

## Acronyms

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARV	Anti- Retro Viral
CLF	Child and Law Foundation
CRLP	Centre for Reproductive Law and Policy
CSA	Centre for the Study of AIDS
CTT	Centre for Total Transformation
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
GOZ	Government of Zimbabwe
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ILO	International Labour Office
MOHCW	Ministry of Health and Child Welfare
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPEC	International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
OVC	Orphans and other Vulnerable Children
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
FTLRP	Fast Track Land Reform Programme
UNAIDS	United Nations Joint Program on HIV and AIDS
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
ZANU PF	Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front
ZIMPREST	Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation

## **Abstract**

This thesis is an ethnographic account of the complex and diverse experiences of children growing up in the context of an AIDS epidemic in *Chiweshe* Communal lands, Zimbabwe. To capture the personal experiences and views of children in a context of AIDS and political economic change in rural Zimbabwe, fieldwork was conducted over 15 months, from January 2007 to March 2008 for the collection of stories, drawings, dreams, and songs from children aged 4 to 16 years. Analysis showed that, despite their extreme context, the children in *Chiweshe* created temporary friendships, relations of patronage, and informal organisations with and without adults, to obtain their survival needs. They also appropriated spaces and discourses for play, work, and learning, necessary for their daily needs.

It is argued that childhood agency emerged through these self-initiated activities, within multiple contextual constraints of poverty, illness, and loss. These findings challenge the one-sided, adult-centric accounts of childhood which portray children as pre-socialised victims, passive, incompetent, ignorant, and silent, on issues pertaining to AIDS and related notions of sexuality, sickness, death, work and politics. It is suggested that recognition of such instances of children's competence and creativity is crucial for interventions aimed at reducing the suffering, untimely deaths, and various forms of deprivation that often characterises contexts ravaged by the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

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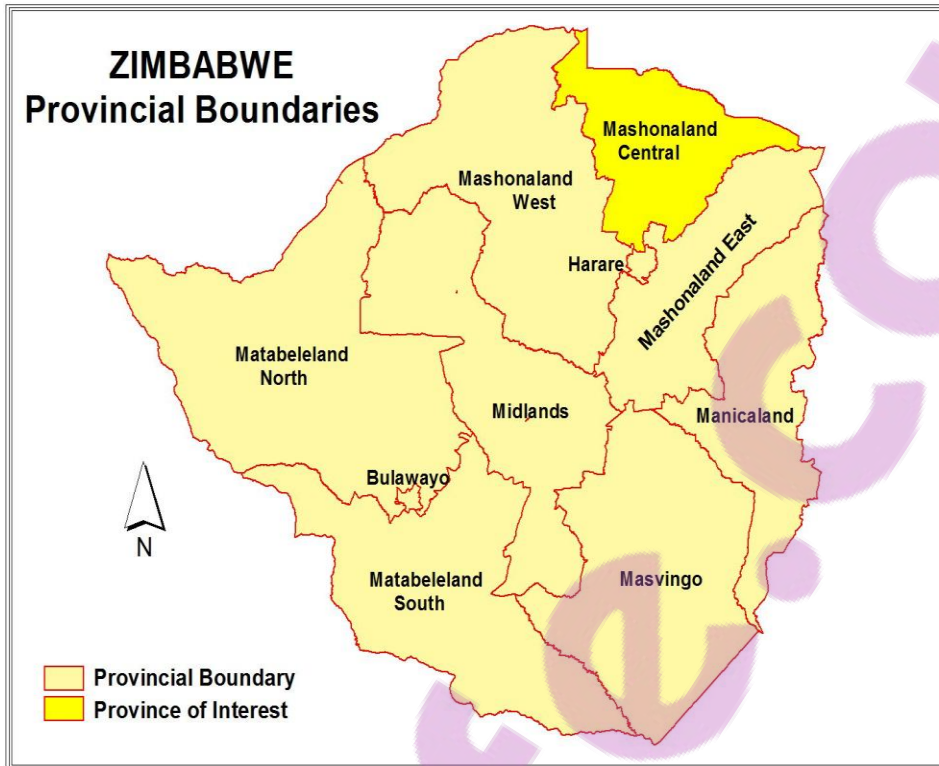
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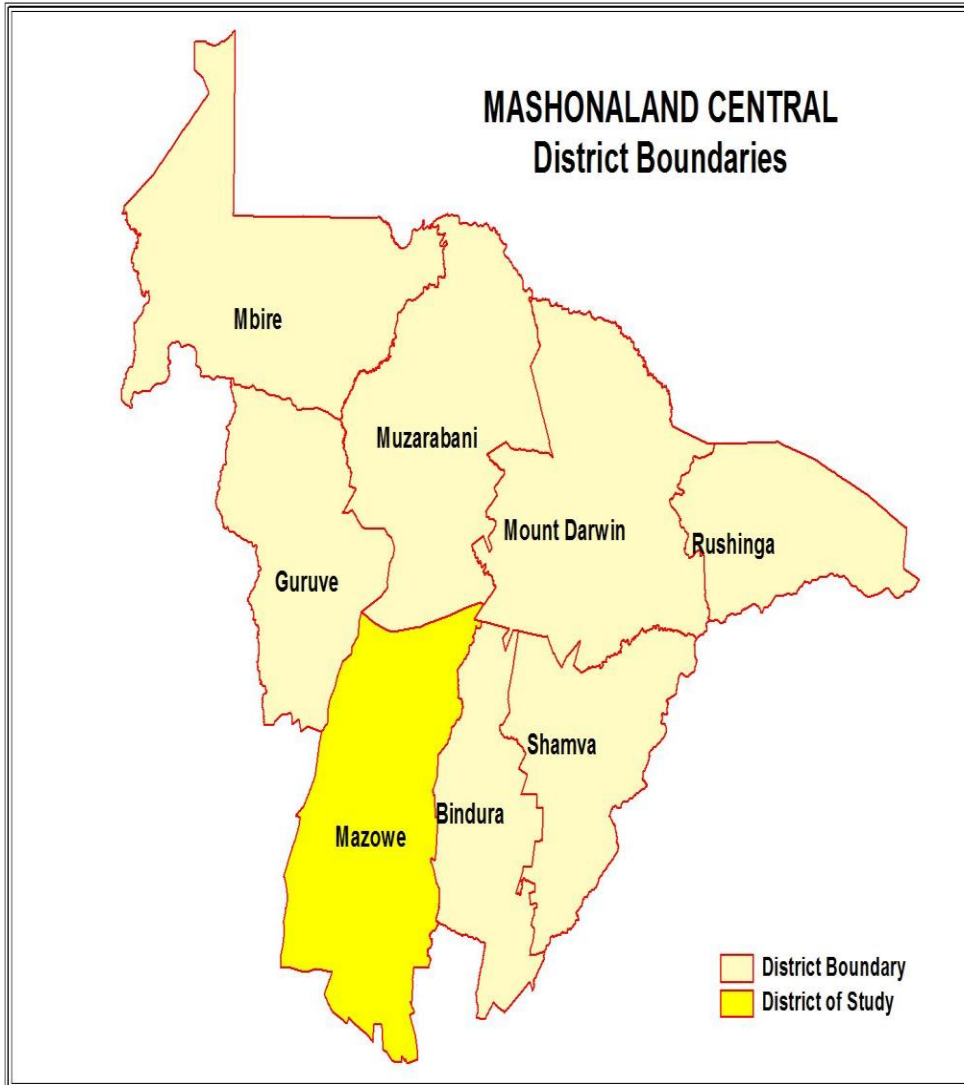
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## Maps

