

AIDS PANDEMIC: THE VOICE OF THE YOUTH IN THE KISWAHILI NOVEL

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Abstract

It is argued that there is little agreement among the youth about how the continuity of life can be maintained and what order should be created or restored concerning their health. So long as the world is rapidly changing and affects the way the youth think about themselves, it is claimed that a parallel change should be realized to empower the youth and enable them to positively solve their health problems. Empowering the youth to independently address their health matters is central to having them voice their opinions through literary works. This paper looks at the Aids pandemic through the voice of the youth in the Kiswahili novel. This study explores the value of empowering the youth to fight AIDs pandemic and recommends that the focus be shifted to them not only in fighting the AIDs epidemic, but also becoming successful individuals who are confident of themselves as well as being capable of contributing to the development of their society

Keywords: Aids Pandemic, Youth, Kiswahili novel

Introduction

The paper's main objective is to analyze the current situation about AIDS in selected texts of John Habwe's novels. It's proposed in this paper that, the youths have utilized the prevailing situation positively to give their views about HIV/AIDS infections, prevention, treatment, stigma and discrimination. It recognizes that the author being studied has used the youth as characters to explain reality. The youths' views are subjected to vigorous interrogation with views of revealing their feelings in relation to the contexts within which they voice their views. This paper looks at the aspect social interaction amongst the youth such as bodily intercourse between the youth and its strained form of bodily contact in these

days of AIDs pandemic. Moreover, we should not assume the homogeneity and stability of any particular youth culture of intercourse but instead explore of different co-present moral regimes in given circumstances to the AIDS Pandemic among the youth.

This paper examines such different imaginations and discusses bodily intercourse among the youth and relatedness that underlies them. The study aims at retracing how sex has become known as an object of discursive reflection and as the source of modern subjectivity. While the view of both female and male youths are locally described as mutually exclusive opposites, they are increasingly interdependent, each constituted with reference to the other and together delineating a new discourse on sex as a specific, may be modern conceptualization of intercourse. The new knowledge, new availability of different conceptualizations enables confusion among the youth and practices and creates confusion among the youth. Therefore concerns about how to get in touch in the right way are vital among the youth and debates and disagreements are common.

Instead of assuming identity with the other aid of envisaging sex as an exchange of pleasures between equal agents, such a view acknowledges the absolute difference between one and another human especially youth as the precondition of the bodily encounter and of creation which results from the memontarily transcendence of difference. Due to confused or raptured social relations, the youths' growth has been affected through ill-health that sanctions individual rule infringements. Therefore the youths view particularly concerning intercourse is often blamed for the transmission of HIV. Their views are blamed for the widespread death and illness and stricter rule adherence is called for in the view of John Habwe's novels.

The affected groups:

Evidence drawn from different findings have challenged some widely held assumptions about the effects of HIV and AIDS. Some studies have found that generally the highest prevalence of HIV was amongst the wealthiest households particularly affecting wealthy young women as opposed to poorer and rural households. Denny (1993), therefore views AIDs as a catastrophic event of central importance to both gay literature and social history. Various reasons have since been suggested for this phenomenon that wealthier people tend to have the resources which lead to greater and more frequent mobility and expose them to wider sexual networks encouraging multiple and concurrent relationships.

They also tend to have greater access to HIV medication that prolong their lives and are more likely to live in urban areas which have the highest prevalence.

However the HIV prevalence gap between wealthier urban groups and poorer rural communities is slowly closing. Access to health care and knowledge of HIV and AIDS is typically lower in rural areas.

The female youth tend to be infected earlier which is partly due to the tendency to have older partners or get married earlier. The female youth's dependency is the widespread culture of sugar daddies. They will often accept the sexual advances of older men or sugar daddies for a variety of reasons including money, affection and social advancement. Through Habwe's authorship, the following examples is drawn:

Sauda alitazama dirishani na akaona Njeri na Ambijo wameshikilia ncha za Mitandio yao wakifuatana na mabaharia wazungu. "Watoto hawa wameasi skuli wanataka kukimbizana na mabaharia wa kizungu?" Kisa na maana ni kutupiwa makombo na kupewa fulusi zisowatosha si kwa safu, si kwa mchele, si kwa dengi. Mara moyo ulimtesa kwa tuto zake alipokumbuka redio ikitangaza ugonjwa hatari – ukimwi. Mawazo chungu chungu yalikivamia kichwa chake karibu yakibukutishe kama kitambaa cha tanga. "Si vizuri kuishi na watoto mjini," moyo wake ulimwelezea. Afadhali waishi shamba labda watoto hawa wamejitia umalaya kwa kuwa maisha ya mjini yamewashajiisha kufanya hivyo. (Habwe 1995:42) (Sauda looked through the window and saw njeri and Abijo who were holding the ends of their shawls following the white sailors. "These children have dropped out of school to run around with the white sailors?". Reasons? So that they be given left over, and little money not enough to purchase vegetables, rice peas. Suddenly she got worried when she remembered the radio announcements about the AIDS Pandemic. My head was full of heavy thoughts and I was almost overwhelmed as a hoist soul flag. "It's not good to stay with children in town," she thought. It's better if they stayed up country because these children are engaged in prostitution because the town life has instigated them).

The example also echoes that population movement is common among the youth. In particular, urbanization and mobility between rural and urban areas. These means that young and sexually active youth come into close contact with high risk sexual networks made up of sex workers whom have high levels of HIV prevalence.

Habwe (2009) depicts a female youth later Dama as a hardcore prostitute. Dama later on is depicted as lonely and desperate when she gets sick. Most of her colleagues in the profession were not aware of what was ailing her. Later on one of her friends Dura confirms that she died of AIDS related illness:

Uchawi vipi? Ukimwi ndio ulimwua mama yangu. Pia ndio ulimwua Dama, Dora alisema. (Habwe 2009:99) (witchcraft? Aids killed my mother. It also killed Dama, Dora said.

Rose Kisoa is a waitress in a hotel. In his novel *Safari ya Lamu*, (2010) Kisoa is depicted as a lonely and harsh youth. Her physique reflects somebody who is not healthy and has all the signs of somebody is HIV positive. The author explains as follows:

Mwenyewe ni wa maji ya kunde. Alikuwa mrefu wa kiasi na mwembamba. Modomo yake ni kama imetoka ngozi. Imebadilika na kuna miekundu kama aliyekula chachandu mbichi. Alitisha usiku ule. (Habwe, 2011:19) She was brown. She was tall and slim. Her lips skin had peeled off. It had turned red like somebody who had eaten raw octopus. She was scaring that night).

As a result of new developments, rural to urban shifts in youth population are the order of the day. With new access to the internet, the youth, their families and relatives are being bombarded with streams of culture and social dissonance from all over the world, enticing gullible and impressionistic youth to adopt new lifestyles. This is one reason that made Musa in *Safari ya Lamu* to start his journey to Lamu for a holiday. Through the male youth, Musa, the author reveals the experiences that lead the youth to engage in health compromising behaviours such as sexual intercourse. You are therefore disproportionately at risk for HIV infection. This happens when Musa meets with a young girl called Maimuna. Once they were in Musa's room the following happened.

Alikuwa ametoa nguo zake amejifunga taalo lililokuwa mle ndani lenye picha za makozi. Mwili wangu ulichemka kama maji yaliyo katika mtungi jikoni. Nikasema acha liwe liwalo. Dunia tulikuja siku moja na pia tutaondoka siku moja. Nilikumbuka mchumba wangu Maria akili zangu zikakwama. Nikasema potelea mbali. Alijirashia mle mle chumbani kwa njia iliyotisha nafsi na akili yangu. Tulilala hatimaye huku moyo nimeupiga konde baada ya kujiambia ugonjwa ni ajali kazini. (Habwe 2011:24) (She had removed all her clothes and had tied a towel which had eagle pictures around her waist. My body was heated up like water in a boiling pot. I told myself I was ready for anything that would happen. We came into the world once and we'll leave at once. I remembered my fiancée, Maria and mind came to dead lock. I told myself, to hell. She did everything superficially and I got scared. Finally we slept when I had a concrete decision that contracting a disease is like an accident at work.

The youths are therefore depicted as characters that endanger their lives and that of others. They are capable of putting their life in jeopardy. They are trouble potential for danger or harm, something that the average person might not do. Something that takes a bit of

courage to do beyond the norm. The youth don't care whether something wrong may happen or not. This type of risk is equated to reforms like sex without a condom is risky but it feels good. The way Musa felt, acting on the spur of the moment.

