

Indigenous Knowledge Systems: An Alternative for Mitigating HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

HIV, as one of 21st century crises, has caused great suffering. Nations, worldwide, have doubled efforts to mitigate the effects of the HI virus. Multi-sectorial approaches have been employed to reduce its transmission. Paradoxically statistics of new infection, Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART) defaulting and HIV related deaths continue to increase despite the fact that communities in Zimbabwe, rural and urban, have access to HIV information. The paper seeks to investigate why the available information does not translate into effective and efficient HIV intervention measures. Is this to do with the nature and form (language and packaging) of the information? Can indigenous knowledge be helpful? These were some of the questions that underpinned the study. Since the study is a qualitative one, five prominent figures in Zimbabwe were interviewed. One chief, one acclaimed folklorist, two renowned scholars on traditional religion and indigenous knowledge and one theologian with expertise on religion and HIV and AIDS were the research participants. Findings revealed that *ngano* (folktales) as repertoires of indigenous knowledge, can be used for HIV information dissemination. The study argues that indigenous knowledge systems are a useful resource for mitigating HIV and suggests their use in dealing with existential challenges, chief among them being the HIV pandemic.

Keywords: HIV and AIDS, *Shona* community, indigenous knowledge, *ngano*, Zimbabwe

Introduction

The HIV pandemic has caused great suffering in the world, particularly Zim-

babwe where in 1999 the Zimbabwe government declared the pandemic a national disaster (Chirovamavi 2012:222). Efforts have been expended on trying to mitigate the epidemic with minimal strides having been achieved. Despite the abundant education available to people (Bankole *et al.* 2004) new cases of HIV infection, ART defaulting and HIV related deaths continue to be on the increase. This paradox calls for a paradigm shift in terms of the conceptualisation of HIV in the 21st century era if the clarion call: Zero New HIV Infections, Zero Discrimination and Zero AIDS-related deaths is to be realised in the near future. Given such a scenario this paper investigates why HIV is on the increase in spite of the fact that awareness about HIV and AIDS has increased and suggests the use of indigenous ways of disseminating information as a possible alternative. The paper argues that *ngano*¹ can be useful in HIV and AIDS information dissemination in the 21st century. This paper progresses by reviewing related literature, discussing the methodology used in gathering data, presents and analyses findings and concludes by way of a summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

Objectives of the Study

The intentions of this study were to:

- Examine the place of indigenous knowledge systems in contemporary Zimbabwean society
- Ascertain whether traditional deep *ngano* language can be manipulated for the 21st generation audience
- Assess the efficacy of *ngano* in the dissemination of HIV and AIDS awareness information

Theoretical Framework

The study is underpinned by Afro-centrism, a theory that calls for African

¹ These are stories told to young children from about five to eleven years of age, although adult persons are not forbidden from listening to the stories (Mawere 2013). This is a genre of storytelling where certain values and virtues were taught. This has been translated as ‘folktales’ by the missionaries with the intent to belittle the African mode of schooling. This genre, because of its efficacy among Africans, withstood the test of time and is still enduring in the 21st century.

phenomena, activities and way of life to be looked at and be given meaning from the standpoint and world view of Africans (Gray 2001; Asante in Hudson-Weems 2007; Makaudze 2013). The theory argues that using colonial and western perspectives in order to understand African epistemologies and ontologies usually results in distortions. In this regard, it is prudent that Shona folktales be interpreted by the Shona themselves as they tap their knowledge into solving challenges confronting them. Using this theory, the study argues that *ngano* (as an artefact Shona people are familiar with from time immemorial) can be a useful tool in HIV information dissemination.

Literature Review

Under this section, I intend to review literature related to concepts that underpin the study. There are always contestations as to definitions of terms in scholarship. In order to put the study into proper context literature on indigenous knowledge systems, HIV and AIDS and *ngano* shall be reviewed.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKSs): Definitional Contestations

Scholarship lives by its debates over terminology and many terms and concepts used in the humanities remain contested (Chitando 2009:8). Scholars have expended considerable energy trying to clarify the concept Indigenous Knowledge Systems. These scholars include, among others, Mawere (2010; 2011; 2012; 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2015), Mapara (2009), Gudhlanga and Makaudze (2012) and Hoppers (2002).