Map 1: Mashonaland Central Province in Zimbabwe

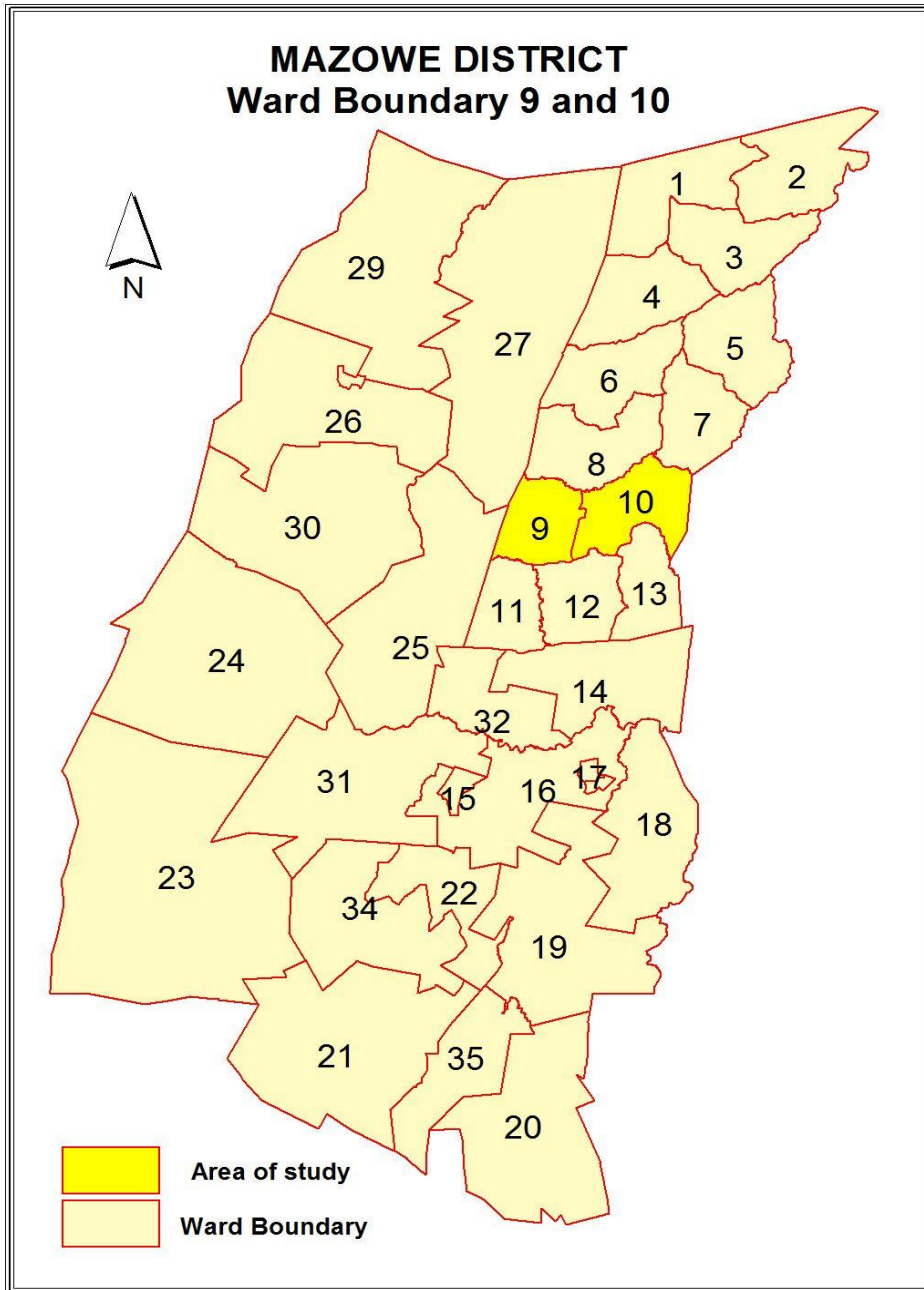


**Map 2: Mazowe District Boundaries**

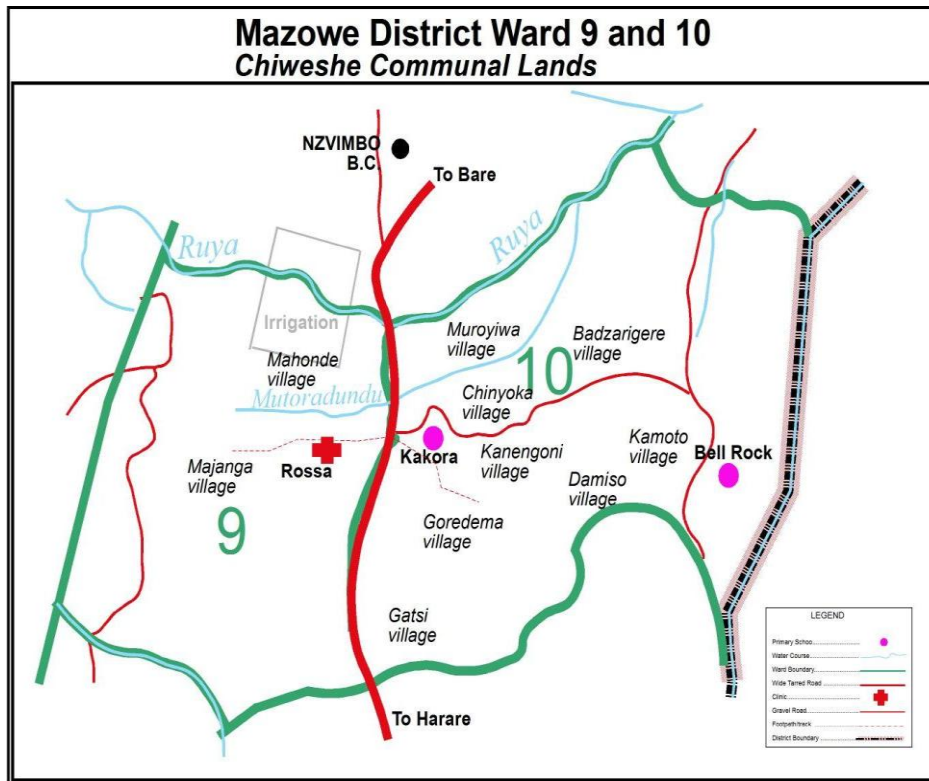




Map 3: Wards 9 and 10



Map 4: The 10 Selected Villages in Chiweshe Communal Lands



## THESIS OUTLINE

### Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis comprises nine chapters, each concerned with interconnected aspects of children's experiences of growing up in *Chiweshe* Communal lands. In the first chapter, I outline my main argument that, despite growing up under extreme contexts characterised by an HIV and AIDS epidemic, economic collapse, political and social unrest, children in *Chiweshe* are competent social actors. I outline my research problem, giving its contextual background and significance, and delineate the questions I ask in an endeavour to address the problem.

### Chapter 2: Literature and concepts on childhoods

This chapter discusses childhood studies literature and the wider, interdisciplinary social studies of childhood that informed my thesis. My thesis chapters are informed by debate about child development and socialisation, agency and interdependence of children, their families, friendships, groups and relations with adults and their total contexts. I consider the diversity and complexity of childhood, how childhood experiences have multiple meanings, how global and local aspects are intertwined, and how the lives of children can be studied from different theoretical points of view, and suggest why a combination of perspectives is important.

### Chapter 3: Contextualizing childhoods and conceptualising a critical medical anthropological framework of ecologies and syndemics

The importance of relating childhood experiences in *Chiweshe* to their specific context is discussed in relation to the interdisciplinary literature on childhood, in combination with Zimbabwean background information. I argue in favour of what I call the “ecologies and syndemics” lens in an effort to unpack the total context of contemporary childhood in Zimbabwe. I demonstrate how combining perspectives is valuable for a broader, deeper and more contextualized understanding of childhoods in the era of AIDS.

### Chapter 4: Fieldwork at home: methods, challenges, reflexivity and ethical dilemmas

An autobiographical reflexive account describes and justifies the mixed methods and ethnographic research design adopted in the study. Methodological challenges and ethical dilemmas faced during the research process, and ways of dealing with them, are outlined, including ethical debate and the challenges of doing ethnographic fieldwork on sensitive and intimate topics with children. I illustrate how the realities and contexts of grounded fieldwork

often diverge from the neat descriptions in many textbook research accounts and demonstrate that ethnographic research is a negotiated process of constant and contingent reformulation and reflection with close attention paid to the specific contexts, and participants involved.

### **Chapter 5: Memories of childhood**

A social history of the notions of childhood and culture in *Chiweshe* Communal Lands is provided, using historical records, adult memories, and ethnographies from Zimbabwe. The historic perspective on how childhood experiences and roles have changed, and the contributory effect of the HIV and AIDS epidemic and the social context is discussed. The history of the pandemic illustrates the ways in which childhood in Zimbabwe was socially, historically and discursively constructed to suit the needs of specific production systems at specific times.

### **Chapter 6: Children of AIDS: children's encounters and understandings of AIDS and their discursive agency (speaking metaphors against AIDS and death)**

Through analysis of the children's symbolic and everyday discourse, compared with historical analysis of past ethnographies, I argue that children are negotiating, and subverting existing social and political structures to create meaning out of their new experiences. The use of metaphors, jokes and other forms of linguistic devices by the children in their attempts to retain some parts of the dignity that the political economy, AIDS, and the various forms of backlash have taken away from them, show that the children are not merely imitating adults, but have the ability to recreate and redefine meanings and realities for themselves.

