

Critical Reflections on Surviving against all Odds in Valerie Tagwira's the Uncertainty of Hope

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Abstract

*This paper is an exploration of the literary representations of survival and coping strategies during times of socio-economic and political upheavals. In a reading of Tagwira's novel, *The Uncertainty of Hope* the resilience theory has been employed. The resilience theory is not an exclusive domain for sociological studies but in the arts it also presents a literary interpretation of texts where it emphasizes those strengths of people which enable them to survive and cope with the challenges they meet in life. The aim has been to use a worst case scenario (the so called Zimbabwe crisis) as a specific setting and thereby challenge Afro-pessimisms which downplay ordinary people's capacity to survive and adapt to new situations; as well as resiliently change their cultural identities and transform into protean beings. The paper also seeks a reappraisal of the resiliency theory and argues that human agency is ubiquitous; therefore, instead of magnifying the dystopian and anomic state of our societies, more hopeful and inspirational readings of texts are possible. Such readings help us realise the potential that the arts have in reshaping individual and national consciousnesses and fostering a sense of courage to face the myriad crises of the 21st century, either at individual, societal or national level.*

Keywords: resilience, coping strategies, agency, protean, serendipity, survive, hope

1. Introduction

This paper explores the literary representation of the various ways and strategies people who are living in crisis-hit Zimbabwe (1999-2009) ingeniously form and devise so as to innovatively reconstruct the world around them in order to survive and live with hope. It is important to reiterate that the rapidly changing and turbulent times of the Zimbabwean crisis exposed many people to high levels of vulnerability. The multiple dimensions of the crisis manifested in extremely challenging times are characterised by a change in circumstances that has been happening too fast for many people. Faced with a cruel, self-serving and dictatorial government, the odds against the people are immense and life threatening. Yet amidst all the challenges, the people's resilience prevailed in inspirational ways; the ordinary people reflect on inborn qualities in order to transform to a different way of being so as to become better and intuitively protean at handling turbulent change, nonstop pressure and life-disrupting setbacks are what this paper seeks to elucidate.

This paper, therefore, seeks to offer critical routes to understand the techniques of survival needed by the people to make it in the city during periods of tempestuous changes that threaten the urbanites in Africa as represented through fiction. The aim is to explore and analyse the fictionalisation of coping strategies in crisis hit urban Zimbabwe and illustrate how literary texts can narrate resilience and inform us about critical concerns to handle change, adversity and uncertainty.

The inspirational ways that colour the urban landscape present some fluidities which are almost invisible and can elude activists, urbanists and policy-makers. However, with the imaginative recreation of the politics of informality and survival tactics in their variegated complicatedness made possible and more visible through the calcification afforded by fiction, a new terrain is hatched. This is corroborated by the fact that:

Even in the best of times, the artist is constantly reaching beyond the present; the severity of Africa's present situation of crisis must urge our artists even farther into their version of new life... inspired by the belief that given the severity of the current crisis of life for African peoples, and given the intuitive and cultivated ability of the creative artist to monitor and accurately capture the complexities of any human situation, ... writers should provide not only important insights into various dimensions of the problem, but also and perhaps even more crucial, subtle but reliable pointers to probable solutions. It is to the artists we must turn for a creative but ultimately realisable vision of the future" (Anyidoho, Busia and Adams, 1998, p.ii).

2. Theoretical Framework

The arts in Africa are serving a central purpose in the society, for they are not necessarily patterned in the western concept of art for art's sake. Writers like Tagwira, whose novel is considered here, create an aesthetic structure which crystallises a complex response to human experiences in times of crisis like the one in question, a response which could not possibly be represented in other (non-literary) terms. Therefore, theorising such a complex situation as survival and the reconstruction of the city space in contemporary Zimbabwe calls for an ideological shift; it becomes imperative that a change in vision should direct our critical efforts to address what Vambe has called the "poverty of literary theory" in the explication of Zimbabwean literature. Addressing the challenges for writers and critics of African literature in the 21st century, Nnolim (2006) once remarked that:

With all humility one might ask how these dry exercises in structuralist discourses are conducive to solving (at least imaginatively) the problems besetting Africans at the turn of the century. How does deconstruction as a critical engagement address life-denying issues confronting Africans at the beginning of this century –poverty, unstable governments, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic?(p. 7)

In quest of relevance and informed by the above, this paper seeks to propagate the resilience theory in the elucidation of contemporary literary texts, specifically to demonstrate that the characters depicted in this novel are more than victims who both change and are changed by the crisis and survive through inventiveness and innovation. Resilience theory is in its nascent stage in literary circles though it has been in use in social sciences. Resilience is the capacity for strategically absorbing disturbance and challenges, and for coping with the complex uncertainties in life so as to survive and move beyond survival (Mlambo, 2011, p. 200). The emphasis is on fortitude, how to survive in the midst of adversity, the subjectivity that emanates in a people to surmount adversity and meet the challenges in their enormity and excesses. For Egeland, Carlson, and Sroufe (2009), resilience is "the capacity for successful adaptation, positive functioning or competence ...despite high-risk, chronic stress, or following prolonged or severe trauma" (p. 29).

Resilience therefore emphasises the strengths that the people have rather than their vulnerability, through exploring the coping strategies that the people exhibit. Stressing the people's vulnerability, as has been touted in the discourse on the Zimbabwe crisis, perpetuates the Afro-pessimisms which have their roots in the 'heart of darkness' images as established in African literature and criticism. This perspective (about vulnerability, crisis), failing as it does to register the resilience of the people and their subjectivity, can be inaccurate as the novel in question will demonstrate, often camouflaging and downplaying the strengths, innovativeness and agency of the disadvantaged ordinary people. This is a view that homogenises people and emphasises weakness, victimhood, fragility and inability to act positively for survival. Analysing literary texts through the lens of the resilience theory therefore means focusing on the people's survival techniques, their responsiveness in exploiting opportunities, and their capacity to prop up agency even in the worst of situations like the one in question (Zimbabwe during a political, economic and social crisis). J.F. Kennedy once remarked that when written in Chinese, the word 'crisis' is composed of two characters –one representing danger and the other representing opportunity. Resilience theory in literature can therefore help open instructive fissures for better elucidating the representation of the inspirational survival tactics of Zimbabwean urbanites as a literary case study.

3. Surviving against all Odds in the Uncertainty of Hope

She thought of her mother engaging in unlawful foreign-currency dealing to put her through university, and build a dream home. She thought of *mainini* Onai struggling to raise three children within an abusive marriage; of Melody, trading her innocence for university fees and groceries. How far was she from promiscuity? She thought of all the many Zimbabwean women flouting socially and lawfully acceptable norms to fend for their children ... she recognised that she had choices, and determined to make them wisely (Tagwira, 2006, p.82).

Livelihoods are important to people's material and cultural wellbeing, as well as to their social identities, constructed and still under construction. The deeply rooted cultural sensibilities which have been passed from generation to generation and the constructed identities (those that are still being transformed) of the people, are threatened in periods of crisis as people adopt various strategies in the pursuit of viable livelihoods in response to the constraints occasioned by the crisis. The lived experiences and resilience of the ordinary people in negotiating, responding to and coping with the main political crisis, as well as the series of other micro-crises engendered by the former, is what Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* represents. Central in the novel and interesting to this paper is how the characters in the novel demonstrate the power of positive expectations and how they are resiliently hopeful against all odds; that they have the power to change things to survive. The reflexivity and autonomy of Tagwira's major characters make them paragons of the survivor personality, whose lives are springs of inspiration and hope to many in Africa and beyond. Therefore, the analysis of Tagwira's characters will focus on their resilience as demonstrated through hope, optimism and pragmatic morality, among others.