Hoppers (2002) makes an essential contribution towards the conceptualisation of IKSs by, first and foremost, attempting to define the word 'indigenous'. For her the word *indigenous* refers '... to the root, something natural or innate (to) ...' (2002:8). Indigenous knowledge systems are then the combination of knowledge systems encompassing technology, social, economic and philosophical learning, or educational, legal and governance systems (ibid). This definition points to the fact that indigenous knowledge systems cut across all facets of human existence. They cannot be restricted to one aspect but are ubiquitous in human life.

Similarly, Mawere (2014a:4) is of the conviction that the concept of

indigenous knowledge is a combination of two fundamental terms: *indigenous* and *knowledge* that need to be separated before the whole concept is unpacked. For him, the term *indigenous* literally mean original, first, native to a place or aboriginal people to an area (ibid). Without necessarily wanting to be philosophical, Mawere (2014a:5) understands knowledge as a personal belief that is somehow justified and with the capacity to influence one's thinking, action and behaviour. In the same book: *Culture, Indigenous Knowledge and Development in Africa: Reviving Interconnections for Sustainable Development*, Mawere admits that *indigenous knowledge* has been approached by scholars across disciplines. These include social/cultural anthropology, cultural studies and sociology among others. For Mawere Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKSs) are inseparable and as such he has decided to use them interchangeably for they mean one and the same thing. The former derives its meaning from the latter.

In an earlier book: *The Struggle of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems in an age of Globalization: A case for Children's Traditional Games in South-Eastern Zimbabwe*, Mawere (2012: 6) understands IKS as local knowledge(s) that is unique to a given culture or society. For him IKSs are the enduring African heritage that has failed to die despite the racial and colonial onslaughts unleashed on them by western imperialism and arrogance (Altieri 1995:114). This understanding by Altieri (ibid) assumes that IKSs are only for areas that were colonised, a position that Mawere (2015:23) in Mawere and Awuah-Nyamekye (2015) refute. IKSs are ubiquitous, both in colonised and colonising societies (developing and developed worlds alike). They have survived the test of time and history. From the definitions offered by Mawere, what he stresses is that this form of knowledge is intergenerational and is passed from one generation to another by those who hold it such as the elders in society (2014a: 6).

From the foregoing some scholars are of the opinion that the categories of this form of knowledge as 'indigenous', 'local' or 'traditional knowledge' has caused contradictions (Lanzano 2013:4). Nyamekye (2015:224) contends that the term *indigenous* needs delineation because it has assumed various connotations. For him the term is quite problematic in that it has assumed a diversity of meanings. For some scholars the term is pejorative to refer to group of people as *indigenes* (ibid). Other contradictions involve who the locals are and traditional has negative connotations. The concepts of local and traditional have been heavily discussed and problematized by scholars. These submissions

point to lack of a common understanding of the concept of *Indigenous Knowledge Systems*. While some scholars want to maintain IK (Mawere 2014a; Lanzano 2013; Nakata 2002; Olatokun & Ayanbode 2008) as an alternative to IKS, others still want to use IKS without violating what the concept stands for (Kamwendo & Kamwendo 2014; Makaudze & Gudhlanga 2012; Mapara 2009). Crossman and Devisch (2002:107) settle for *endogenous knowledge* as a shift of vocabulary having realised the pejorative connotations inherent in the use of the term *indigenous*.

Having discussed the different perspectives on the concept of indigenous knowledge systems, this paper is quite enthused by the definition offered by Marrewijk which I intend to quote at length.