I focus on the actual knowledge held by the children; their sources of information and their reconstruction of knowledge to make sense of their experiences in their specific circumstances and context. This is related to the global childhood models and its emphasis on childhood innocence, passivity; dependency and need for protection; and time to play.

### **Chapter 7: Survival against all odds: Child survival strategies and social support networks**

I argue that in the context of AIDS and the Zimbabwe economy, children's survival networks have become more important. I examine activities and strategies developed by children for survival, including hunting, gathering, gold mining, and trading. The changing sexual division of child labour, and the growing socio-economic importance of the female child and grandparents in a non-monetary economy is evaluated. Through the children's own accounts I also illustrate how global debates on the elimination of child labour fall short of the realities, and that the main

concerns of the working children in *Chiweshe* now seem to be on fair treatment and fair exchange platforms where children also have a voice.

### **Chapter 8: Singing about AIDS, sexuality and gender: Addressing silences, exclusions, and bringing healing**

Children`s views, experiences and agency on issues relating to sexuality, reproductive health rights, death, illness, politics and AIDS are not given adequate attention usually and, with few exceptions, the focus is on them as innocent, passive victims or unwilling participants. I argue that this is an inadequate and incomplete picture of childhood, which may have negative consequences for children and health promotion in the contexts of AIDS and political economic decline.

Through song and dance, and through appropriation of restricted spaces and structures, children are able to redefine, contest, and recreate childhoods to deal with AIDS, syndemics, deaths, illness, exclusions, silences, denials and other issues affecting them .I contend that the concern over the children`s performances reflect underlying local and global “bigger stories” and ongoing intergenerational struggles to define the appropriate spaces for childhood, and definitions of culture.

I suggest that in a context where formal education, sex education and health systems are on the decline, and where inconsistencies and contradictions exist in legal policies, paying attention to children`s performances is a crucial starting point in any serious analysis of childhoods, and how they intersect with issues of sexuality, politics, and gender. Critical analysis of children`s performances and their particular contexts, combined with the children's interpretations of their performances, illustrate the usefulness of paying attention to both adults` and children`s views.

### **Chapter 9: Reconstructing, reconceptualising and recontextualising the paradoxical notions of childhood agency**

In conclusion, I examine whether my study has successfully accomplished its mission, contributed to theory, and provided implications for research, policy and health promotion to complement existing epidemiological, medical and demographic data on childhood experiences in HIV and AIDS contexts.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The thesis explores the complex challenges of children growing up in rural Zimbabwe in an extreme environment in which survival and development opportunities were increasingly precarious. It focuses on a generation of children aged 4-16 living in *Chiweshe* Communal lands, amidst an HIV and AIDS epidemic in conjunction with unprecedented political-economic decline, socio-cultural change, and increasing intergenerational and national insecurity.