The Uncertainty of Hope is set at the peak of the harsh crisis in 2005; a few months before the notorious operation *murambatsvina* (Chirisa and Mlambo, 2009). Described by Charles Mungoshi as "an astonishing debut", the content-rich novel of 368 pages catalogues the difficulties facing many Zimbabweans, especially the urbanites. Life is precarious and difficult, and through the rich and complex life of Onai Moyo and her family, the author immerses the reader into the vortex of the crisis in its multifaceted dimensions. Onai is a Mbare resident, a high density suburb in Harare which is a colonial creation formerly meant for the black community in white Rhodesia (Chirisa and Mlambo). Onai is a market vendor, a hardworking mother of three children; she is a determined and resiliently optimistic lady who fights against all odds to survive and make it. She is married to Gari, an abusive, improvident and promiscuous drunk who is later retrenched from his job and finally dies because of HIV/AIDS related illness. When Gari dies, his young brother inherits all that he has, the house and Gari's pension, kicking Onai out of the house she and her husband have lived in since they got married. An embodiment of hope and optimism mixed with self-critical pessimism, Onai ultimately survives and moves beyond hope. Despite the drudgery and overwhelmingly threatening multiple dimensions of the crisis, the novel ends with the relieving and inspiring words:

Onai felt more keenly than ever before that her destiny was now in her own hands and that at last her children stood a chance of being able to fulfil themselves. She would do her best for them. They would not be oppressed by a system beyond their control. She looked out the window and smiled to herself (Tagwira, 2006, p.363).

Tagwira's novel, furthermore, presents Onai's best friend, Katy Nguni, who is also a market vendor and a black-market foreign currency dealer who is married to a supportive, cross-border haulage-truck driver. They have a precocious child, Faith, who is a university student and they support her. They are doing all they can to raise her school fees, thereby opening to us another survival strategy which is that of investing in the education of children. Through Katy and John's support and friendship to Onai and her family, Tagwira manages to further demonstrate how the formation of strategic alliances can be yet another survival strategy. Above all, through this couple, Tagwira manages to explore the necessity for the transformation of everyday values during a crisis to survive; what the paper will alternatively call, pragmatic morality.

Furthermore, the novel is also about Faith's boyfriend Tom Sibanda, a young businessman who buys a farm for himself (as opposed to the controversial land redistribution acquisition) and he works hard for himself. Tom also has a young sister, Emily who is a health professional and activist. Through Emily, Tagwira explores advocacy, activism and both formal and informal support groups as a means for survival. Finally, another notable character is Mawaya, the ostensible beggar who turns out to be a rich businessman. Through Mawaya and Onai, Tagwira shows us that despite the crudity of life, acts of kindness and humanness (*unhu/ubuntu*) can still be a valid life-giving force that sustains the vulnerable members of society.

These issues are fully explored below to ultimately demonstrate how literature represents the various ways people living in a crisis situation form and devise as survival strategies.

As the title of the book connotes, transforming “the uncertainty of hope” occasioned by the multiple dimensions of the Zimbabwean crisis into veritable drinkables calls for an enhancement of the power of positive expectations. 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.

Onai is not one to rise from moderate social standing to the level of firm certainty we witness at the end of the novel as she lives in the plush suburb of Borrowdale. Instead, Tagwira allows us an inward, and deep, glance at her life as the novel begins. She is staying in Mbare, the oldest and most dilapidated township in Harare. Thieves have broken into her house while she is awake and there is nothing she can do to fight them off. It is midnight and the husband is not yet back from work. When he comes in at dawn, he is dead drunk, his shirt has smudges of lipstick, the shoes are encrusted with a thick layer of vomit and his trouser zip is undone. She gets a fine beating by this very husband because he accuses her of selling the stolen television set to her boyfriends. The beating leaves her with a concussion, a couple of stitches and hospitalisation for a couple of days.