Indigenous knowledge is the sum total of the knowledge and skills which people in a particular geographic area possess, and which enable them to get the most out of their natural environment. Most of this knowledge and these skills have been passed down from earlier generations, but individual men and women in each new generation adapt and add to this body of knowledge in a constant adjustment to changing circumstances and environmental conditions. They in turn pass on the body of knowledge intact to the next generation, in an effort to provide them with survival strategies (Marrewijk 1998:1)

The above insight highlights the fact that Indigenous Knowledge (IK) which is also known as Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) by Mawere (2012) refers to what indigenous people know and do, and what they have known and done for generations- practices that evolved through trial and error and proved flexible enough to cope with change (Melchias 2001). For purposes of this paper IK and IKS shall mean the same and hence shall be used interchangeably. With this in mind the next section assesses IKSs as an African resource worth protecting, promoting, developing and conserving (Hoppers 2002) for sustainable development in Africa. Given this understanding of indigenous knowledge systems, *ngano* qualifies to be part of a people's indigenous knowledge where the young, especially, are taught to care for, conserve and exploit the natural environment to ensure the continued thriving of resources (Mawere 2013: 13). As Zimbabweans battle to come to terms with challenges such as HIV and AIDS, indigenous knowledge systems such as *ngano*, told long back and still being told, continue to provide solutions thereof.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems: An African Resource

There has been unprecedented interest in indigenous knowledge systems. This renewed interest in indigenous knowledge systems and practices is widespread and global (Nakata 2002). This renewed interest comes after colonialism and its enlightenment science (heretofore referred to as modern science). Under colonialism, African traditional scientific knowledges and technologies (heretofore referred to as indigenous knowledge), bequeathed from their forefathers, has been despised, labelled as irrational, void of logical thought, unscientific and anti-development (Mawere 2015:1). Resultantly, the users of this knowledge were either discouraged or forbidden from using them with modern science and technologies either being encouraged or imposed on the indigenous peoples of Africa (ibid). This left a trail of demonization of African ways of knowing. Thanks to the period of renaissance, the once despised and trivialised indigenous knowledge were (and are still being) resuscitated no wonder the renewed interest in IKSs. Hoppers (2002: 8) argues that indigenous knowledge systems represent both a national heritage and a national resource that should be protected, promoted, developed and, where appropriate, conserved. She further asserts that this resource, IKSs, must not only be protected, promoted and conserved but should be put at the service of the present and succeeding generations (which is sustainability of IKSs). What she means by this is that IKSs must become handy in dealing with existential challenges that confront humanity today and generations to come. Ntuli (2002:53) sums up this point when she calls for African solutions to African problems. This is what Crossman and Devisch (2002:116) calls charting a new direction where a people's understanding of knowledge entails privileging local, practical, differential, site-specific/situated knowledges and competencies in contrast to western scientific tradition. This is not meant to oppose science to local knowledge but to emphasise that no one form of knowledge should trivialise the other.

Mawere and Awuah-Nyamekye's book: *Harnessing Cultural Capital for Sustainability: A Pan-Africanist Perspective* argues that the basic component of any society's social security and sustainability is cultural capital. This cultural capital is largely informed by a people's indigenous knowledge systems. Contributions in this book focus on the efficacy of indigenous knowledge systems in combating natural disasters such as droughts and famines. To cite just one example, Mawere and Mubaya (2015:8-9)'s article

focuses on *Zunde raMambo* whose main objective was to ensure collective well-being of humanity. It was a traditional social security arrangement designed to address the contingency of drought or famine. In cases of severe droughts and famines the local people would use the chief's granary to secure grain harvested from his *Zunde raMambo*. If African people, Zimbabweans in particular could harness such IKSs to deal with existential problems such as droughts or famines, what can stop the same people in the 21st century to harness the same IKSs in dealing with pandemics such as HIV and AIDS? This is the cardinal question this study attempts to answer by looking at how *ngano* (folktales) can be harnessed to disseminate awareness about HIV and AIDS in the Zimbabwean context and to Africa by extension.