The study illustrates how children in *Chiweshe* negotiated these various crises and argues that the children were competent social actors who exercised considerable personal initiative within their constrained context. This is contrary to the dominant adult-centric views that, more often than not, portray children as passive, hopeless victims of their circumstances. Whilst mindful to avoid a simplistic position which classifies children as either victims or social actors, and ignores the complexity of their social reality, I pay close attention to the daily contexts of growing up in Zimbabwe., In this I follow Gelfand (1979) and Bourdillon's (2000) lead in arguing that, for many children in Zimbabwe, growing up is characterized by both constraining and generative processes.

In this thesis, I aim to do four things:

- (a) to examine how childhood experiences in *Chiweshe* Communal lands have been affected by the HIV and AIDS epidemic;
- (b) to explore the various ways children actively deal with and thus in turn shape the HIV and AIDS contexts;
- (c) to investigate the meanings children in *Chiweshe* attach to their experiences within the HIV and AIDS contexts; and lastly
- (d) to examine how these processes and experiences have redefined childhood experiences in Zimbabwe.

In line with these objectives, I endeavoured to look at the following questions:

- (a) How are childhood experiences in *Chiweshe* shaped by the HIV and AIDS epidemic?
- (b) How do children, in turn, deal with and shape the HIV and AIDS context?
- (c) How do children make sense of their experiences within these particular contexts?
- (d) How does this process of shaping and reshaping redefine childhoods in Zimbabwe?

These questions enabled me to explore and illustrate the interconnectedness of childhood , HIV and AIDS, and the broader politico-economic context which I argue was punctuated by non official and unwelcome “enclaves” of neoliberal cultures and governmentality, concepts I found particularly useful and borrowed from Hilgers (2013), which are elaborated in the background section of this thesis.

The idea of incorporating concepts of childhood agency in contemporary childhood studies has gained attention in the current context of child rights and participation, and in the context of neoliberal changes and wars in Africa (Stephens 1995, Honwana and De Boeck 2005). These studies inform my approach as they resonate with a focus on children as both “makers and breakers” of their contexts of growing up, learning and surviving under precarious realities. Thus whilst one of my aims is to illustrate how the HIV and AIDS epidemic has increased the assault on childhood, the greater aim is to expand on an alternative focus of children as social agents. I adopt this current approach to examine the diverse responses of the children as instances of agency within the context of AIDS and related constraints in rural Zimbabwe.

### **1.1 The AIDS pandemic, political economic decline and socio-cultural changes in Zimbabwe**

Initial research led me to understand that, due to the interconnectedness and the multiplicity of issues that arose, it would be implausible to write about childhood experiences of the AIDS pandemic without relating to the broader political-economic, historical and socio-cultural context. In the following section, I give a brief overview of historical and current contextual background within which childhoods were experienced in Zimbabwe.

### **1.2 Political and economic history of neoliberal reform**

After attaining its independence in 1980, the former British colony of Southern Rhodesia became the independent Republic of Zimbabwe and pursued a wide range of development policies which were fraught with “contradictions, inconsistencies and constraints” (Maphosa et al, 2007). The newly elected government adopted socialist driven policies characterised by free education and health care; resource redistribution; and “Growth with Equity policies” targeted at redressing the colonial imbalances in the economy, service provision and access to land.

However, in October 1990 in there was a drastic change from socialist to neoliberal market oriented reforms when the government adopted the Economic Structural Adjustment

Programme (ESAP) due to Western donor pressure. The adoption of this neoliberal policy has been argued to have been the root cause of the political economic decline that later gripped the country and culminated in the current crisis in Zimbabwe (Sichone, 2003). This policy reform resulted in a “...total reversal of the impressive strides made in the 1980s”, a widening of the gap between the rich and the poor, as well as the creation of an economically disempowered but highly educated “fake” middle class (Bond 2006; Maphosa et al, 2007).

The ESAP measures included the reduction of government expenditure and increase of taxes on people`s incomes and wages. The reduction of state provision of social services meant that the community, the family and the individual took over the previous roles of the state, hence the increase in individual responsibility and competition as inequalities increased. Some formerly state-run entities were privatised and commercialised. Since ESAP was based on the neoliberal policy model based on the “free market” ideology, trade opened up, and the foreign currency allocation system was liberalised. In addition, the Zimbabwean dollar was devalued by 40 percent, and government subsidies on basic consumer goods and social services such as health and education were removed( Maphosa et al, 2007).

In line with free market logic, the government also removed the protection of non-productive import substituting industries and increased profit remittance abroad. These economic policy reforms resulted in a decline in employment opportunities by more than 60 percent, and increased poverty as 80 percent of the Zimbabwean population fell below the poverty datum line with children, women and youths in rural areas being the worst affected (Bond 2006; Maphosa et al, 2007).

In 1998, the Zimbabwe government launched the second stage of ESAP, as the Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST), which outlined macro-economic reforms extending to 2000 with the aim to grow the economy and maximize profit in organizations. In 2000 the war veterans spear-headed Fast Track Land Reform which, despite official rhetoric, led to a decline in agricultural production and food security. These conditions led on to the current period which Maphosa et al (2007) termed a period of “policy formlessness, chaos and the lack of rule of law”.

The section above gives a brief description of the political economic history and the Zimbabwean variant of the implementation of neoliberal policy reform. I argue that the current lack of coherent policies reveals remnants of neoliberal ways of operating at both individual and



governance levels, punctuated to a lesser extent with socialist tendencies. Thus I focus on the continuities of neoliberal practices and thoughts by drawing from two contemporary anthropological approaches to neoliberalism.

Contemporary anthropological theorists on neoliberalism argue for the use of the concept of neoliberalism as both a culture and a mode of governance that influences people's thought patterns and subsequently their actions and practice (Hilgers, 2011; Kingfisher and Maskovsky, 2008). In adopting these two approaches, I am mindful of Hilgers' warning, not to take an overly simplistic stance of seeing neoliberalism as an abstract, totalizing force that is external to the context, but take a more empirical approach to the study of the impact of neoliberalism on local cultures and local modes of governmentality in the current Zimbabwean context.

I employ this concept to see how it is adopted and modified at the local level and combines with the AIDS pandemic and other socio-cultural phenomena to affect children's contexts of growing up in Zimbabwe. I shall come back to these issues later when I develop a syndemics and ecologies lens to enable a better and broader understanding of contemporary children's cultures, discourses and practice in Zimbabwe, in the context of AIDS and its allies.

