7. POLITICISING AND COMMERCIALISING DEATH AND PAIN IN POSTCOLONIAL URBAN ZIMBABWE: *THE UNCERTAINTY OF HOPE* BY VALERIE TAGWIRA

Justina Namupala and Max Mhene

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Abstract

This paper analyses the politicising and commercialising of death and pain in The Uncertainty of Hope by Valerie Tagwira, from the trauma and resilience perspectives. The aim of this paper is to explore and interpret the myriad interrelations between death, pain, politics, and commercialisation as presented in the novel. The analysis found that loss and hardships are closely interconnected to politics and commercialisation. The politicisation is exposed through the challenges characters face and commercialisation is clearly shown through the exploitation of the female body for monetary needs. Without consideration for human emotions and sentiments, these types of suffering and hardships are further aimed for political and commercialisation objectives. In this context death is utilised as an instrument for commerce and financial gains.

Keywords: politicising, commercialising, death, pain, trauma, resilience, Operation Murambatsvina, economic struggles.

Introduction

Death and suffering have long been central concerns of literary studies across both African and Western societies and many scholars have greatly written about it. However, despite death being common in our societies, the concept of it is viewed differently and nearly, all African communities regard illness and death with great fear. In fact, in most African communities' loss and mourning carry deep cultural meanings and practices as such that they ensure that the dead are given a proper burial and their families are provided with moral, material, and spiritual support. These traditional considerations provide an important background for examining how current socio-political circumstances re-form the significance of death and human distress.

The trauma and resilience theories are equally useful in this regard, as they help enlighten how individuals process traumatic experiences and how they undergo or adopt within oppressive political and economic environments. In recent years, the interpretation of loss is no longer influenced by cultural and spiritual aspects but also by economic struggles and survival techniques. The significance of death, grief and other forms of hardships have increasingly been impacted by politics and minimal attention has been paid to its meaning.

This analysis is based on the transition from cultural meanings to politicised and commercialised understandings. Hence, this paper explores and interprets the myriad interrelations that exist between death, pain, politics, and commercialisation as represented in The Uncertainty of Hope by

Valerie Tagwira using the trauma and resilience theories to analyse how these underlying forces are signified in the novel.

Literature Review

Understanding the concept of death

According to Lee and Vaughan (2008) 'Death' and 'Africa' are words which, unfortunately, seem twinned together. In much Western media coverage, Africa appears as a space of death owing to epidemic diseases, famine, war and apparently 'irrational' violence which dominates the continent. Gire (2014) writes that the difficulty of having a unitary view of death or the death experience can be better appreciated when we realise that it is problematic to even define what we mean by death.

To begin with, Black (1977), defines death from the reflection of the everyday use of the word "death,'' and proffers that death can be defined as the absence of life in relation to the meaning of "life". Secondly, Black reiterates that death is the suspension or cessation of vital processes of the body, such as heartbeat and respiration. Similarly, Olson (n.d.), defines death as the opposite of life and that it is more precisely the end of life, which initially means that a thing dies when it ceases to be alive.

Ekore and Lanre-Abass (2016) assert that death is a universal, natural, persistent, inescapable, unavoidable, and undeniable fact of life. Nevertheless, Mason (2015) argues that the concept of death has no subjective meaning. Death and its concepts are absolutely empty; no picture comes to mind. Death is a blank wall; the concept of death is absolutely without any object whatsoever. Even though it is a very present issue in our everyday lives, it is very tough to understand.

However, as much as we want to understand the issue of death, Prater (2001) writes that the subject of death is a taboo in our society. This situation contributes to the difficulties many have in accepting and coping with the death of a loved one, thereby impeding the process of grief and bereavement.

Lee and Vaughan (2008) write that African societies are also frequently represented as being 'good' at dealing with death. Africans, have 'proper' funerals, not the shortened affairs so common in Europe and North America. Furthermore, they do not cut themselves off from their dead, but live in relation to the world of the dead, the world of the ancestors. Hence, people are scared of death because it evokes several fears such as pain and suffering, and post-mortem consequences.

