with the prestige.

She is a show off and is a snob. This is seen when she name-drops a popular western fashion designer Stella McCartney, claiming to know her personally and showing Abigail her shoes; and also when she claims to work for western rock star/ humanitarian Bono. She also has a high opinion of herself, and is passive aggressive and debasing towards Abigail. This is depicted by her laughing at the fact that Abigail works at ZBC, and how she then goes on to elaborately tell Abigail of all her accomplishments and how great her career is.

Gurira also humorously depicts the Zimbabwean from the Diaspora through Petronella, how she returns to Africa believing that she is superior to other Zimbabweans due to her exposure to western culture and education. She is back in Zimbabwe complaining about everything from the lack of petrol, to complaining the driving in Zimbabwe with that of the United Kingdom. Hilariously, she claims to have even forgotten her own Shona language, even though she only moved to the West for university. She is proud to be Africa’s poster child to the western

organisations she works for regarding women's issues and HIV, and capitalises on the gullibility of western organisations in their humanitarian African efforts. Petronella's surname even comically suggests her denial of her Zimbabwean roots, because it loosely translates to "denial of country," and even her description in the text supports this; she is described as a "self-satisfied 'musalad' (black with white pretensions). Ironically, however, even though she views herself a cut above other Zimbabweans because of her western influence, Petronella, like Probation Patti, becomes the mouth-piece for regular Southern African women affected and infected by HIV/AIDS to the western organisation she works for. She is the Southern African woman poster child in spite of being completely alienated from the Southern African woman's experience; and this is why she sensationalises HIV statistics by getting the highest statistics possible to the organisations; so as to steer them to providing financial resources. She epitomises neo-colonialism and perpetuates western media's negative portrayal of African feminisation of HIV/AIDS, which is consumed and believed by the West, as indicated by Nia's association of HIV with Africa.

The scene ends with Petronella's pompous, inflated character providing some comic relief as she chatters on about wanting to be on television, "I think I have a lot to say that this country needs to hear. I am really breaking new ground..." This comic scene between Petronella and Probation Patti reflects how the women who have platforms to represent women are those that are aliens to the experiences they stand for. For this reason, women remain misrepresented in society.

#### **4.3.6 MALA: *WHO SAID I I DON'T WANT TO DANCE***

"Gina, enough! You can't dance. It's your handover ceremony." – Mala (p25)

Mala is depicted as a woman in her fifties, who is well respected by the clan and given a role as equally important as the men because the Ndebele tradition subscribes that she is like a male-figure due to her age and position as an aunt or “babakazi” which loosely translates to female father. Because she has the privilege to sit with the men, drink with the men and make important decisions with the men, Mala views herself as superior to the women in her clan. Instead of uplifting the poor conditions that the women in her clan experience, she maintains the patriarchal society because she does not experience the injustices.

Mala is portrayed as Gina’s antagonist; vanquishing all of Gina’s attempts to attaining independence. She is even harsher than her brothers in ensuring that distribution of power in the clan remains among the men. We see this when she tells Gina, “I will make sure you don’t succeed...You will not leave my family in decay.” The significance in her forbidding Gina to dance portrays her as a regressive woman, who chooses to keep outdated norms and customs in order to benefit the rural elite few. She also serves to depict the stereotypical conflict between sisters-in-law; where strife and backstabbing occur; and how women at times pull each other down rather than equip each other. In her beliefs, Mala is convinced that she is doing due diligence to society by maintaining patriarchal conditions; and sees her behaviour as noble and a benevolent act in protecting her family and clan.

#### **4.4 THE HYPER-SEXUALISED**

Both Gurira and Dangarembga show through their characters, how for Africans, sex work is more of a desperate last resort for survival than a sexually liberating adventure; unlike western ideology from theorists such as de Beauvoir who assert that sex work is an empowering form of financial emancipation.