Onai’s problems are compounded by the fact that she is a woman in a patriarchal society and “[s]he could not protect her children from the life they were destined to live” (Tagwira, 2006, p.3). Such is the apathy and despondency that spell out her life and her future seems so bleak that “of course, she would never be able to replace the stolen set. Not in a lifetime” (Tagwira, 2006, p. 3). In order to provide ample background to this case study of hope, Tagwira shows us an initially hopeless and pitiable Onai who believes that “There was nothing else she could do. She was, after all, only a woman. How could she fight against fate?” (Tagwira, 2006, p. 5). Fate and destiny are the blinkers which stop her from being hopeful enough to seek a way out and be a survivor. Therefore, it is interesting to later realise her transformation to becoming an optimistic and resilient victor. Further crippling is her adherence to traditional values which dictate that a woman can never think of leaving her marriage. In other words, Onai is burdened by a double yoke, that of a political and economic national crisis and that of being a woman in such a crisis-hit and patriarchal society that condones wife bashing and emotional torment. This is how she perceives her situation:

But she stayed for the sake of her children and because marriage was not something that one could just walk away from. ‘Once you get in, you stay. *Kugomerauripochaikomwanangu...* no matter how hard it gets. Always remember that a woman cannot raise a good family without a man by her side’. This was the essence of a true African woman... perseverance in the face of all hardship, especially for the children. One always stayed for them (Tagwira, 2006, p.7).

Onai’s problems, therefore, are larger than the simple economic and political crisis as it is known in its generality. This is a situation common in the contemporary African world and many fictional works have decried this situation. It is from these dregs and many more that Tagwira, instead of condemning them to perpetual misery, inspires the victims to hope, positivity and resilience. According to Siebert,

From ancient times, people have recognized that a spirit of hope helps them bear times of great suffering, illness, disasters, loss, and pain. They learned that the spirit of hope could lead to being healed. And it makes sense. Hope is meaningful when people are struggling to survive bad conditions. Without bad conditions, there is no need for hope other than hoping that good things will continue to happen and bad things will not occur again in the future. As long as humans experience diseases, tragedies, and disasters, they will also feel hope (2005, p. 7).

Siebert’s analysis, therefore, qualifies our heroine, Onai, as an inspirational model of hope. Like Onai, many people find themselves in similarly difficult situations and the attainment of a better life by Onai at the end of the novel is motivational. The novel teaches that it is possible to survive and, instead of being passengers, passively riding in a huge and hegemonic mechanism controlled by external forces in absolute terms, they can steer life’s direction in ways that lead to a betterment of life. Speaking at his re-election victory in November 2012, the American President spoke of the hope akin to what Tagwira propounded in 2006 through this novel. Obama, also the author of *The Audacity of Hope*, said in his 2012 re-election victory speech, that he has “always believed that hope is that stubborn thing inside of us that insists [that] despite all the evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us, so long as we have the courage to keep reaching, to keep walking, to keep fighting”. This is the universal message that speaks to all that are faced with a crisis, whether national or personal, major or minor.

Like the United States citizens to whom Barack Obama reaches out to, at a time of an incessant economic depression; Tagwira, through Onai, also preaches about the Zimbabwean crisis and how resilient, hopeful and optimistic people manage to soar above the waters. Yet the message has a universal appeal, hence the significance of fictional works in Africa.

Onai's hopeful journey is not simply wishful idealism or blind optimism but one of fortitude and sheer determination. She is an actor and practical person. Hope that feeds the mind only is useless; it has to be acted upon. "But Onai had been optimistic enough for all of them. Refusing to admit defeat, she had juggled her vegetable vending and her dressmaking lessons with remarkable dexterity. And, at the end of it all, she had triumphantly passed her finals" (National Diploma in Dress Making)(Tagwira, 2006, p.59). This is goal-oriented action that has a specific focus for positive results. As Siebert cautions, having hope will not necessarily beat the odds, but without hope you are lost. Without hope one has no courage and no resilience but entertains fatalistic thoughts. However, for Onai, even when her market stall is destroyed by operation *murambatsvina*, she still hopes and acts upon that hope. She reclaims the city space and utilises it for a better life:

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 she took to making door-to-door sales in the high-density townships. One had to be constantly watchful in readiness to run away should the figures of authority appear, as they did habitually. It was like an intricate game of hide-and-seek (Tagwira, 2006, p.180).