Female youths risk contracting HIV because of the need to survive. Poverty and unemployment leads them to prostitution so that they can provide for self and family. They are in need of money, food, clothing and shelter. Since they have no other recourse many female youths are obliged to accept indecent proposal from whoever or they propose. This is the case of Maimuma who developed interest in Musa and finally lured him into commercial sex as it's explained:

Sikujua kama alikuwa yule kisura aliyetitwa Maimuna. Sikumtarajia lakini nilijua wasichana wa barabarani hawa hawatarajiwi. Wakati mwingine hujileta tu na kujiingiza katika mpango wa mtu... Maimuna aliondoka alfajiri ya Mungu alipopata ujira wake. Aliahidi kurudi.... (Habwe 2011: 31-32). (I didn't know whether she was the beautiful girl called Maimuna. I didn't expect her. But I knew girls who are not settled in life are never expected. All times they just come and fit themselves in one's plans.

The youth don't like restrictions and ultimatums are not a favourite part of their mode of operation. Specific to sexual behaviour, any youth having unprotected sex with partners whose sexual status they don't know. The perception of not getting caught is high because few people get caught. Sometimes they become rebellious and are favoured for it. At times they feel they are already victims so they might take chances with their lives, get rich and finally die trying, as the case of Petero in *Safari ya Lamu* according to Musa's views:

Nilisoma hiyo habari iliyonikata maini jioni hiyo. Petero alikuwa ameaga dunia! Nilishukuru Maulana kwa yote niliyoyaona. Ilikuwa vizuri kuwa Petero amekwenda kupumzika baada ya maradhi ya muda mrefu. Jioni hiyo sikuwa na rai. Nilitetemeka katika moyo wangu. Petero alikuwa amenunua gari la aina ya Toyota na kujenga nyumba mjini Kisumu. Yote hayo ameyaacha (Habwe 2011:60-61).

(I read a message that hurt me that evening. Petero had died! I thanked God for all that I had seen. It's good that Petero had rested after being sick for a long time. I was in shock. Petero had bought a Toyota car and built a house in Kisumu town. He had left all that).

In most cases such incidences come about because youths are misguided by peers or even adults. Influence from other young people is evident and personality traits such as rebellion, self opinionated and not wanting counsel. Additionally youths live in communities where people are engaged in careless sexual acts

HIV prevention measures.

In the view of Habwe's authorship, prevention measures must be increased if new infections are going to be reduced among the youth. These measures include voluntary counseling and testing through a high profile campaign and condom use.

Campaign and sensitization education

Urbanization and mobility between rural and urban areas, lead the youth into slum areas. They can survive in such residential places because they don't get employment that is well paying. Campaign aiming to target such practices among the youth in the slum areas is vital. The campaign aims to highlight the HIV risk associated with having multiple and concurrent. Partners through mass media, televised drama series, films, posters and community outreach. In Habwe's novel *Fumbo la Maisha* (2009), Dora a female youth takes the campaign to the Majengo Slum dwellers.

Dora alipita katika vilango vya watu siku chache baadaye. Alihimiza watu kupimwa virusi vya ukimwi. Dora ni mwanaharakati kweli. Alikuwa na kikundi cha watu waliohimiza kwa nyimbo. Walivaa jesi zenye maandishi HIV. "Mjitokeze kupimwa," alitutangazia. "kupimwa nini," mama mmoja aliuliza. "Ukimwi," Dora alisema kwa sauti ya juu. Ukimwi ni nini, mama? "Alimwuliza Dora.

"Maradhi ya ngono," Dora alijibu "mimi si mgonjwa, Dora" Ali alisema "si lazima uugue." Dora alifafanua kwa kikundi cha dhumna.

"Kupimwa mapema kunakupa nafasi ya kujiangalia," Dora alisema.

"Tujiangalie vipi? Hatuna uwezo sisi waambie wenye uwezo.

"Ni ugonjwa usio na tiba. Wengi wanaougua wako hapa Majengo" Dora alieleza.

"Shauri yao. Uongo mwingine wa Marekani," Ali alisema.

"Ni msaada wanataka kusaidia ili kuwe na afya kote ulimwenguni," Dora alisema. Majengo kukawa ni kisiwa cha mapuuza...

Tena mama, sisi twataka pesa. Hatuna chakula kupimwa kutatufaa nini?.....(Habwe, 2009:77-78) (Dora passed by our doors a few days later. She convinced people to take HIV test... Dora is a struggler indeed. She was with a group of singers who convinced people and had put on jerseys written on HIV.

"Come and take HIV test" She announced.

"To take which test?" a woman asked.

“AIDS”, she said at the top of her voice.

“What’s AIDS mum? Ali asked Dora...

“It’s sexually transmitted disease,” Dora answered.