#### **4.4.1 SEX WORKER: *IN THE CONTINUUM***

“You think this lifestyle is planned or something? The economy is rubbish my dear, in case you haven’t noticed. I was a secretary, couldn’t pay for my rent, couldn’t pay for my electric, couldn’t pay for my DSTV.”- Sex Worker. (p85)

Gurira does not give the sex worker an identity, but instead labels her as “the sex worker” throughout the text. Her role is therefore meant to depict a typical day in the life of an urban Zimbabwean sex worker. In this portrayal, the Sex Worker is stereotyped as a smoking, scantily dressed woman, who slurs her words when speaking, and overuses ego-stroking pet names when addressing both her clients and Abigail. Her flamboyant mannerisms however indicate more a facade than a reflection of her true identity; her sex work is an act rather than her actual personality and we see this when she “straightens out her wig” and gets into character by talking to her new client with great showiness: “You’re looking reely nice today, Chief.” The deliberate job title rather than name by the playwright could further be to distinguish how a woman’s occupation is not her identity. It could also be to emphasise on how sex work is taboo and shamed by society, and so the playwright protected her character by presenting her alias and not her identity. The audience therefore only knows that she learned with Abigail, but do not know who she is.

Sex worker shows how she is on survival mode rather than actually living and enjoying life. Part of her survival includes how she has chosen to face the reality that she is in a crippling economical environment; and has harnessed her sexuality as a weapon to survive through the tough Zimbabwean economy. Even though she hides her personality and puts on a show when doing her work, she owns the fact that she is a sex worker, telling Abigail that, “there is nothing

wrong with being a kept woman. It's the least those men can do for us." She has therefore chosen to use her sexuality as a business, and asks Abigail the important question: will she" remain Miss Priss Abigail, or become a survivor." Sex worker has chosen the latter.

#### **4.4.2 GERTRUDE: *SHE NOLONGER WEEPS***

"Anyway, what's wrong with being the hundredth woman, it's like that for everyone- share and share alike. If you want a man you have to settle for half or a quarter or even a tenth." – Gertrude (p15)

Gertrude is portrayed as Martha's foil: She is a "nice bitch" as Joe describes her because she is undemanding, while Martha is a "fuckin bitch" because she challenges men and has unorthodox feminine traits. The men like and prefer her to Martha because she exhibits more of her sexuality than her intellect, and because she does not have high expectations from the men, or challenging ambitions. Freddy explains how she does not expect marriage, regular visits, gifts or intellectual conversations, but rather for Freddy to make love to her when he feels like it. For this reason he describes her as a "nice woman." He further goes on to say he "likes bitches because they don't make demands." Gertrude is therefore painted as a character that sells herself short and becomes a sexual object, not by choice, as Joe highlights, but because she has to be "too nice" to survive. She is therefore a sexually objectified victim of circumstance; if she had a choice and opportunity, she would not be a prostitute.

Gertrude is portrayed as an extremely crass and uncouth character, yet the men gravitate towards her when overwhelmed by Martha's poise and intelligence. After discussing how complicated they find Martha, they go to Gertrude to soothe them. She acts as their therapist, the one they dump their emotional baggage to. She serves as the haven to escape their realities and

responsibilities because she soothes their fragile egos; whereas Martha's strong personality emasculates them. Gertrude reminds Freddy on this when she tells him, "You leave this woman (Martha) to come to me. Ehe. I'm a bitch, everybody knows it but you, you just love the way I open up to you." She advises Martha on how to please a man, when she tells her that they do not care for art and decor, but only to drink alcohol. She has mastered how to tone down her intellectual traits so as not to intimidate me, because men, who are more financially privileged in her society, are her livelihood. Therefore, she succumbs to Friedan's theory (1963) that social construction of femininity includes sexual availability without sexual assertiveness, which is the difference between Gertrude and Martha.