I also draw from the anthropology of neoliberalism to analyse how "enclaves" or certain fragments of neoliberal forms of governmentality may still be in operation today, even after many years since ESAP has been officially abandoned. Although one may argue that within the same context where ESAP was implemented in Zimbabwe, there were also other non neoliberal modes of governance which were not entirely driven purely by market and maximization logic, I argue, like Hilgers (2011), that closer analysis of findings may demonstrate continuities of various fragments of neoliberal cultures and modes of governmentality by children in Zimbabwe. Though one could state that Zimbabwe was never purely or wholly a neoliberal state, I argue that the very unique way the policy was implemented, the inconsistencies and contradictions, already demonstrate a much bigger, global neoliberal mode of governmentality that was already in operation from the colonial times and continues to operate in the current local context albeit under a different label (Bond 2006).

I concur with Fisher and Maskovsky (2008), who argue that there are multiple forms of neoliberal governmentality and also plural formations of neoliberal cultures under construction by both the subjects and systems at any one given point. Therefore, there is no one universally acceptable definition or implementation of neo-liberalism, though one can identify some

dominant characteristics such as the logic of the market and an increased sense of individual hyper-responsibilisation as a response to the roll back of the state's parenting and social service provision role.

The economic background partly explains why, to some extent, children in Zimbabwe still tend to see themselves as entrepreneurial actors who are self-reliant participants in a borderless economy, in the absence of state and parental support. Such thought patterns and practice are reflective of the formation of contingent and context-specific, market-driven cultures.

### **1.3 A context of AIDS and political-economic decline**

When I commenced fieldwork in January 2007, the country was mired in an unprecedented economic crisis. The annual inflation rate, estimated in 2006 at 1000 percent, had escalated to exceed two million percent. This led the World Bank to brand Zimbabwe as “the planet's fastest shrinking economy outside a war zone” (Department for International Development, 2006). International political sanctions, political instability and lack of foreign currency led to a decline in foreign investment and reductions in development assistance. Funds formerly available to the health sector were cut; most medical facilities were privatised, and some collapsed totally (ZDHS, 2005-6, Basset 1997).

The Zimbabwe Human Development Report (2003) reported that indicators of “human poverty” which include measures of deprivation in a long and healthy life, knowledge, and decent standards of living were higher in rural areas at 31 percent, in comparison to urban areas at just over 26 percent. The fragile political situation made life worse for the already poor rural population, which constitutes more than 75 percent of the population in Zimbabwe, and comprises mainly of women and children (Nemapare & Dow Tang, 2005; Ministry of Health and Child Welfare (MOHCW), 2009). Mushayavanhu (2003:9) noted that the AIDS pandemic worsened the situation for the already disadvantaged rural folk through the death of the economically active, and the diversion of meagre economic resources from the household to pay for hospital bills, medication and burials. She also pointed out that because the virus infected mostly the urban working-class, poverty in the rural areas increased as alternative sources of income and remittances reduced. Cumulatively, this made rural children more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and HIV infection, particularly the female children (Palermo and Peterman, 2009; Robson, 2000).

An UNDP and Government of Zimbabwe report (2011) notes that in Zimbabwe, the infant and under-five mortality rates which had decreased just after Independence in 1980 due to free health care, began to increase in 1996. The report associates the increase in child mortality rates with the start of economic challenges and the introduction of cost-recovery policies under ESAP in the 1990s. In 2009, the Group for Child Mortality Estimation showed an under-five mortality of 96 per 1,000 live births in comparison to the lower level of child mortality of the 1980s (59 per 1,000 for under-five mortality and 40 per 1,000 for infant mortality). This clearly shows that HIV and AIDS is one of the leading causes of child mortality in Zimbabwe.

According to United Nations Joint Program on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS, 2006), approximately 64 percent (24.5 million) of the world's HIV and AIDS infections are found in Southern Africa. In 2005, it was estimated that in one in ten children below 15 years in the sub-region was HIV positive. The UNAIDS report also revealed that 43 percent of all children living with HIV/AIDS reside in Southern Africa, where one third of the world's HIV related deaths occurred in 2005 alone. These are staggering statistics given the fact that sub-Saharan Africa makes up only 10 percent of the world's population. Even if Zimbabwe's HIV infection rates for adults above 15 years have been reported to have declined from 25 percent in 2004 to 13.1 percent in 2011, 1.7 million people in the country are reportedly living with AIDS and mortality levels remain high (UNDP and Government of Zimbabwe 2011; 2012).

In 2006, less than ten percent (23,000) of the 320,000 who need antiretroviral drugs were on treatment and mortality rates continued to increase (UNAIDS, 2006). As a result, life expectancy at birth in Zimbabwe fell from 61 years in 1990 to about 43 years for the period 2000-2005. In 2011, the UNDP and Government of Zimbabwe (2011) estimated it to have fallen below 35 years. This was the disease and death-ridden context in which Zimbabwean children were living during the period between 2007-2008 and, from my recent field visits in 2012, conditions are not much changed. Inequalities, infections and deaths in rural areas seem to be worsening despite the reported improvements in ARV rollouts, and the current United States dollar economy.

The high rates of HIV and AIDS related illnesses and deaths in Zimbabwe has brought about many social, political, economic and cultural changes, as evidenced in conceptualisations and experiences of childhood, sexuality, gender relations, death, health and illness. The totality

of these changes has substantially changed childhoods in *Chiweshe* and, arguably, in other rural communities.

#### **1.4 The AIDS pandemic, changing family roles and collapsing family structures**

The advent of AIDS has led to a proliferation of female headed and child headed households in Africa (World Bank 2005). In the early 1980s before the advent of HIV and AIDS, only two percent of the children in Southern Africa were orphans but by 1997, the figure had risen to seven percent (Francis-Chizororo 2008). Foster, et al, (1995) and; Kesbey, et al, (2006) reported that over 10 per cent of children in Mutare had been orphaned by the AIDS pandemic and that three percent of these children lived in child-headed households. Very little detailed research has been conducted on this growing phenomenon of child headed households in Zimbabwe with the exception of Foster et al (1997) and Francis-Chizororo (2008). I argue that this is a pathological view of alternative forms of family, which prevents researchers from seeing the existence and maintenance of child headed households as evidence of childhood agency.