This is not an ideal life but given the magnitude of the crisis, through hope Onai is able to survive. However, hope is not an autonomous and constant human quality that grows on its own. First it must be realised that at times Onai herself is filled with moments of pessimism and dejection, though she chooses not to allow these moments to overwhelm her. Through the presentation of these moments where the hope levels run low in Onai, we learn that a person who has true hope will still have fears and will run through the gamut of emotions. A hopeful person also understands that things may not work out for the best, but such a person must have the courage and the resilience to try and move forward through all difficulties and against all odds, as Onai does.

Furthermore, for hope to be sustainable, it takes another very important survival strategy which is that of friendship and alliances. As Onai concedes, "She needed Katy for the practicalities of surviving life with Gari. And for surviving life in Mbare. She would be lost without her friend" (Tagwira, 2006, p.17). Survival is made possible through friends like Katy who stand by her, fanning her waning hope back to motion and giving her a helping hand in a reciprocal manner. To survive and keep on being hopeful, one challenge is that the emotions and actions of the important people around her need to also indicate that they accept this reality. Where this acceptance fails, the less hopeful people may have to be side-lined; this is exactly what Onai does to Maya, the pessimist and loudmouthed loser.

However, with Katy her focus is kept in check as we see when she is encouraged: "All you need is a bit of practice and you will be back in top form. *Urishasha*. Just because you haven't found a job doesn't mean that you are not good. *Ndiyo Zimbabwe yedu* and jobs are hard to find, that's all" (Tagwira, 2006, p.167). Onai's spirits are raised by her friend's words and, to some extent, one can sense a twinge of authorial intrusion seeping through Katy's voice. John's words of advice are also equally inspiring and they are prophetic. For John, "Anything is worth a try *Mai Ruva*. In time, you ladies can even rent a shop in town for your business. There are lots of buildings in the city centre where self-employed tailors are making a killing" (Tagwira, 2006, p.167). These are motivational words which militate against Afro-pessimisms and demonstrate that African urban centres are indeed hubs of opportunity. Through this presentation, therefore, Tagwira has illustrated the value of the arts, particularly fiction in the area of advocacy. The lived realities enacted in such lively dialogues as shown here are enthused with verisimilitude, that aura of reality which speaks louder than dry statistics and expert advice. The wisdom coming through these informal alliances and friendships are useful tools that can corroborate expert-driven solutions to the problems haunting our contemporary world.

Similarly, to survive against all the odds, formal structures of support groups are also very important. Onai's problems are social, economic and cultural, as well as health-related. Living with a ruthless, reckless and improvident husband is an enormous micro-crisis she has to contend with. Through Emily, the activist medical doctor who attends to her at the hospital, Onai is introduced to formal support groups which can possibly assist her to survive the bashing she receives from Gari.

Realising that Onai's problem is a typical case of domestic violence, Emily persistently implores Onai to seek help: "I don't know what you are afraid of, but I can refer you to an excellent support group with whom I work. They will take care of you and help you through, whatever ..." (Tagwira, 2006 p.45). However, Onai is not keen at first but Emily is insistent. One can easily link Emily's ideas to an exhortation that comes from such formal organisations like Musasa Project, Project Hope, Women Action Group and the fictionalised Kushinga Women's Project. These are formal support groups which are meant to give intervention programs where women in abusive relationships are threatened. One, therefore, thinks of murders, passion killings, maiming and all sorts of gruesome acts which go uncurbed in our societies. Thus, to survive, such formal structures are important.

Cruelly evicted out of her matrimonial home by her brother-in-law who wants to inherit everything, including her, Onai's need for accommodation is real. Her waning hope is ignited through the Kushinga Women's Project as Emily facilitates her meeting with Mr Ndlovu at the municipal office, and her dreams to own a house become a tangible and time-bound fact. Reflecting on the prospect of Onai owning a house, this is what John, Katy's husband once said:

This is Zimbabwe. A poor woman will always be a poor woman. *Hazvichinje!* Onai will never own a house. She is an unemployed dressmaker who works as a vegetable vendor. How can you even imagine that she could buy a house? Where would she get the money from? Katy stared back at him and did not answer. He was right. The notion of Onai ever owning a house was ridiculous (Tagwira, 2006. p.19).