Gertrude also serves in highlighting the disparity in the use of demeaning sexual terms used to describe women compared to men. She brings out an important point on how she is referred to as a "whore" and "bitch" because she has multiple sexual partners, whereas Freddy, whom she "can't count on one hand the women he sleeps with, in a week," does not get labelled as a whore because he is a man. Here, Dangarembga shows the double standards of society, where dictionary definitions used to shame sexual behaviours are gendered. The definitions of "whore," "slut," and "bitch," when looked up in dictionaries, always begin with the description, "a woman that," rather than "a person that." Gertrude is therefore the epitome of society's unfair treatment of the same behaviours exhibited by men and women; where men are encouraged and allowed to get away with the same behaviours those women are condemned for.

#### **4.4.3 CHIPO: *SHE NO LONGER WEEPS***

Chipo is portrayed as a restless mistress, who wishes to be with Freddy, but can settle as being the other woman. Unlike Gertrude, however, she expresses a need for partial emotional provision as she asks Freddy to tell her that he loves her. Even when he does not, however, she stays.

Chipo depicts what was cited in Chapter Two about how women are socialised to display frailty and incompetence (Goffman 2015) and to massage male egos and suppress their power, (Friedan, 2017). Freddy exhibits her as a sex object when he taps her buttocks and orders her to fetch him a beer. This action marginalises her role as belonging only in the bedroom, to satiate Freddy's sexual appetite, and in the kitchen, to take care of him domestically.

When Martha is beaten by Freddy, Chipo is described as watching with "great interest." Despite the presence of Martha in the room, and even after watching him hit another woman, she still chooses to remain with him. When Freddy raises his hand to beat Martha, she restrains him, but only to mock Martha than to protect her. This depiction shows how some women will knowingly choose to remain with a man they know is abusive to other women, and how these women perpetuate patriarchal systems by turning a blind eye, or enabling abusive male behaviour. Chipo further reinforces how some women who have the reality or the illusion of equal power distribution with men, will enable patriarchy to thrive because they benefit; just as Mala in *Who Said I Don't Want to Dance*. Chipo is disillusioned by the idea that she has Freddy's heart and attention, and thus does not stop him when he beats Martha.

When Martha has left, Chipo remains in the same bedroom where another woman was inside before, and she and Freddy begin to undress in silence. This action of silently undressing in an intimate room is significant as it portrays both characters' desperation and brokenness. Freddy is broken and this is shown by his abusive character, but Chipo is broken for staying. When Freddy expresses his vulnerability, she draws his head on her lap and sings him a nursery rhyme. This is ironic because she sympathises with the violent perpetrator and not the victim. Again, this

indicates how women are victim-blamed, whereas men are given second chances at salvation; and how society is more unforgiving to women, but lenient to men, who are treated as children.

## **4.5 THE CONFORMIST**

### **4.5.1 Zothile: *Who Said I Dont Want to Dance***

Zothile is portrayed by Moyo as a product of her mother's British-Rhodesian grooming, which is comical because her setting is the small Moyo Village in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe. Gina sarcastically dubs her the "Royal Highness, Queen of Moyo Village," which emphasises her fixation with British society, but also reveals the neo-colonial system around her. Further, the Ndebele name Zothile, which translates to, 'humble,' ironically does not depict her character, as she demands to be treated in a special way. However, her name also indicates her conformity to her mother and her community's expectations of her role as a woman; she humbly conforms, unlike her defiant sister Gina. As Gina recalls, she always looks impeccably neat, and sits uncomfortably "lady-like." Her interpretation of womanhood is therefore influenced by the West, because she has adopted Western etiquette.

Role congruity theory as discussed in the theoretical framework suggests that people usually regard deviation from expected gender roles negatively. Zothile therefore is characterised as a woman who is lost in the need for acceptance, because of the trauma she encountered in her formative years when she was discovering her identity. Because of the traumatic shame of getting pregnant outside of marriage that she faced like Martha in *She No Longer Weeps*, Zothile is redeeming herself in the face of her society. She does this by domesticating herself and becoming hyper-feminine. Due to the possible slut-shaming she endured, and possibly in fear of



how the society does not accept her foil Gina, she wants to teach Gina to “sit with her legs closed.” In addition to this being a western rule of etiquette, Zothile’s desire reveals her suppression of sexuality, because sex led to her being “damaged goods.” Therefore, she wants to “redeem [her] integrity” and the only way to do this is by getting married, even when love is not involved. Zothile’s closing words to her sister are, “can’t you see? Now I wont have to be alone!” The character therefore has to do what she can to survive in the Moyo Village, and marriage is the solution to climb the social hierarchy as Gaidzanwa, cited in Chapter Two, explains.