Foster et al (1997) give further evidence of this agency by pointing out that while most children in child headed households had extended family members who offered assistance, some children opted to live alone so as to prevent the loss of household property to relatives who often volunteered to be their guardians. Some relatives preferred not to take children in and, instead, offered support to orphans living in their deceased parents' home. Contextualised understandings of conditions that force children to take contradictory roles as both a child and a household head become crucial.

Matshalaga's study (2004) in Zimbabwe showed that grandmothers headed most households where orphans were growing up, but did so under impoverished conditions. Most of the "grandmother orphan households" faced food insecurity, economic, labour, educational, and health access challenges. In cases where mothers were deceased or ill, grandmothers assumed the child care role. In many households, females had migrated to towns or neighbouring countries in search of employment and often left their children under the care of the grandparents. Due to economic hardships, most migrants could only afford to visit or send money home on major holidays, such as Christmas, Easter and Heroes holidays.

Like Matshalaga (2004), most studies on grandparent-led households focus on the child caring roles of grandparents and ignore the role of the child and children's views of these care

arrangements. Exceptions include Parsons (2010) and Robson and Ansell (2000) who show how child carers are often invisible workers in the care economies in Southern Africa. My study contributes to this knowledge by showing how at times children may volunteer to move in with relations for strategic reasons, and are not just “passively” taken care of by adults, or unable to negotiate or run away from new living arrangements.

Whilst the role of grandparents was increasingly gaining importance, other social relations were collapsing. Constant rural-urban migration patterns resulted in eroded kinship support systems, and left most people with no alternative home-based care for ill people, or alternative care options for orphans. These changes created a new environment for children growing up. In some cases, children dropped out of school in order to work and take care of their siblings or ill and bed ridden adults. Children learnt to negotiate for survival on their own (UNICEF, 2006).

In the face of collapsing kinship ties and obligations due to increased migration, the traditional roles of the paternal aunt (*tete*), the maternal uncle (*sekuru*), and grandparents were also undergoing transformations (Kesby et al, 2006). Village elders, peer networks, church and schoolteachers now served as sources of information about sexuality, relationships and marriage. Biological parents who are traditionally not expected to communicate with their children on sexual matters were increasingly taking over this advisory role but the paradox was that most adults still assumed all children to be asexual, and often provided irrelevant knowledge (World Bank 2005; Sethaput and Israbhakad, 1999). My study attempts to ascertain whose ideas the children take, and to explore how children make sense of contradictory discourses, knowledge and modes of existence.

Alongside changes in household structures, many adults outside the household have assumed responsibility for childhood “socialization”, including distant kin, church leaders, schoolteachers and peers. (Mkwanazi, 2005:118). This is the situation in rural Zimbabwe. In the contemporary era of HIV and AIDS, it is imperative to record children’s sources of knowledge on AIDS, gender and sexuality, and to establish how children make sense of multiple and conflicting discourses to provide contextually appropriate information for informed policy and interventions. Such contextual knowledge also informs on ways children navigate uncertain situations in their lives, such as death and illness.

## 1.5 The significance of the study

Despite HIV and AIDS being the focus of concern over the last two decades, the pandemic's impact on children only received global attention from the mid 1990s because prime concern lay with developing intervention practices and prevention initiatives to curb the spread of the virus amongst sexually active adults. Garbus and Khumalo-Sakutukwa (2003) stated that policy makers, international organisations and national governments responded slowly to the impact of HIV/AIDS on children in Zimbabwe because of the simplistic assumption that these children would be the future "AIDS free generation". Although the first AIDS case in Zimbabwe was reported in 1985, the policy to put children first, such as the Orphans and Vulnerable Children policy, was only developed only in 2005.

Early epidemiological studies focused on establishing the numbers and general patterns of what was termed the "orphan problem". This focus perpetuated the view of orphans as helpless and vulnerable, and provides an incomplete and inadequate picture of childhood in the context of the AIDS pandemic (Foster et al, 2005; Meintjes, 2006). Therefore, in an effort to give a more complete and alternative picture of childhood, this thesis focuses on both orphans and non-orphans, in the context of an HIV and AIDS epidemic.

Kesby et al (2006) and Ansell (2005) observed that, in Zimbabwe, like most third world countries, children under the age of 16 make up more than 45 percent of the population, yet very little attention is given to their view point and agency. The selective attention given to them by both academics and policymakers serves to reinforce the protectionist agenda of "saving" and "protecting" the "helpless children of the Third World." This may lead to inadequate interventions where resources allocated to children are insufficient for youthful populations such as Zimbabwe (Kesby et al, 2006:185). Given that this thesis is not only about 45 percent of the population, but also that the children come from the rural majority, adds to the focus of this study.

The intention of the study is to reveal and give primacy to children's realities, in order to contribute towards the "double hermeneutic agenda of the social sciences through research whose aim is to continuously construct and reconstruct knowledge on childhoods" (James & Prout, 1997:8). This study then provides an opportunity to understand how broad socio-economic and political changes in Zimbabwe affect childhood and the AIDS crisis (Honwana and De

Boeck, 2005:1). I argue that the HIV and AIDS epidemic has substantially changed how children experience childhood in rural communities.

The study explores the socially variant ways through which the experiences of children in *Chiweshe* have been altered by HIV and AIDS and, at the same time, how the HIV and AIDS context has been transformed due to children's agency. Thus, contrary to mainstream scholarship which suggests that children are always at the receiving end of the brutality of HIV and AIDS, this study shows how children have been reconstructing and deconstructing the HIV and AIDS terrain. My study draws heavily from this growing body of literature on childhood agency and focuses on AIDS and its interrelated contexts.

Kesby et al (2006:185) argue that in studying local childhoods, it is not enough to understand them, but there is a need to also theorise these local understandings of childhood, which this thesis attempts to achieve through anthropological ecological analysis. Bluebond-Langner and Korbin (2007:245) encourage studies that focus on the agency of children arguing that this makes children "worthy of study in their own right" and also "increases interest in studies of children among those who would not necessarily see their value for development of social theory". In line with this view, my thesis examines Zimbabwean childhood through providing a space where children's agency and perspectives are documented, displayed and given meaning, contrary to the pathologised misrepresentations so often used by the media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others (Guest, 2003).