IKSs have been largely referred to in crises such environmental dilemmas like climate change (Hadgu & Gebremichael 2013; Ajani, Mgbenka & Okeke 2013; Mawere & Mabeza 2015), environmental degradation (Tatira 2015; Asiana 2015; Kwarteng 2015) and food insecurity (Olatokun & Ayanbode 2008; Grantham 1996; Kamwendo & Kamwendo 2014; Seleti & Tlhompho 2014). All these cited examples evidently point to the undeniable fact that IKSs indeed, if harnessed properly, can be the panacea for some of the challenges that threaten to exterminate humanity on earth. Given such truisms the paper seeks to investigate if the Shona people of Zimbabwe can use *ngano* as a tool for disseminating HIV and AIDS to 21st century generation. There has been a deafening silence on target at the efficacy of *ngano* in addressing some existential challenges confronting humanity. As if that is not enough *ngano* has not been documented as a tool that can be harnessed to educate the Zimbabwean populace about the dangers of HIV and AIDS. This yawning gap is the target of this research. It is prudent to briefly review literature on the effects of HIV and AIDS in the midst of interventions put in place by governments and international agencies to reduce the impact of HIV to manageable levels.

HIV and AIDS: Navigating the Tumultuous Terrain

Of the total population of people living with HIV in the world 71% are in sub-Saharan Africa². These statistics are worrisome at a time when people talk of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero HIV related deaths.

² Star FM News at 18.00 on 16 June 2016.

Statistically, Parry (2013) provides information to the effect that despite the interventions put in place to curb the HIV epidemic, the spread of the virus is on the increase. She states that by 2011, 34.2 million people, including 3.4 million children less than 15 years of age, were living with HIV (Parry 2013:3). She further posits that this rapidly, relentlessly expanding global epidemic was, by 2006, claiming the lives of more than 2.2 million people each year (ibid). Barker and Ricardo (2005:37) equally state that in sub-Saharan Africa, there are nearly 10 million young men and women, ages 15-24, living with HIV and AIDS (statistics from UNAIDS 2003). There could be arguments that the cited figures could have been overtaken by events since then. Be that as it may evidence of the decline of the spread of the virus seems to be as elusive as a mirage. Admittedly, efforts have been expended to bring down these figures but with nominal successes.

Having realised this trend the Church took the bull by its horns. Parry (2013) talks of the comparative advantage of the church in dealing with the pandemic. She unequivocally discusses an HIV competent church that ensures that the pandemic is fought against from all fronts: from a children perspective, women's fellowship front, men's fellowship front, engaged couples, married couples, people with disabilities and parent groups' perspectives. The list is endless. This has made some possible recordings in terms of HIV awareness. But the question still remains unanswered as to why are we still recording new infections, why are there ART defaulting and HIV related deaths?

Chitando (2009)'s *Troubled but not destroyed: African Theology in dialogue with HIV and AIDS* seems to suggest the vantage position theology has when dealing with HIV and AIDS. The female theologian seems to keep up the pace as compared the male counterpart. The title suggests a resilient stance that Igo (2009)'s *A window of hope: An invitation to faith in the context of HIV and AIDS* also seems to be affirming. For Igo there appears to be light at the far end of the tunnel. The book is about how HIV and AIDS 'challenges us to question our very understanding of what it means to be human and motivates us to search for ways to fulfil our deepest desires and dreams ...' (back cover comments). What all these point to, is the fact that the HIV epidemic has been approached from multiple points of view but alarmingly no solution seems to be forthcoming. Being in such a quagmire calls for the local people's ingenuity as had been the case in times of droughts or famines from time immemorial. How did our forefathers (and of course foremothers) deal with eventualities such as droughts or famines, epidemics like *maperembudzi*

(leprosy) and other outbreaks such as rinderpests (foot and mouth diseases)? It is at this point that the same can be said about *ngano* in mitigating the HIV pandemic.