The transformation of death and pain through politicisation and commercialisation

Politics can be defined as 'affairs of the state.' Politics is primarily about the acquisition and maintenance of power. Power is inherent in the relationships between individuals, groups, the state, and a wide range of what are known as 'actors' in international politics. Justice has been upheld by most political theorists as a vitally important feature of a 'good' political system; so important, in fact, that justice has often been identified as the single most important objective of political activity. (Harrison & Boyd, 2003).

On that note, death has long been a central concern of social anthropological writing on African societies, and of the extensive literature on African belief systems. Until recently, however, little attention has been paid to the history of death practices in Africa in relation to demographic change,

urbanisation, and the interventions of the colonial and postcolonial state and the availability of new technologies (Lee & Vaughan, 2008).

In addition, Lee and Vaughan (2008) assert that African societies have found effective ways of managing the universal problems posed by death, but their ability to continue to do so have been called into question by some recent developments. Societies are saturated with death, particularly violent death, to such a degree that the work of mourning is now meaningless. Civil war, genocide, and the 'banalisation' of violence in some parts of the continent produce situations in which the normal practices and processes of mourning become impossible.

There is an on-going profound shift in contemporary attitudes towards death. People learnt about death and dying through the intimate, hands-on experiences. Indeed, the same was true for most people throughout the world until the mid-20th century. Rapid urbanisation in Africa and international migration have given rise to the use of new terminologies of death, seemingly far removed from the burial practices described by colonial anthropologists. A burgeoning African funeral industry has grown to address these new needs. African corpses are now refrigerated and embalmed and captured on video camera. The funeral industry is big business, especially when allied to the insurance industry (Greece, 2013).

Economic struggles in Zimbabwe after independence and the introduction of 'Operation Murambatsvina'

Several Zimbabwean literary works depict struggles during the economic struggles in Zimbabwe after independence and most especially under 'Operation Murambatsvina'[Operation Restore Order]. The novel under study represents the death and pain amidst political instability, economic crisis, inflation, HIV and AIDS, gender-based violence, and land struggles during the introduction of the 'Operation Murambatsvina' under the 'Mugabe rule' in Zimbabwe. In 2000, Zimbabwe endured profound political and economic crisis. Parliamentary elections held in 2000 and presidential elections in 2002 were marred by political disturbances and violence between the opposition and the ruling party.

Tagwira's novel mirrors incidents during the economic turmoil specifically during the launch of the operation. Tagwira writes about the experiences of women against the background of Murambatsvina and the struggles women faced during the economic turmoil after independence. On May 19, 2005, the Zimbabwean government launched an operation called 'Operation Murambatsvina'. Madebwe et al. (2005) write that the official government translation for "Operation Murambatsvina" is "Operation Restore Order." The police burnt, bulldozed, and destroyed tens of thousands of properties around the country. The destructions resulted in the mass evictions of urban dwellers from housing structures and the closure of various informal business sectors throughout the country. (Zimbabwe's Operation Murambatsvina: The Tipping Point, 2005) Therefore, *The Uncertainty of Hope* gives highlights on the ignored dimensions of women experience in the general context of a country facing serious political, economic, and social challenges.

The Trauma and Resilience theories

The paper adopts the trauma and resilience theories as its primary literary lenses. Over the years, various scholars have shaped the development of Trauma theory. According to Balaev (2018), trauma refers to a person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an

individual's sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society. In a similar vein, Liswaniso (2016) asserts that trauma manifests differently among victims, because an event that traumatises one person may not necessarily wound the other. Caruth (1996) highlights the lasting effects of traumatic events, whereas Balaev (2018, 2021) and Visser (2021) reason that trauma must be understood within wider cultural, political, and economic settings. Collectively, these opinions offer suitable lens for examining how suffering in the novel develops from Zimbabwe's socio-political crisis.

Similarly, resilience theory provides significant perceptions about how humans navigate struggles. Scholars like Ungar (2018, 2020) and Masten (2021) highlight how individuals adapt and negotiate survival in adverse environments. Resilience, therefore, is concerned with clarifying the strengths that people have within them, which enables them to rise above adversity. It is the capacity for strategically absorbing disturbance and challenges, and for coping with the complex uncertainties in life to survive and move beyond survival (Mlambo, 2013). Moreover, Masten (2021) defines resilience as a class of phenomena, characterised by good outcomes despite serious threats to adaptation of development, identifying the term as the ability to ''bounce back'' from adversity, frustration, and misfortune.