Zimbabwean children were doing their best to survive under precarious conditions and showed surprising agency and tenacity under such constraints. Following Reynolds (1989:4) who raised similar concerns of childhood literature which did not contextualise, or relate findings to the social context, I made an effort not to overlook the context in which childhood experiences occur by adapting an analytical framework that is aware of both the agency of children and the total context in which this agency occurred. Similarly, Ennew and Morrow (2002:10) advise young anthropologists studying childhood to follow in the footsteps of the late anthropologist, Sharon Stephens, who had the "originality" and "courage" to challenge complacent formulations of children's rights, pointing out their political nature and their potential to do more damage in children's lives when assumed to be universally applicable in all contexts. Through capturing the children's actual experiences in their own voices, my thesis also questions the meaning of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the

Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), for children who are struggling to survive, in the context of HIV and AIDS epidemic and other intertwined contextual constraints.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE AND CONCEPTS ON CHILDHOODS

#### 2.1 Introduction

The literature in childhood studies and the wider interdisciplinary social studies of childhood that informed my thesis are discussed with reference to debates about socialisation, child development, agency and interdependence of children, their families, friendships, groups, and adult relationships within their contexts. The diversity and complexity of childhood, the multiple meanings of childhood experiences, global and local perspectives, and different theoretical approaches to childhood studies suggest why a combination of perspectives is important.

#### 2.2 Childhood(s)?

Definitions by their very nature of assuming universality are problematic. (Manderson et al, 1999:184). Studies clearly show that there is no universal definition of childhood, agreement on what it means to be a child, or who can be clearly defined as a child (Ansell, 2005:1) In some instances, this ambiguity has led to arguments that one should not study childhood, but rather childhoods due to the multiplicity and diversity of form and experience. (Kesby et al, 2006). Mkwanzazi (2005:175) argues that the term is context specific, and relies upon social rather than biological criteria.

In this study, I use ‘children’ to refer to anyone below 18 years. (UNCRC age based definition) whilst remaining aware that this chronological age based definition is not universal. (Ansell, 2005:1).

The International Labour Organisation (ILO), Convention 138 defines a child as anyone below the age of sixteen. The Government of Zimbabwe has established the age of sixteen as a boundary for sexual responsibility and anyone who engages in sexual relations with an individual below the age of sixteen can be charged with statutory rape (Bourdillon, 2000:18). The legal age of majority in Zimbabwe, however, is 18 years. Although these definitions were useful to limit my research population, I acknowledge that chronological age may be related to some biological limitations, but does not determine a child’s actual behaviour or competence.

James contends that "... childhood should be seen not as an object, a thing, but as a context within which children socialise one another as well as socialise with each other" (James, 1998:76). Ansell observed that chronological age is not a universally accepted basis for determining who is a child in Brazil, Ansell (2005:1) where the legal age of majority is attained at 21 years. Ansell also contends that in other countries, there are contextually based factors such as whether the individual has undergone an initiation ritual, has married, has children, owns property or earns a living through work. As the children's accounts reveal, in daily life in *Chiweshe*, definitions of who is, and who is not a child, are increasingly blurred.

### **2.3 Antecedent paradigms: socialisation and child development**

Although this is an anthropological thesis, I cannot underestimate the influence of sociology in my background. Additionally, the fact that an integrated anthropology of childhood is still a relatively recent focus in the field meant that my study would be the result of the synthesis of inter-disciplinary reading.

Socialization theories in their various forms provided the basis of most early studies of childhood in the social sciences. According to Jenks, (1996:13ff), functionalist scholars such as Parsons used 'socialisation' to refer to the "unilinear", biologically based simplistic process of the "transmission of culture", or imprinting of social norms from fully socialised adults to "pre-socialised" children. Children were assumed to have empty minds "*tabula rasa*" which would be passively filled with input by the adult members of society. Thus, children were not regarded as complete "beings", with cognitive, economic or social competence but rather as "becomings", unfinished, raw products to be processed and refined (Christiansen et al, 2006:11ff). Christiansen calls for a "perspectival dualist analysis" of childhood in which childhood is viewed more holistically as a period of "being" and "becoming" and thus "betwixt and between" points.

Socialisation theories have largely portrayed children as passive recipients of adult cultures and stimuli, and have ignored the agency of children and their abilities to be co-constructors of reality. Children who do not conform are often labelled as deviants or viewed as the results of failed socialisation. Furthermore, related ideas on how immature, irrational, incompetent, asocial, acultural children are in juxtaposition to adults also dominated early developmental psychological research (Ansell 2005:19).

Adult fears of improperly socialised children were reflected in two Western images of children: the Dionysian and Appollonian views of childhood (Jenks 1996). The Dionysian view portrays children as “little devils” born with “the original sin” and therefore in need of strict moral guidance, discipline and corporal punishment to protect them from their natural undesirable selves. In contrast, the Appollonian view considers children to be “little angels” with innocent, naturally virtuous natures, and thus in need of encouragement and support, rather than control and punishment (Ansell, 2005:11). Both views continue to influence current understandings of childhood in academia.

Growing dissatisfaction with socialisation paradigms, and increasing interest in children’s agency led to the development of the “new social studies of childhood” (James and Proutt, 1997) which recognise that childhood is a social and cultural phenomenon that has no universal validity and that childhood varies historically, according to place and time (Abede, 2008). James and Proutt, 1997:8) outlined six key features of this new paradigm, summarised below:

- Childhood is socially constructed;
- Childhood is a variable of social analysis which cannot be entirely separated from other social variables such as class, gender, ethnicity or race;
- Children’s social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the concerns of adults;
- Ethnography is a particularly useful methodology in research with children because it allows children’s voices to be heard;
- Children are actively involved in the construction of their own lives;
- The development of a new paradigm is a contribution to the process of reconstructing childhood.

These are tenets that have influenced my ethnography of childhood.

## **2.4 The emerging anthropology of childhood**

A distinct and coherent anthropology of childhood is still growing and gaining recognition (Bluebond-Langner and Korbin, 2007; Levine, 2007; Montgomery, 2009). Children are seen increasingly as social actors in their own right as opposed to passive recipients of adult cultures, instruction and influence. The important role of the agency of children, as they explore and

experience the conditions of the ‘adult’ world in which they live was proposed by Hardman (1973:85) who called for a distinct anthropology of childhood, and regarded both women and children as the “muted”, and invisible groups in society.

Most previous studies focused on the ‘marginalization’ to which children and women were prone, and to their exclusion and position on the periphery of experience (Montgomery, 2005:472) criticized social analysis for categorising children and women as minority groups, and thus placing them in “the same lousy boat” which produced biased research. Indeed, this is the case not only in academic research, but also in governmental structures, whereby women and children are often grouped under the same departmental portfolio.

Most early anthropologists, including Mead (1928), Malinowski (1927), and Whiting (1963) focused on issues such as social learning, socialisation, child rearing, discipline and punishment, whilst ignoring the creative ability, agency and everyday issues affecting children. They viewed children as passive recipients of culture, and children's activities as imitation of adult actions (Jones, 1993; Hirschfeld, 2001; Bluebond-Langner, 2007; Levine, 2007; Montgomery, 2009). As ethnographic evidence from my study demonstrates, the reality of childhood in rural Zimbabwe is more complex and contextual than mere imitation of adult behaviour or childhood delinquency.