Methodology

While this work remains chiefly a product of critical literature review, it is spiced with data from in-depth interviews held with four renowned scholars and one folklorist of repute. The interviews lasted an average of one hour. WhatsApp was used in gathering data. WhatsApp, as a social media platform is gaining a lot of currency in this 21st century. The WhatsApp platform, which was used with the folklorist was found quite useful and effective given the tight schedule of the folklorist. Questions were given to him on the platform and would respond to them at his own convenience and the interviews took some days. This enabled the researcher to reflect on responses given and in the succeeding interviews certain aspects raised in earlier discussions could be followed, a scenario that could not have been possible in a face-to-face interview unless one makes another appointment. This also removed the close contact of the interviewer and the interviewee which, in most cases, compromise the kind of responses. WhatsApp was like a self-administered interview and produced reliable and valid data. Listening to the folklorist's radio programme was another methodology used for this study, where he narrated *ngano* and listeners asked questions and made comments. This proved useful for the interactive radio programme brought out issues pertinent to this study. Both data from the interviews (WhatsApp included) were recorded and transcribed. The data collected was anonymised and analysed thematically.

Findings and Discussion

The study suggests that *ngano* can be an effective means of disseminating HIV information. It is an indigenous way of imparting knowledge and has been argued to be even effective in the 21st century. Amali (2014:88) makes this clear by arguing, using Idoma folktales, that children stand to benefit from lessons derivable from folktales. Folktales educate and prepare children for 21st century challenges with the HIV pandemic being chief among them. In the past, folktales were targeted to the youths with a view to prepare them for

adulthood but they can also be useful to all and sundry in this context of HIV and AIDS.

Interviews with Three Scholars and one Chief

All the four interviewees agreed that *ngano* used to function as a teaching tool in a number of African communities, especially to children, using a language accessible to the audience. They (*ngano*) were a school for the young as they prepared for adult life. Arguing from a different perspective but with the same intent, Mawere (2012) meticulously discusses games that African children in general and Zimbabwean children in particular engaged in as they sharpened their creativity, accuracy, motor skills, endurance, determination, physical fitness, hygiene and vigilance just to mention a few. These games are a part of the cultural capital (Mawere 2015) that our progenitors passed from one generation to another. The games were (were because they seem to be extinct due to colonialism and globalisation) a form of African education that played a significant role (ter Haar 1992). For Mawere (2013) *ngano* were meant to educate people of many aspects of life including knowledge about how the natural environment should be cared for, conserved and exploited to ensure the continued thriving of natural resources. If this was the case then, *ngano* can also be tapped in teaching HIV and AIDS. Arguably *ngano* can be some of the media through which HIV information should be disseminated.

One interviewee noted that the make-believe world created by the *ngano* teller (*sarungano*) made everything possible. Even the impossible would appear possible because they happened in a faraway country (*nyika iri kure kure*). Animals could marry human beings, trees could speak and human beings could change into animals. The interviewee stated that the *sarungano*'s manipulation of the audience's immediate environment of human and animal kingdoms did not only make the stories interesting but accessible in terms of the language used. The manipulation of the immediate environment made a lot of sense to the audience. HIV and AIDS messages come packed in a language that is not accessible to all and sundry. The information is largely in English metaphors and imagery that may prove difficult for a local community member to grasp. It is only recently that translation has been done. But again once translation is used a lot of meaning is lost in the process. It is at this point that the paper posits that HIV and AIDS dissemination of information must be done

in a language and imagery that local communities are conversant with. *Ngano* can be such a medium.

Speaking to one renowned scholar with an impeccable expertise in studying indigenous knowledge, the following idea was quite clear. He argued that if *ngano* could be used in the past to disseminate information on outbreaks such as leprosy and foot and mouth diseases, the same can still happen in using *ngano* to conscientise people about HIV. He further argues that what could account for the continuous HIV prevalence rate in spite of the education about the epidemic could be the forms in which the education is disseminated. For him people understand a language in their own idioms, proverbs, and riddles. This, therefore, means *ngano*, when tapped into HIV information dissemination, can be effective and useful in bringing about behaviour change. Arguing from a music point of view Mlambo (2015) concurs that indigenous knowledge can be tapped into dealing with 21st century challenges. Music, for him, from time immemorial has been an important aspect of life. He cites a number of Zimbabwean musicians who use their songs to conscientise people about the HIV pandemic. This paper argues that if music can be HIV information disseminator with a high impact factor, *ngano* can equally play a significant role towards the realisation of zero new HIV infections, zero stigma and zero HIV related deaths.