In a society where women's support groups are viewed as nothing other than divorce machines and radical feminist clubs, Tagwira gives the readers an alternative view. This is a subtle campaign, further illustrating the role that the arts play to educate people in a non-coercive manner. At last all that Onai has to do is to go to Emily and say, "I've just come to say thank you. My application was approved. My new house will be ready by the end of November" (Tagwira, 2006, p.311). Impossibilities can certainly be made possible.

The formal support groups are not only female-centred though. Tagwira strikes a balance by involving another formal structure, the New Start Centre. As Onai goes to this free walk-in-clinic, she is encouraged never ever to lose hope no matter the results. "There was a treatment available, and support groups to join. Life would go on; it could even improve, as with knowledge, came control" (Tagwira, 2006, p.339). An HIV/AIDS free generation and zero infections; that is the outcry for Africa. Where HIV/AIDS is a reality and formal mitigation measures are called for, this advice is highly called for, and fiction like Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* is filling this void in a positive and progressive manner.

Moreover, maintaining and practising acts of kindness and *ubuntu* are yet another survival strategies. Tagwira refuses to accept the fact that the Zimbabwean crisis reduced everyone to non-humans and criminals. Onai still strives to maintain integrity in her household and rebukes the children: "Ruva, I will not have such language in this house. What an awful thing to say to your brother. And I will not have you making those comments about your father" (Tagwira, 2006, p. 114). Times may have reduced the people to the poorest millions in the world but not the worst and most horrible humanoids. Tagwira's moralising message is further illustrated when Mr Mawaya, the "mad man", observes that he certainly could have died were it not for the kindness and generosity of Onai who would give him food. He is a rich man who is undertaking the *kutandabotso*; a ritual where one has to live the life of a beggar for some time so as to appease an offended spirit. As he goes back to his normal life, he observes that "[b]izarre as it had been, it had taught him a lot about the value of life, about compassion and about having an open hand, despite being poor. How else would he have survived?" (Tagwira, 2006, p.342). Therefore, to survive, some acts of kindness from the likes of Onai come in handy and as fate has it, in a reversal of roles, he is the one to employ Onai and give her a glorious life and a certain future.

One of the most touching acts that Onai did, one that is necessary for ensuring that public institutions also survive is that of honouring one's debts. Survival is not only in human terms but also at infrastructural and institutional level. It is not enough for Onai to be a role model who is resilient, determined, optimistic and kind. She also has to show that she is honest and faithful, and she does this by paying off in kind all that she owed for what Katy and John and the hospital have done for her. A touching scene indeed it is as she wrote a letter a letter to the hospital's accounts department. She would pay a third of the money she owed at the end of January, and the remaining balance over two months. She apologised for the delay but explained that she had no previous means of paying. She advised them of her change of address, in case they needed to contact her again.

It felt good to have her own address again. The contrast between her past and her present was something constantly in her mind, as if reality itself had turned on its head (Tagwira, 2006, p.362).

It is true that, given the inflation rate of more than 600%, the debt could have possibly been reduced to nothing other than a couple of useless zeros, but the principle is what carries the day.

Another major act of hope for survival is demonstrated through the way in which education is valued. It is a form of investment born out of the vision one has that one day things will become better and when that happens, one must be found standing and well rooted. Against all the odds, Onai goes to school and this pays off during moments of the depressing crisis as she manages a clothing manufacturing shop, equipped as she is with a Diploma in Dressmaking. Tagwira is not content in reductionist statistics which either decry how the crisis resulted in massive school dropouts nor those which paradoxically commend Zimbabwe as having the highest literacy rate in Africa. She practically demonstrates the value of education even in tempestuous times. She has faith in how formal education is yet another survival strategy worthy of all the effort. Faith's fees stand at a shocking fifteen million but his father is unfazed. He vows, "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!" (Tagwira, 2006, p.25). John is determined to sacrifice his all to make sure that his daughter finishes school because his focus makes him realise that even in times of crisis, one's education cannot be eroded by inflation. As a result, "University had changed Faith from a gawky, insecure schoolgirl to a confident young woman" (Tagwira, 2006 p.117). Despite the fact that she is a girl child in Africa, Faith deserves an education and she is given one. She is the hope of the family and through her, Ruva, Onai and Melody, as well as the author's voice; they are hopeful education ambassadors in Africa. The adage, 'education is key to success' cannot be overemphasised. Education opens doors and, even in times of crisis, it is an age-old tool for survival.