Taken together, these perspectives outline the strong correlation between trauma and resilience as individuals often try to bounce back after experiencing a horrifying events. Consequently, these arguments offer a framework for understanding the coping strategies portrayed by Tagwira's characters.

The presentation of survival techniques in literature

Everyone goes through hard times, but not every person deals with these periods of time in the same way. When death occurs, optimistic people mourn and grieve, but in a different manner than that of which pessimistic people grieve. Cloete and Mlambo (2014) write that most African literature depicts challenges experienced by different characters in their everyday lives. Characters adapt to different survival techniques as they resiliently face these challenges that texts try to reflect. Many authors manage to show how characters are capable of coping with tragedies by adopting resilient techniques.

According to Mlambo (2014), resilience emphasises the strengths that the people have, rather than their vulnerability, through exploring the coping strategies that they exhibit instead of their vulnerability, but through exploring the coping strategies that they exhibit. Literature demonstrates that there is a direct relationship between the stress of the leader's job and their ability to maintain resilience in the face of prolonged contact with adversity. Muganiwa (2013) further explains that some of the central messages in African novels are hope, determination, positivity and living a purposeful life inspired by resilience. In addition, Chitando (2016) writes that any literary texts focus on social commentary about the challenges faced by the girl children and their resilience.

Therefore, literature on thriving suggests that people will respond to thriving in three different ways when confronted by a challenge: they may survive the incident, recover from the incident, and thrive as a result of enduring the hardship (Nishikawa, as cited in Ledesma, 2014). As a result, survivors continue to function although it may be in a weakened state. Recovery indicates a return to the baseline, where individuals return to their previous level of functioning.

Synopsis of the Selected Text

The Uncertainty of Hope is a novel by Valerie Tagwira. She is a Zimbabwean writer who is a specialist obstetrician-gynaecologist by profession. Her novel *The Uncertainty of Hope*, published in 2006 by Weaver Press, won the 2008 National Arts Merit Awards (NAMA).

The novel is set in the densely populated suburb of Mbare, Harare. It explores the complex lives of Onai Moyo, a market woman and mother of three children, and her best friend Katy Nguni who is a vendor and black-market currency dealer. Onai Moyo is married to Gari, an abusive, irresponsible, and immoral drunkard. He is later retrenched from his job and finally dies of HIV and AIDS related illness. Kathy is married to John a cross-border truck driver, who is a very supportive man and a complete opposite of Gari. Tagwira presents a society's uncertainty of hope that is very high, as most of the people fail to fend for their families and do not even know what the next day has in store for them. Hence, the author highlights the challenges that these underprivileged women face in their day-to day lives and the obstacles that they encounter in trying to make life better for their families.

In addition, the novel gives insights into the challenges faced by Zimbabweans, where people survive by their intelligence, their labour and friendship, henceforth, the text is a celebration of urban sisterhood and unshakable relationships. These bonds endure the deprivations of harsh, life-negating policies such as 'Operation Murambatsvina, the government's urban clearance programme, which created over half a million internally displaced people and destroyed countless livelihoods. Moreover, characters face domestic violence, poverty, homelessness and the vulnerability to HIV and AIDS.

Character associated with death and pain amidst the political and economic turmoil as depicted in *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006)

In 2000, Zimbabwe endured profound political and economic crisis. The country's economy was in a state of prolonged crisis provoked by massive mismanagement and corruption. People were said to stand in long queues up to three days to get a few litres of petrol. Mealie- meal queues resulted in violent rioting and the police were called to restore order which they carried out with indiscriminate force and sadistic delight. Power cuts and load-shedding were a regular occurrence in Harare and other towns and basics were not readily available. People did anything they could to get quick money and fill the gap that the government could not fill.

This resulted in the death of a small baby, according to Katy Maya's lodger was selling petrol from his shack, God knows how he came to have it in there. It caught fire and all the nearby shacks were burnt to the ground. It is said that a small baby died in that fire (Tagwira, 2008, p.29).

When Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, the country inherited an unequal and race-based land ownership pattern. Thousands of white farmers were violently forced from their farms and were forced to flee their homes as a result of the violence.

An unfortunate farmer according to the writer had died after being brutally assaulted in his home. Amid great speculation, his family had fled the country soon afterwards (Tagwira, 2008, p. 54).

These incidents are further reflected in Douglas Rogers' The last resort: A memoir of Zimbabwe (2009), whereby Sachikonye (2003, as cited in Musanga, 2015) observes that the programme was characterised by violence thereby leading to loss of life by black farm workers and white farmers. The resettlement process itself was accompanied by chaos.

Tagwira's text provides insights of the implementation of 'Operation Murambatsvina, as the police burnt, bulldozed, and destroyed properties around the country. The evictions and the demolition of houses and market stalls and the manner in which they were carried out caused a lot of trauma. Those whose shacks were destroyed were moved to Tsiga grounds.

Displaced families gathered there to seek refuge and mark out their territories in the open space (p.139). The narrator describes that the atmosphere was saturated with fear, anger, and uncertainty (p. 141), leaving many in a state of confusion and with traumatic consequences since these areas offered few employment opportunities and they thus suffered severe food shortages.

The operation resulted in various deaths; people being crushed to death in their own homes under the relentless shovels of bulldozers. Some died because of exposure to the elements whilst sleeping in the open since the demolition of their shelters. They suffered hastened and dishonourable deaths in cold winter amidst the rubbles and the heartache of razed suburbs. Those that resisted the police were dealt with brutally and faced humiliation. This resulted in the death of one of Onai's neighbours "Hondo" a war veteran, and Tagwira writes that:

Hondo was emasculated and publicly humiliated in the worst possible manner. He was filled with grief, anger, and pain. He questioned if that was the reward for his sacrifice, nobody knew what it really meant to have fought in the war of liberation. The next morning Hondo's mangled body was discovered on the railway tracks, the train's wheels had sliced him across his torso and abdomen and his head was untouched (p.149-153).

In addition to Hondo's death, there were three other deaths that were reported that week. Two toddlers had died when the demolition team erroneously moved in without checking whether there were people inside the targeted shack. The parents had not only been left homeless and impoverished, but also childless and grieving. Another woman's bloated body was found floating in a ditch over-flowing with sewage and nobody had an idea how she could have died. The writer, however, reveals that 'Those who knew her, said she could have died of grief, because she too had lost virtually everything' (p. 155). One woman had committed suicide by taking rat poison, when both her tuck-shop and her shack were demolished within a few hours of each other. Being homeless and having no means to look after their family, life had ceased to hold any meanings and she saw death as an easy escape.

The country's economic instability caused people to leave for other countries in search for better places to live. People migrated to other countries where life was better than in Zimbabwe, a place of hunger and things falling apart. It was reported that a group of unidentified men had drowned in the Limpopo River while trying to escape to South Africa.

The hospital staff had been muttering about a strike to press for better salaries and the improvement of conditions in hospitals. Most of the patients were nearly homeless people who had come in with diarrhoea and chest infections, worsened by overcrowding, lack of sanitation and exposure to cold weather, resulting from the relocation of the operations. Some doctors opted to quit due to the situations that they encountered when operating patients (p.183).

The novel represents a society faced by death and pain, particularly violent deaths, to such a degree that the work of mourning was meaningless. The operation produced situations in which the normal practices and processes of mourning had become impossible. The situation had removed the burying of the dead with dignity.

Onai's neighbour was buried three days after his death. The mourning or grieving process was interrupted by the political incidents, the 'operation Murambatsvina' in particular. African families were believed to ensure that the dead were given an appropriate burial and their families were provided with moral, material, and spiritual support. Death was an occasion for every member of the community to come together to mourn, remember, commiserate, and send off the spirit of the dead into the next world (p. 153).

Thus, *The Uncertainty of Hope* depicts that less attention was paid to the meaning of death and pain as a result of the economic and political chaos. During these struggles people had no choice over how to honour their loved friends and family members. This shows that the culture of burying the dead had been lost and people had lost a lot of humanity in the society as a result of these political decisions.