During the interviews it came out clearly that *ngano* has been imparted upon by colonialism and globalisation such that their efficacy as an African resource in crises such as the HIV epidemic has been done a big blow. Notwithstanding this, the interviewees made it clear that *ngano* has withstood the test of time. One of them had this to say:

Ngano played and still play a fundamental role in the communities, especially in the rural areas where grandparents are still keen on educating the young on *Ubuntu*. The youth are taught what it means to be humane, what it means to be a real man, a real woman and how to coexist with others. Stories being told are of hare and baboon always at odds, thereby inculcating in the youth the need to coexist peacefully. This is why even the school curriculum emphasises as well the teaching of such stories to mould in the youth good citizenry (Interviewee).

Arguing from the same perspective, Chivasa and Mutswanga (2014) examine the role of *ngano* in promoting peace building among the

Shona people. They argue that Shona indigenous peace promoting and sustaining methods are still a thriving forest which has not been lost in oblivion. This is acceptance of the African people's ingenuity in dealing with human challenges that threaten their very existence such as violence. Folktales were part of the Shona people's way of life. They (folktales) were mainly concerned with sustaining relationships, maintaining and inculcating peaceful co-existence between individuals and groups within communities (Chitando 2008).

In the same vein Mukonyora (2007: 32) emphasises the significance of *ngano* by arguing that Shona women elders used *ngano* to teach a philosophy of coexistence among people and the animal kingdom. She cites a *ngano* she got from her grandmother about an elephant who used to steal hare's pumpkins. When elephant was finally caught he was humiliated. Lesson learnt from the folktale is: it is wrong to steal. Mukonyora learnt a lot from the stories told by her grandmother. The stories were narrated in a language the storyteller and the audience understood very well. If *ngano* were meant to teach the audience issues of their time, this study is quite convinced that the same genre of teaching can be used to teach people about HIV and AIDS. The language used full of animal and human metaphors are not only vivid but are likely to leave a lasting impression in the minds of the audience. If people manipulated their indigenous knowledge systems to teach, can 21st century generation not benefit from the same in the context of HIV and AIDS? This is the thrust of this paper.

WhatsApp interview with Ignatius Mabasa

Asked about the efficacy of *ngano* in the 21st century, a folklorist Ignatius Mabasa argues that, *ngano*, just like in past, address challenges of the time. They, in this century, address challenges posed by HIV and AIDS. He made it clear during the interview that he had taken *ngano* to another level where people begin to appreciate them. To illustrate his point he briefly narrated a *ngano* in which a young girl used up her transport money on buns at school. She then walked home after school. On the way 'a good Samaritan' offered her transport. She was given an intoxicant and lost her consciousness only to wake up dumped, brushed and besides a dump site. She had been raped by an unknown stranger who initially pretended to be good to her.

From the foregoing Mabasa is teaching using *ngano*. One of the lessons in this folklore is that we must not trust people we do not know. This is a clear case of rape. More to this grave offence, the survivor could have been infected with HIV.

Arguing from an Afro-centric perspective, and concurring with Mabasa, Makaudze (2013) opines that folktales constitute a serious body of literature to which contemporary Zimbabweans must not only pay serious attention, but also tap from for a better understanding of reality and for them to cope with challenges (Makaudze 2013:521) in their day-to-day lives. He refutes a colonialist thinking that relegates folklore in the form of folktales as an art of the past with no place in ‘modern’ society. His (Makaudze) citing of some Shona *ngano* ‘Vasikana vakaroorwa nemadzvinyu’ (Girls married by lizards) demonstrates the Shona philosophy that marriage is not a one-man event but a process that involves many people. The girls realised later that they had married lizards who could change to human beings (changelings) but the realisation came a bit late when vows had been exchanged.