Finally, another very important survival strategy in the novel is that of pragmatic morality, through which the urbanites transform and also devise new codes of morality. In situations where survival is top priority, the people transform traditional beliefs and cultural traits which are no longer tenable. The surrounding reality calls for a change in perspective because the norms and values of old can no longer cohere. On many occasions the author points the reader to the need to be protean, versatile and adaptive so as to survive. The dialogue between John, his wife Katy and their daughter Faith is quite illuminating. John's pragmatic argument is that, "These are hard times. We must do everything possible in order to survive, *vadzimai*" (Tagwira, 2006, p.29). This is the new rule which rules crisis-hit Zimbabwe, which calls for practical actions even if it violates legal and moral parameters. One has to survive against all odds and periods of crisis like this call for such daring transformation of one's moral perspective and code of conduct. John and his wife, guided by pragmatic morality, thus, engage in "illegal" foreign currency dealings, bribing authorities and smuggling foodstuffs that are in acute shortage in the country both for personal consumption and for resale. Resultantly they live a relatively more affluent life; they can pay for their daughter's fees and can compassionately give practical assistance to the likes of Onai.

This is how John explains this new, necessary and pragmatic code of conduct to his daughter Faith, "My daughter, the legal limits are not important. How else do you think we can raise your university fees and set aside money to start building? The line between what's legal and what is not has never been as blurred as it is now. *Hakuchina*" (Tagwira, 2006, p.27). However, Tagwira is not an advocate for a free-fall loosening of morality and code of conduct. Her voice, through the characters is ever questioning to what extent people have to allow themselves to sink simply because of a need to survive. Tagwira concedes that from traditional folklore and proverbs, Zimbabweans have had sayings like "a clever bird uses other birds' feathers to build its nest" (Tagwira, 2006, p.51). Just like in traditional orature, times of crisis have always been there and the hare and tortoise characters survived through cunning and wit. However, there is always the nagging at the back of many; as Onai says, "Sometimes I have a feeling that we are slowly turning into a nation of thieves" (Tagwira, 2006, p.26). Even Katy is also perturbed and asks, "I know we have to survive. But at what cost?" (Tagwira, 2006, p.29). The costs are evident in some of the characters - Gloria who sold her body for sex but is now at the verge of dying of AIDS; Police Inspector Nzou, the illegal foreign dealer who is finally arrested and John who is forced to flee the country because of the foreign currency dealings. The scars are there to see and such are the contradictions and paradoxical consequences of survival in a situation that has horrors like the Zimbabwean crisis of 1999 to 2009.

Another interesting dimension of pragmatic morality is expressed through the brave acts of Katy and Onai so that they can survive the threat of HIV/AIDS since they are at high risk. Married to a reckless philanderer who does not care about her, Onai takes bold steps so that she can survive.

These are steps never heard of in an African traditional setup as she changes her identity from being a submissive and cultural wife to being a resolute and cunning wife. What many could have considered the greatest betrayal, unbecoming of a woman and an unforgivable sin, she sees as a necessary evil for survival and survive she does. This is how she thinks over the choice she makes:

Her biggest failure as a wife lay in refusing Gari his conjugal rights... unless he agreed to use condoms. In a rare moment of rebelliousness, she had told him clearly no condoms, no intimacy. She felt a twinge of guilt, then immediately forgave herself. What was a woman supposed to do with a philandering husband when the risk of HIV infection was so real? She was so consumed by a burning desire to stay alive for her children, and stay alive she would (Tagwira, 2006, p.26).

Survive she surely does whilst Gari and his girlfriend finally succumb to the disease. She goes to the New Start Centre and when she discovers that she is indeed HIV negative, thanks to the drastic survival choices she has made. Onai sleeps dreamlessly that night and when she wakes up, she feels that a burden has been lifted and, as a happy survivor, she filled with joy and the hope to face a better tomorrow.