The meaning of pain is transformed to satisfy monetary needs. People seized this opportunity of the economic and political chaos to take advantage of others. A conversation between Onai and Katy reveals that:

'This is unbelievable. People are profiting from the fuel shortages. They know we've no choice except to pay their high fares. Why must we go through the city centre in order to get to Mbare? There was no shortage of people trying to make profits at every turn, regardless of whom they crushed or chested in the process. 'Sometimes I have the feeling that we are slowly turning into a nation of thieves' (p. 51).

The text represents evidence of betrayal of the masses by the black leaders. The attainment of independence had not brought about social, political, and economic improvement. The newly elected leaders' political decisions had in return caused emotional and physical pain to everyone as people lived in poverty. "The food situation was getting worse every day, there was no transport, no bread, no sugar, no mealie meal, no cooking oil, no soap and no… everything" (p.332).

The commercialisation of death and pain as depicted in *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006)

The economic challenges and the political instability in Zimbabwe of 1998-2008 affected citizens negatively. There were little employment opportunities, hence people did what they could to make money in order to eat and survive. Valerie Tagwira's text depicts the commercialisation of the female body through prostitution. Various women were forced into prostitution, thereby making them vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. Tagwira thus writes that:

Hearing that her previous partner had died of an HIV-related illness, just that morning, did not help matters. Fear and anger wrestled with her sanity. Gloria had no illusions about her own HIV status. She was shrewd enough to realise that it was just a matter of time before the inevitable happened (p. 39).

Gari had agreed to take in Gloria as his second wife but after a few days, Gari fell ill and he began vomiting clots of blood and later died after being admitted for days in the Intensive Care Unit. Onai's emotions were confused. She wanted to mourn her husband, but when she searched her heart, she found only anger, disappointment, and a real sense of having been cheated by his death.

The novel depicts a country's economy that is to be blamed for forcing people into a corner of desperation. The country's economy dictated individual choices as many women were facing difficult choices. Melody, a law university student was in a relationship with a forty-five-year-old married man

called Chanda. He bought her clothes, groceries and gave her money. In a conversation with Faith Melody questions that:

Do you think this is what I wanted for myself? This is what I have to do, not what I want. For the first time since I came to varsity, I haven't had to scrounge and get by one meal a day… or have you passing me your leftovers. For the first time I haven't had to worry about which of my pompous relatives I should approach to beg for money only to endure lectures about how they are struggling as well. For the first time in months, I haven't spent sleepless nights considering whether I should become a prostitute to finance my studies… I would… or rather… I have thought of prostitution. If you knew anything about real poverty, you wouldn't blame me. If you want to blame something, blame the economy for forcing me into a corner' (p. 80).

Henceforth, Tagwira's text is a portrayal of the HIV and AIDS crisis. Onai lost her two brothers to the sickness. They left the village to go to work in Harare and it appeared that they had done well in the city. However, one encounter with one person was enough to destroy several lives (pp. 272-273).

The country's health sector had deteriorated and hospital standards worsened too. It was believed that those who got hospitalised were fined with high hospital bills that they could not afford. If one needed a nurse to dress their wound, one would have to wash their old bandage and put it out to dry in the sun. The hospital meals were deficient and tasted as bland as they looked. The government had run out of money even to buy HIV and AIDS drugs. Those who were sick were left to die without any provision of medication. A dialogue between Onai and Sheila discloses that:

'I went to the hospital again to try and register for HIV drugs,' Sheila replied, a sad look in her eyes. Her gaunt frame drooped; despair seemed to weigh on her shoulders. Onai looked at her troubled face and felt her pain. 'Any luck this time?' she asked softly. No. I've been put on a waiting list. They said they're not taking on new patients at the moment. There's no money to buy drugs. I was not surprised at all. Things never change. Except to get worse (p. 61).

Sheila felt that maybe she needed to sleep with someone, a man or to be connected to someone important because that was the only way to have anything done for you when you were from disadvantaged backgrounds. Ironically, someone was selling the drugs at the market square for five million dollars only for a month's supply.