“I am not sick: Dora” Ali said.

“You don’t have to wait until you get sick”, Dora explained to a group of young men playing dice game.

“Taking the test early enough gives one an opportunity to take care of himself/herself,” Dora said.

“How do we take care of ourselves? We are poor, Tell the rich.

“The disease has no cure. Most of those who are infected live here in Majengo,” Dora explained. “That is their own problem. The Americans falsehood,” said Ali.

“It’s on aid. They want to help so that there’s good health all over the world.” Dora said.

Majengo became an island of ignorance...infact we need money and food, taking the test will benefit us in which way?.)

A high profile campaign was launched by the government in conjunction with the Americans to sensitize people in the slum areas about the importance of taking an HIV test. Unfortunately the youth are not willing because they feel the campaign is a waste of resources. The youth who get tested early enough are able to avoid new infections and the infected ones get treatment and are able to live long even after the infections. As the campaigns went on, new issues cropped up.

“Lazima tuwe tunajikinga,” alisema.

“Kujikinga vipi?” nilimwuliza.

“Na maradhi ya Ukimwi,” alieleza akicheka. Nilishtuka kiasi. Maradhi hayo yalikuwa yamepunguza wateja wetu na kazi yetu.

...Lakini mimi nami kama ni kupata tushapata,” nilimwambia...

“Wewe ushapimwa?”

“Tayari”.

“Urongo, Dora,” nilimwelezea Dora.

“Si urongo. Wewe nenda kapimwe ndipo uanze kujikinga.”

Tutaona, Mimi ninaona hapana haja kwetu kujipima au kujikinga kama nimeandikiwa kuwa nitapata. Mungu alikujalia hutapata.

“Karne hii ni karne ya kujiwekea ratiba ya kujipangia si karne ya kujiachia,” Dora alisema. (Habwe 2009:98-99) (We must prevent ourselves,” she said.

“How?” I asked

“Against AIDS Pandemic,” she said amid laughter.

“I was a bit shocked. The epidemic has reduced our customers and our income....

“But as for me, may be we are already infected” I told her.

“Have you already been tested?”

“Already.

“It’s a lie.” I clarified to Dora .

“It’s not a lie. Go and be tested the protect yourself.”

“We will see”. My view is that there is no need people like us taking the test or protecting ourselves if it’s already written I will be infected”.

“If God has mercy on you then you will not be infected”.

“This is a century of planning and not just doing things carelessly, Dora said.

The above discussion between Dora and Mwanaisha shows there is need for comprehensive sex education within the age groups and especially youth groups promoting behaviour change for HIV prevention. Sex education is a vital part of reaching young people and ensuring that HIV incidences do not increase in the coming years. However sex education is not widespread and not readily accepted by the youth. Without consistent and clear messages, youths often miss out on the vital information that can stop them from transmitting or becoming infected with HIV.

Use of condoms

Condoms play a crucial role in the context of AIDS. It’s still controversial among the youth. Opposition to condom use is equally vehement among the youth. Condoms epitomize moral evil and are seen as the legitimization of promiscuity and others think that intercourse with a condom is no intercourse at all as its in the following example:

Tulikaa kwa muda tukihadithiana. Baadaye aliingia katika msala. Alipokomea mlango nikafungua kibeti chake nikatazama humo ndani. Katika hilo pochi mlikuwa na hirizi, pakiti moja ya trust condoms, na shilingi ishirini za sarafu. Roho yangu ilipiga. (Habwe 2011:24) (We sat for a while telling stories. Later on she entered the bathroom. As she closed the door, I opened her handbag. Inside there was a charm, a packet of trust condoms and a twenty shilling coin. I got shocked.)

In the given example Musa's interaction with Maimuna reveals that the female youth use condoms. They advocate their use by carrying them for prevention in case of anything and they speak about them. Though this perplexes the male youth but a long the way, the message about condom use has been radicalized as a question of life and death. Aids has therefore driven home the virtue of the individual youths. The youth now recognize the role of condom use in the prevention of HIV/AIDS and has made it an integral part of the fight against the epidemic. Nevertheless, condom use during high risk sex is still very low among the youth as in the case of Musa and Maimuna.

Stigma and discrimination

The moralization of the social imagination and the conceptualization of intercourse within the moral framework of sex have undoubtedly been encouraged by educational discussions on AIDS which have emerged in the Kiswahili novel. The youth have played a prominent role, reflecting and reinforcing the view of AIDs as a sexual and thus a moral problem.