This folktale, like Mabasa’s teaches a number of lessons: that people must marry people they know and within their proximity (*rooranai vematongo*, a loaded Shona saying that emphasises the importance of marrying within proximity where no one is stranger). This folktale can be tapped and be effectively used to teach against marrying people we do not know, especially in the context of HIV and AIDS. Knowing in both *ngano* (Mabasa’s and Makaudze’s) may not necessarily be limited to just knowing one’s life background but may be extended to mean knowing would be husbands’ and wives’ HIV statuses. These are old *ngano* which ‘still make sense!’ in the 21st century. Therefore, relegating folktales to the margins, arguing that they do not have place in the world of globalisation and sophisticated technology is being myopic. Mabasa is already using technology such as YouTube, twitter and clouding to access his audience but the *ngano* maintains its intended purpose.

In the said interview, Mabasa categorically made it clear that the use of *ngano* in the context of HIV as an information dissemination tool is long overdue. Asked on the impact of *ngano* to realise zero new HIV infections, zero stigmatisation and zero HIV-related deaths, Mabasa bemoans the lack of trust in our people whom he said have a serious colonial hangover. For him *ngano* are not static but dynamic. They are part of a people’s heritage and using them to teach about HIV is quite possible as illustrated by his programme on one of Zimbabwe’s radio stations, which shall be discussed later. He

emphasised that *ngano*, from the past, taught and still teaches in the 21st century.

The efficacy of *ngano* as a teaching aid is also emphasised by Amali (2014) who focuses on the functions of folktales in traditional societies. Among the functions Amali identifies include but not limited to imparting educational, traditional, cultural, religious and social ideologies of the society to growing children (2014:88). Looking at the Idoma folktales in Nigeria, Amali (2014:91) cites Amadi (1980:92) who argues that folktales serve many functions in African society. In addition to providing entertainment, they have certain didactic qualities. They are used to educate the young; they help to establish social norms. In other words, folktales were (and are still for communities still using them) ‘schools’ where the young are under the tutelage of *sarungano* (storyteller). The Idoma folktales teach about good upbringing and acceptable behaviour of children. They check indulgence in societal ills. It is this checking and control mechanism of folktales that can be tapped for use in the 21st century challenges such as HIV and AIDS. The deafening silence by available literature on this slant is a cause for concern. The Idoma folktales punish acts such as wickedness, theft, stinginess, unfaithfulness, dishonesty, hatred and rewards such attributes as honesty, sincerity, love, generosity, kindness, faithfulness, helpfulness (Amali 2014:92).

On the effectiveness of *ngano* language as a medium to educate people on HIV, Mabasa made it abundantly clear that the language is ‘modernised’ not westernised so that the 21st century audience understand it. I had raised a concern on the accessibility of deep *ngano* language to his audience. He asked me to listen to his Star FM Thursday radio programme where he teaches a lot of contemporary issues such as domestic violence, rape, child marriages and HIV using *ngano*. The language is made easy allaying fears that *ngano* language cannot be contextualised to suit the current audience. Using animal and human characters (Mazuruse 2010), folktales ‘speak’ in a language that vividly captures the minds of the audience. Whilst they entertain, they have a moral vibe that runs through most of the folktales. This paper argues that such vitality imbued in folktales can be handy in the dissemination of HIV information to people in a language that they know and understand better. More often HIV information dissemination has been in packages that indigenous people are not familiar with. Speaking of abstinence, faithfulness to one faithful partner and condomization may be mouthfuls to certain sections of

people. When such talk is packaged in indigenous knowledge systems such as *ngano* the impact factor may be more comparatively.

Listening to Ignatius Mabasa's Thursdays programme on the most widely listened to Star FM, a radio station in Zimbabwe at half past nine in the morning, one has no option but to appreciate the beauty of the Shona language that he weaves with 'modern' diction that 21st century generation identifies with. Comments made by his audience speak volumes. One listener had, on one of the occasion, this to say:

I never knew that our Shona language is this rich. It is a language that captures our very life experiences through its rich diction. I wonder how vaMabasa (Mr Mabasa) does it. He makes *ngano* language so sweet to the ear and this makes them (*ngano*) very popular to both the youths and the adults (Listener).