Sheila's health worsened, she was taken in by the nuns at an orphanage and later died leaving her baby in the care of the nuns. However, the police demolished the orphanage because the church had built it without council approval and there was no whereabouts of the baby (p.156).

Additionally, the text implies that instead of providing security and safety, the police members were corrupt and cruel. This is depicted through individuals such as Assistant Commissioner Nzou who attempted to acquire wealth by exploiting others for his own monetary benefits. He arrested black market dealers during the day, and went to buy foreign currency from them at night. This indicated an obvious disregard for the public interest, and an increasing use of the office of state for personal gain.

Tagwira also highlights the abuse of entrusted power for personal benefits. Mr Boora at the municipal office made a move on Onai. Onai thought that the man wanted a bribe because the county's situation was bad to an extent that nobody did anything for free anymore. Many people expected payments in return for carrying out their normal duties.

'Oh, my dear sister! Sis veduwe! What makes you think everything comes down to money? You don't have to pay me at all. We can come to a small understanding. No? Just the two of us. Boora walked round the desk, and bending over her, wrapped his arms tightly around the desk half of her body and clutched her bosom. She felt his breath on her face. He smelt of cigarette smoke; acid and overpowering, worse than Gari's cigarette breath, then his dry lips were crushing hers, his hands groping her lustfully, in places where she had not been touched in a very long time (p. 292).

Hence, the vulnerable suffered and were humiliated at the hands of those in power. It was also believed that some officers used their power to disadvantage others. What is ironic is that the same officers were meant to keep peace, yet they turned out to be shameless thieves, therefore the society's custodians were not worthy of their roles.

The funeral industry too had been irrevocably changed by the economic and political instability, and the number of deaths were on an increase as a result of the operation and the HIV and AIDS pandemic. John had delivered polishing bricks to Siyaso Industries. The owner specialised in making granite tombstones, a business that was flourishing due to the AIDS pandemic. Everything that had to do with funerals had become a potential money-spinner. Entrepreneurs had discovered that it was possible to make huge profits from another's misery (p.163) and the cemeteries were filled up due to the frequency of AIDS-related deaths.

The death and pain represented in the selected novel are closely intertwined with politics and commercialisation in particular of the female body, during political times in Zimbabwe.

Resilience and survival techniques employed by characters as depicted in *The Uncertainty of Hope*

Tagwira's text highlights that in spite of all the hardships that the character's face, in *The Uncertainty of Hope,* they did not allow their life situations to reduce them to becoming helpless people. The lives of the unemployed were difficult, but they continued to fight endlessly, even when they were disempowered and had little or no means with which to make their lives better.

When Onai is admitted into hospital after she has been brutally abused by her husband, Gari, it is her friend Katy who convinces her husband to drive her to the hospital. Katy visits her soon after her admission and after her discharge from hospital, she comes to take her home. Though they are unable to get direct transport to Mbare, due to the high taxi fares, they laugh and make fun of the situations that they find themselves into (p. 52).

This is evidence that despite the challenges that they faced, they still managed to laugh and were determined to reach their destinations. It is through the assistance of her open-minded friend, Katy, that Onai finally decided to leave Gari after taking up Gloria as his second wife. Therefore, Tagwira shows that friendships are vital in our daily lives as Onai needed Katy for the realities of surviving life with Gari and for surviving life in Mbare, as she would be lost without her friend.

Tagwira additionally portrays this through Fari, Onai's son who chose joy and laughter during difficult situations. This occurs when he had spent a day in a queue looking for cooking oil, and though he had returned home empty-handed, he was joyful and full of laughter. Tagwira indicates an act of positivity through Fari, despite the adversity of poverty. This is shown when Onai claims that:

He had returned home empty-handed, dust-covered, and exhausted, but bursting with exciting, hilarious accounts of skirmishes with the riot police. His propensity for enjoyment, even when he came

away from the long queues with nothing, constantly astonished her. But then, he was only a child, and childhood was like a shield. The grim realities of life did not hurt so much within its relatively safe confines (p.67).