#### **4.6 CONCLUSION**

The portrayal of women in the plays indicate that the playwrights are not writing merely to entertain, but as a lens into the prejudiced positions of women in society. The writings reveal the various intersectional grievances faced by each character’s social class and economic group. Elements of radicalism and acknowledgement of the need for re-socialisation is present. The playwrights therefore infuse feminist elements in their writings.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **5.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will present and analyse the research findings. It will also discuss the challenges that the researcher encountered during the research study. Finally, it will conclude with recommendations for further study.

### **5.1 FINDINGS**

The research found that Black women are depicted diversely, depending on the socio-cultural background of each playwright. Dangarembga presents a world in newly independent Zimbabwe (the 1980s) where the main theme is her protagonist's struggle to reshape women's heterosexuality and femininity in a very religiously conservative society adopted in the colonial era. The social constructions in the world of *She No Longer Weeps* are taken from the Christian religion, where women are meant to be submissive to the men in their lives, and where they gain communal respect only through marriage. Dangarembga's protagonist Martha is therefore radically portrayed as she rebels against the restrictive system in the world of the play and attempts to redefine womanhood. Gurira and Salter, on the other hand reflect a world in the new millennium (the early 2000s), where the urban Black female characters are more sexually expressive, are more industrial in language and action; and this is normal in their global capitalist community. However, the main conflict faced in the world of *In the Continuum* is the patriarchal feminisation of H.I.V/A.I.D.S in the partially more liberal world for women in the play as compared to that of *She No Longer Weeps*. The characters are therefore depicted as being moderate in feminist thought and action; they know their rights but are cautious when it comes to rebelling against the female victim-blaming society in the play. The characters are

moderate conformists. Moyo portrays a 2017 Matabele rural Zimbabwean setting, where the protagonist's main struggle is to escape a Levirate marriage and to explore her bisexuality. The social world in this play is patriarchal, and this system is maintained through Ndebele tradition. The characterisation in *Who Said I Don't Want to Dance* is strong, literate and opinionated rural women, whose conflict is choosing to, rediscover or maintain their Black female identities in a neocolonial but rural setting.

The shared themes of Black womanhood that all the plays possess are the need for a shift of women from the margins of society to becoming priorities economically, politically, in the healthcare system and socially. This is the recurring theme whether the setting is the 1980s, the 2000s, rural or urban: Black women are still marginalised. Salter's depiction of African American womanhood further emphasises on the universality of Black women's struggle to be prioritised and not be secondary in global legislative structures, as the juxtaposition between Harare and Los Angeles highlights that both Black women are faced with the same oppressive systems of class domination, which Hooks (1984), as explained in Chapter Two, diagnosis as caused by capitalism.

At the beginning of the research, the assumption was that most depictions of African women's experiences on stage have been homogenous and inadequately presented. However, the research has found that the playwrights have done justice in representing Zimbabwean women through the characters. They achieved this from the diction of each character, to the references the characters make on their environment, whether it is political or popular culture references. Further, the playwrights were able to shatter stereotypical misrepresentations of Black

womanhood, from Moyo portraying contemporary, intelligent rural women and thus correcting the notion of rural women being primitive, to Dangarembga correctly and humorously portraying stereotypical judgemental married women, to Gurira and Salter's realistic illustration of a global community where Black women face similar struggles but express them differently due to cultural diversity. Thus, the aim of the research, which was to observe whether Zimbabwean womanhood is portrayed differently by each playwright, was accomplished. The research therefore uncovered that female playwrights portray women in affirming ways, whether the characters choose to radically rebel or to conform. Therefore, the findings prove what Brumer (1983), who is referenced in the literature review, says about African women writers being creators and not perpetrators: they expose the injustices faced by women. This answers the question on whether it is important for a playwright to have lived through an experience in order to attempt to depict it truthfully: it is important as indicated by the Black female playwrights who plausibly portray Black women.