While emphasizing the dangers of sex and adopting an attitude towards it, these discussions promote a new openness representing sex as a natural part of life. Sex is here linked to what are seen as new kinds of mobility in terms of migration and labour and to promiscuity. Moral cleanliness has thus become equivalent to containment and status.

This type of attitude leads to stigma and discrimination. Therefore there is need to protect the rights of young people living with HIV and AIDS. These should be an act that provides a legal framework for the societal response and be created through a process that involves community groups. This could make illegal discrimination against someone because of HIV status of their family member and obliges every member of the society to advocate against stigma and discrimination.

However sufficient training is necessary so that the act can be implemented and public awareness of the rights is needed for the act to be effective. This should be harmonized with other legislation in order to ensure that there is no contradiction i.e. criminalization of high risk groups such as commercial sex workers as evidenced by Habwe's authorship in the following example:

“Umekuwa wapi siku hizi zote? Umekwenda kupiga umalaya sasa ndipo unarudi. Kwa nini hukukaa huku?”

“Sikukaa huko? Huko si kwetu,” nilimweleza....

“Umekwenda kutangatanga kama fisi. Umerudi hapa na ukimwi”. Kama nina ukimwi si neno, ni wangu,” nilimweleza Rose.

“Kama ni wako kwa nini umekuja tuletea?” Rose aliuliza huku amenishikia mpini wa jembe.

“Ukimwi ni ugonjwa kama malaria, shemeji.”

“Usiniite shemeji yako wewe hawara wa majengo...”

Wanawe walielezwa, “Ana ukimwi huyo msimwamkue. Mwone atembeavyo. Watoto waliponiona mimi shangazi yao, wakawa wanatimua mbio”.

“Mwanamke mwenye ukimwi ni huyo. Twendeni, twendeni...”

Nilianzisha biashara ya kuuza mafuta ya taa hapo kwetu. Mwanzo watu walinisusia.

“Huyu Malaya hatumtaki pamoja na mafuta yake”.

Huyu hata ukimwamkua tu atakupa ukimwi. (Habwe 2009:186) (Where have you been all this time? You went into prostitution and now you are back. Why didn't stay there?)

“I did not because it's not my home,” I explained

“You went roaming like a hyena. You are back infected by AIDS.”

“If I am HIV positive it's not an issue because it's mine”, I explained to Rose.

“If it's yours why have you brought it to us?” Rose asked while holding a jembe helve ready to hit me.

“Aids is a disease just like malaria sister-in-law.”

“Don't call me your sister-in-law you Majengo prostitute....”

Her children were told; “She has AIDS don't greet her. Look at the way she walks.” When the children saw me, their aunt, they ran away.

“The woman with AIDS is there. Let's go, let's go.”

I started a business to sell paraffin and at the beginning people boycotted.

“We don't want this prostitute and her paraffin. When you greet her you will be infected with AIDS).

These groups are already marginalized and stigmatized to access care and treatment. Discrimination leads to unwillingness to take an HIV test and to disclose results to family, friends or sexual partners. Such fear increases the chance that HIV will be transmitted to a partner and that preventive behaviour will be avoided and hence uptake of treatment will be delayed.

Lack of knowledge about AIDS is one drive of stigma and discrimination as it was elaborated in Habwe's novel *Fumbo la Maisha*. Stigma and beliefs that it can perpetuate such as witchcraft or curse can lead to reduced motivation to seek treatment. One other

reason is that HIV and AIDS continues to be associated with immoral behaviour such as prostitution and is therefore seen as a punishment. There is need to increase the visibility of people living with HIV through the media, public awareness campaigns and the involvement of faith organizations is necessary to address the causes and consequences of HIV/AIDS related stigma in different communities.

Conclusion

In this paper, the author of the works under study has shown that youths assault intercourse head on linking it to death and suffering. There is no underlying, unchanged youth notion of intercourse in present day society against which discursive intrusions occur but a landscape of fragments which are taken up or dropped by youths in everyday life. Youths challenge modern views regarding AIDS while simultaneously striving for the new opportunities that they offer new individual youths. While informed by the new sources such as video films, their search is rooted in another way of thinking.

Stigma against HIV positive youths and human resource shortages are among, the obstacles ensuring a sustained reduction of new HIV infections and to providing care and treatment to those already infected. Commitment to prevention efforts will be necessary if the youth have to overcome the depilating effects the HIV and AIDS pandemic continues to have on them and the society in general.

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