The text depicts solidarity and the spirit of Ubuntu or solidarity among characters whose homes were destroyed as part of 'Operation Murambatsvina' and had nowhere to go. They received assistance from those whose homes were still standing. This is shown below:

Elsewhere in Mbare, people whose homes were still standing opened their doors and squeezed in displaced families. Overcrowding, and sleeping on kitchen floors, was not an issue. That day, human compassion was manifested at its best among those who knew the meaning of poverty (p. 148).

This is further revealed through the death of Hondo, Onai's neighbour, who was humiliated by the officers who destroyed his home besides him having fought for the country with remarkable bravery. Mourners gathered to attend the funeral to offer their support during the difficult times hence practising the spirit of Ubuntu.

Inevitably, the gathering of mourners spilled over into her small yard. Gari also got himself actively involved with the funeral preparations, consulting with the other men about what would constitute a suitable burial for Hondo. For a while, the tragedy that had struck their neighbour appeared as if it might draw them closer together (p. 153).

Tagwira highlights that individuals needed support from other people during difficult times as this helped to ease the stress and to make sense of all the changes and disruptions. Therefore, the text reveals that characters drew strength and built resilience from having others to lean on.

After Onai's and the other women's market stalls were demolished through the operation, they had no source of livelihoods and nothing to survive on as the market had been the only means of supporting their families. Being the one solely responsible to fend for her children, Onai found other ways to sell her vegetables though she was taking a risk with the police officers as an unregistered vendor.

Onai went back to ordering small quantities of fruit and vegetables for resale from VaGudo. Like all yet-to-be-registered traders, he was playing a cat-and-mouse game with the police. Onai claimed her own territory in the city centre, selling fruit and vegetables to city workers and people in fuel queues. On days when it seemed as if there were police officers patrolling every street in the city, she took to making door-to-door sales in the high-density townships (p.180).

Her children, Fari and Rita too took up the role to target long-distance commuters at the main terminus. They sold bananas, sweets, crisps, maputi and cigarettes. They took up their task with a level of dedication and diligence. In addition, Onai, was still determined, she had hope and had found different ways of experiencing purpose and meaning. Tagwira's text is a representation that her characters did not limit themselves despite their circumstances. Furthermore, Tagwira used John to represent an act of hope and determination. When Faith's university fees accumulated up to fifteen million, her father remained calm and reassured her daughter by saying: 'don't look so worried. I'll do everything possible to pay up. There is no way you're going to miss out on your final exams!' (p. 25).

After Onai had lost her husband, she was left homeless after refusing to become the second wife of Toro, Gari's brother. She travelled back home to the village to pursue the assistance of her mother. Her mother offered her advice about what she should do next especially about her children. Therefore,

Tagwira used this opportunity to represent the vital role played by parents in our daily lives and through life struggles. Onai's mother seemed sympathetic, and Onai felt good to be home (p.268).

Onai found herself reminiscing on how things were done in the olden days. This also proves that no matter how painful it is to lose a loved one through death, life has to go on without them. Hereafter, Onai found ways of coping with the death of her husband, and discovering ways to move on with her children after losing their only home. She went to the village to find comfort and support and to leave her children there. She later returned to the city to make things right.

The central message in the novel is about hope, determination, positivity and living a purposeful life inspired by resilience. This is all enshrined in Onai's long and tortuous journey in life. The novel teaches the reader that it is possible to survive instead of playing victims of the forces that life throws at us, by applying resilient mechanisms that lead to bettering one's life.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that death and pain are closely intertwined with politics and commercialisation. The politicisation of death and pain in *The Uncertainty of Hope* is portrayed through deaths and pain amidst the political and economic turmoil. Death and pain are subsumed in the larger political and economic environments and they are also commercialised through the female body in particular. The text outlines that death and pain are transformed to satisfy political and monetary needs. The novel reflects death of loved ones and the pain that they endure because of political decisions by those in power during the implementation of 'Operation 'Murambatsvina' that involved the destruction of people's houses, thereby leaving them homeless with unexplainable pain that they had to endure. However, despite all the challenges that the characters in this text undergo, they employ various survival techniques in order to be resilient from adversities. The novel outlines that it is possible to survive, from what life throws at us by applying survival techniques that lead to bettering one's life.

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