Three objectives are listed at the beginning of this research explore the portrayal of Black women in the works of female Black playwrights. This is achieved through the reading and analysis carried out on the plays. Outcomes of library research also contributed to the findings. The first objective was to analyse how the shared experiences of Zimbabwean women is illustrated in the plays. This was done in Chapter Three. The second was to reveal distinct characterisations and was achieved in Chapter Four. The third was to reveal whether the playwrights' works are feminist writings, and this has been proven through each chapter.

Three note-worthy values of western feminism are established in the plays. They are intersectional feminism, conventional feminism and radical feminism. In *She no longer weeps*, Martha wants to be a mother but does not want to carry pregnancy as she sees the time devoted to pregnancy as a waste of time. This is in line with radical feminist beliefs. Martha affirms radical liberal feminist ideology, as she exhibits androgynous abilities; she sees herself as both male and female but her feminine nature is dominant. She relay's this to Lovemore when she told him that she is both the father and the mother of Sarah her daughter. Gina's desire to explore bisexuality in *Who Said I Don't Want to Dance* also reveals her androgynous character traits, and second wave feminist ideology is exhibited by her belief in the constriction of feminine beauty standards. Third wave conventional feminism is depicted through the character of *In the Continuum*, as the characters are portrayed as lipstick feminists who find sexual allure as a valid and empowering part of femininity. Intersectional feminism is a present theory in all the plays, and it is uncovered through the struggles the Black women face because of their race, different social classes, financial positions and sexual inclinations. It can thus be said that western feminism has influence on the works of the playwrights.

African feminism, womanism and motherism are also present in the plays. All three plays contain major explorations on motherhood and nurture. Dangarembga hints on the need for man in the life of women through the supportive Lovemore, Gurira and Salter show this through the yearning the women have for father figures for their unborn children and Moyo depicts this through the colloquial relationship that Gina has with Buyi. The writers prescribe solutions, which are seen in how these female characters react to the laid down canons and their situations. They use their female characters to send a message to their western counterparts. The message is

that though they are feminists and acknowledge all that the theory stands for, they belong to a culture that cannot just be thrown away. Rather, they wish to handle their situations in a much different way.

## **5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

I recommend that the university and more especially the Department of Film and Theatre Arts Studies stock its library with current books on portrayal of women. The arguments on female portrayals and its relevance to the African are unending, therefore, stringent measures should be taken to upgrade knowledge and also keep students abreast of current trends and literatures in that regard. I also recommend that researchers in Africa, especially Zimbabwe, take deep interest in the subject and research on it further, especially to the relevance of their culture. Most scholarly materials used for this research is written by South Africans, therefore, I will encourage my fellow Zimbabweans to take up interest in research and more especially in related fields such as this (Performing Arts). I recommend that a further study into the works of African female playwrights be done using African feminism as the theoretical framework.

## **5.3 AREAS OF FURTHER STUDY**

As stated in Chapter 1, there has been little scholarly research into portrayal of Black women by Zimbabwean female playwrights and this leaves a lot of areas of study to be examined. Researchers could look into the reading of portrayal of Zimbabwean women by male playwrights as well. Further, researchers could look into how different generations portray women.

## **5.4 CONCLUSION**

By evaluations of the research questions as well as the research objectives, the findings of the study have shown how Black Zimbabwean women are portrayed by Black female playwrights. In accordance with the research objectives, the research has also established how different social stratifications lead to different portrayals of women. The research has shown the shared and varying depictions of women due to the different backgrounds of the playwrights.

The urge to undertake this research has brought further understanding and insight to the discourse. The various theories and definitions surrounding portrayals have deepened the understanding of the text. Women are not battling for equality but rather for equity, simple acknowledgment that needs to be accorded them as humans just like their male counterparts.

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