Furthermore, despite the fact that she trusts her husband, Katy also knows that as a haulage truck driver John is at a high risk to get infected. As John prepares to go to South Africa after Gari's burial, Katy packs his bag and puts condoms in his bag, telling him that if ever one day he gets tempted, he has to be prepared. Despite John's protests, she insists because for Tagwira, it is pointless to be an economic survivor yet lose one's life. As she puts it:

Any other woman would have told her that her mind was unhinged, and that she was sanctioning infidelity. She chose not to see it that way. These were not times when one could rely on naive assumptions and sit back complacently. One always had to be on guard. Out of her own volition, this was her way of protecting what she held close to her heart (Tagwira, 2006, p.245).

Rules and cultural values have been changed here. Katy accepts the reality that she is faced with. The economic crisis has pushed her husband to get a job demanding that he travels long distances to other countries in search of livelihood, yet this has its attendant dangers; therefore, this calls for cultural transformation. The norms and values, she has been socialised into, need to be twisted to suit her specific situation, and as a resilient survivor she makes sure that the rules, norms, values and code of behaviour are informed by the situation on the ground. Certainly she may not desire to share her husband with another woman but she does not want to take that chance of infection. That is the true mark of a survivor; times are changing and she also has to change, transform to a higher level of morality and construct new codes of behaviour to live by. The challenges facing people are varied and the coping strategies need to be equally relevant. At the end of the day Katy makes it; she is about to be reunited with the husband and she is healthy on most of the fronts - economic, physical, emotional and cultural.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, therefore, in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, the power of positive expectations has been explored as one of the major coping strategies the urbanites devise to survive the crisis and live in the city with hope. Starting from vulnerable livelihoods, the characters embark on a tortuous journey and what gives them sustenance is their hope, resilience, optimism and positive attitude. Onai and Katy transform the titular "uncertainty of hope" into concretised hope. From informal alliances, formal support groups, education, purposive living and determination, and up to devising a code of pragmatic morality, the uniting factor is survival. Against all the odds the people journey purposefully and resiliently, refusing to allow the external circumstances to condemn them to a life of misery. They are hopeful, meet life head on and the fiction here offers liberating and breakthrough stories to strengthen the reader's own innate resilient capacities for a happier, more successful and better life.

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IN a recent interview, Valerie Tagwira spoke about the concerns that influenced the novel. She says in the interview: "It is a novel set in contemporary Zimbabwe. It looks at poverty, homelessness, HIV and AIDS, domestic violence and a host of other socio-economic challenges of the day. It is also a story about surviving against the odds and, hopefully, gives an insight into the intricacies of contemporary Zimbabwe with respect to how people are trying to survive. When I initially started thinking about writing, I had a desire to do something different – something creative and, because I'm something of a 'mild feminist' at heart, I always knew that I would write something featuring strong female characters. Description. The Uncertainty of Hope by Valerie Tagwira, a novel which Charles Mungoshi calls 'an astonishing debut'. Through the various and complex lives of Onai Moyo - a market woman and responsible mother of three children, and her best friend Katy Nguni - a vendor and black-market currency dealer - we are given an insight into the challenges that face those who only survive by their wits, their labour and their mutual support. In doing so Tagwira aptly captures how precarious the future is for the inhabitants of Mbare, Zimbabwe in 2005. The story of these two close friends is situated in a high-density suburb. However, the author also introduces a much wider cross-section of... Buy The Uncertainty of Hope by Valerie Tagwira (ISBN: 9781779220639) from Amazon's Book Store. Everyday low prices and free delivery on eligible orders.Â Paused You're listening to a sample of the Audible audio edition. Learn more. See all 2 images. The Uncertainty of Hope Paperback " 28 Mar 2007. by. Valerie Tagwira (Author). " Visit Amazon's Valerie Tagwira Page. search results for this author. Valerie Tagwira (Author). 4.4 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews. See all 4 formats and editions Hide other formats and editions. Amazon Price.