Mabasa, as *sarungano* (storyteller), discusses many themes ranging from rape to HIV. On rape he talks of a story (*ngano*) where a female student (represented by elephant in the story) used her bus fare at school on scones and had to walk home. On the way she got so tired that she was offered a lift by *shumba* (lion). She was given intoxicants in the car only to gain consciousness in a bin brushed and bloody. This is a story where one has been raped by a stranger. Lesson (s) learnt here is that we must not trust strangers and this may also help in avoiding contracting HIV. Rape has also been responsible for the spread of the virus given its violent nature. Chances to protect oneself under rape are very minimal. The said folktale therefore warns against getting along with people we do not know. Admittedly most rape cases are from known relatives but as the folktale illustrates it can also be perpetuated by strangers. In another *ngano*, Mabasa teaches about the need to fight stigma and discrimination associated with being HIV positive. He narrates of the animal kingdom where some animals mock and discriminate others because they are HIV positive. From the discussions that ensued it was made clear that there was need to be positive about being HIV positive. All the animals ended up accepting their HIV positive colleagues and vow to assist each other in the fight against HIV stigmatisation and discrimination.

From the foregoing, it is clear that *ngano* has never been static and trivial as suggested by colonialist thinking (Makaudze 2013:521). This colonialist thinking believes and takes *ngano* to be an art of the past with no

relevance to today's experiences. This thinking finds expression in scholars such as Bascom (1965:4) who argue that such a genre of literature needs not be taken seriously since it is not considered history or real life. Thanks to luminaries like Mabasa who resuscitate the use of *ngano* as a genre that 'still makes sense' (Makaudze 2013) even in this 21st century.

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

My aim in this paper was to think through the impact of indigenous knowledge systems as an alternative to mitigating the HIV and AIDS pandemic. This was done through discussing the efficacy of *ngano* (folktales) as a genre that still makes a lot of sense in the 21st century. Despite the trivialisation of indigenous knowledge systems by the colonialist thinking, *ngano* can still be tapped to with challenges that confront humanity and HIV and AIDS is no exception.

In this study I have emphasised that *ngano*, as illustrated by the lessons derived from some of them, can be a resource that indigenes can rely on when dealing with outbreaks. They can be used to disseminate HIV information in order to realise zero new HIV infections, zero Anti-Retroviral defaulting and zero discrimination. Evident in the discussion is that *ngano*, as an artefact of the Shona people's indigenous knowledge, is not static but can be modernized to suit the 21st century audience who are in a different socio-economic and religio-cultural milieu from the past. Fortunately, *ngano* proved in the discussion that they can be adapted to suit any eventuality and this demonstrates their (*ngano*) flexibility and resourcefulness. They are normally told in a language audience know best and lessons drawn from them are plenty. Having been given folktales' usefulness, the paper makes the following recommendations:

- IKS can be a useful resource to alleviate the effects of HIV. By mainstreaming *ngano* for preservation and using the language to teach and disseminate HIV information, the pandemic's effects can be minimised. *Sarunganos* from a number of communities can be trained on how to use *ngano* and its rich language to teach and disseminate HIV information.
- Since *ngano* used to take place during the evening, their usage occupies the audience such that they do not find time to frequent places where they may contract the virus such as bars. There is need to have planned

concerted efforts towards having the story tellers have the youth during the day, especially during school holidays teaching them using *ngano*

- Community workshops can also be done where facilitators like Ignatius Mabasa, with the assistance of the Ministry of Health and Child Care in Zimbabwe in collaboration with non-governmental organisations, teach about HIV using *ngano* in the villages.
- Academic conferences on this aspect from various communities of Africa can be held and publications made which then can be used for HIV information dissemination

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