Only after scholars challenged conservative notions of childhood did anthropologists begin to hold a different perspective. Hardman (1973) argued for “...seeing children as competent social actors who could be articulate about what the social world is like for them”. Burman and Reynolds, (1990:1) advocated that children ought not to be studied as “miniature adults” as revealed in historical studies in Western countries Aries (1962). In a review of Morton`s work on Tongan childhoods, Stephens (1998:530) argued that the anthropology of gender and women had progressed since the early 1980s, whilst the anthropology of childhoods remains, “a genuine frontier” that is “...arguably in its infancy”. A few years later, concurring with Stephens, Hirschfeld (2001:611) summarised the main problem:

Few major works in anthropology focus specifically on children, a curious state of affairs given that virtually all contemporary anthropology is based on the premise that culture is learned, not inherited. Although children have a remarkable and undisputed capacity for learning generally, and learning culture in particular, in significant measure anthropology has shown little interest in them and their lives. Resistance to child-focused scholarship, it is argued, is a by product of (1) an

impoverished view of cultural learning that overestimates the role adults play and underestimates the contribution that children make to cultural reproduction, and (2) a lack of appreciation of the scope and force of children's culture, particularly in shaping adult culture. The marginalization of children and childhood, it is proposed, has obscured our understanding of how cultural forms emerge and why they are sustained.

Although some scholars disagree with Hirschfeld's view above, he showed convincingly how incoherent and limited the work done so far has been. Benthall (1992:1) had argued earlier that there were "enough studies of children by anthropologists to form a tradition" and cited the child ethnographies by Mead (1930), Schwartzman (1978), LeVine et al, (1994), Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) as examples. However, as Hirschfeld (2001:116) stated, this work had not succeeded in bringing children in from the margins of anthropology as Hardman (1973) and Toren (1993) had hoped. This thesis contributes to this quest by providing an ethnographic account that gives primacy to the voices of the children themselves.

## **2.5 Childhoods, and the medical anthropology of health, illness and healing**

Christensen (2004) observed that even in child health research, the tradition has been to understand the child as an object acted upon by others and moulded by factors in the social and material environment. This view is still widely accepted in studies that view child health and well-being as primarily predetermined by external, psychological and biological factors. These approaches often neglect children's own agency, experiences, understanding and actions, focusing on what has been labelled as an "adultist" perspective, (Christensen, 2004) whereby children are primarily seen as modelling parental behaviour. My chapter on children's understandings of AIDS will reveal this view as inadequate for children growing up in the era of AIDS and death.

The ethnography by Scheper-Hughes (1992) on the "unnaturalness" of the seemingly unemotional "death without weeping" over the deaths of infants, in a context of extreme deprivation and scarcity, is one of the classic studies on child mortality in anthropology. In this study, she links child mortality in Brazil to the colonial roots of social and economic oppression and its later form as an evolving plantation economy. She convincingly shows how the emotional distance of Brazilian mothers to their dead children is a product of the oppression and violence

structuring their social relations in daily life. This work provided part of the inspiration for this study which deals with similar issues, but in the context of AIDS.

Scheper-Hughes and Sargent (1998:19) argue that childhood illnesses and deaths are often metaphors of social disruption and change both at micro (household) and at macro (national or global) levels. Metaphors of witchcraft may be used by adults to cope with inexplicably high illness and death rates; and other social changes. (Schoebf, 1991:757; La Fontaine, 1998:277; Farmer, 1992). However, Parsons (2005:62) maintains that it is equally important to ascertain how children make sense of their “grief stricken existence”, particularly in contexts of rampant illnesses and early deaths. Parsons’ study (2010) at the intersections of psychoanalysis and anthropology accounts for how HIV positive children in Zimbabwe use their religious capital to survive with the disease and find emotional healing. Bluebond-Langner (1978) studied how children deal with their pending deaths in hospital contexts, conditions which Buchman (2007:1972) confirmed are luxuries for Zimbabwean children for whom palliative care is not an available option. This thesis will elaborate on the conversation started by Parsons (2010) by showing the other ways by which children deal with AIDS illness and deaths, not in the context of the hospital as Bluebond-Langner (1978) did, but in home-based care systems where the children are often invisible participants.

## **2.6 Children as learners and tactical, competent social actors**

Interest in learning processes amongst children was initially an area of analysis dominated by psychologists including Freud (1923), Piaget (1936), Pavlov (1927) and Bandura (1977). Their psychological rigidity and biases towards the cognitive development of children influenced later anthropological studies whose work also focused on childhood as a learning context (Hirschfeld, 2001).

In his study of street children in Brazil, Hecht, (1998) developed the notion of taking children as social actors, who negotiate and form networks for their everyday survival. These children construct their own forms of knowledge about survival on the street without parental supervision. Hecht argues that these children have the potential to be revolutionaries because they construct their own meanings through street life, and act in ways that do not necessarily conform to societal expectations. To children, street life provides freedom and an alternative life

to the poverty and hunger of the matrifocal households from which they escaped. The police and the state, however, see these children as a threat to social order.

Studies (Reynolds, 1986; Argenti, 2001; Scheper-Hughes, 1998; and Rampele, 2002) have demonstrated that the political agency of children cannot be underestimated, or simplified to rebellion. At a time that child rights issues were increasingly questioned in the era of AIDS and the redefinition of childhood, Parker (2001) argues that anthropological researchers only started showing an interest in reproductive health and AIDS issues towards the end of the 1990s as those areas were regarded as a preserve of medical and public health research. The medical orientation of sexual, reproductive and AIDS issues led to the “moralisation” of cultural, political and economic factors affecting childhood sexuality issues. Most researchers were more comfortable with research on children as victims of sexual abuse, not as the agents in sexual issues (Jenks, 1996:84).

However, as childhood research becomes increasingly interdisciplinary, researchers brave enough to move out of the traditional methodological and epistemological boundaries of childhood studies are presenting innovative studies on the realities of current, uncomfortable issues such as childhood sexuality and reproductive health rights (Pattman and Chege, 2003; Gwanzura-Ottmoller & Kesby, 2005; Kesby et al, 2006; Max & Aggleton, 2009; Izugbara, 2005). Articles have been written on the ethical challenges of researching and writing ethnographies of childhood sexuality regarding child prostitutes in Thailand, (Montgomery, 2007) and teen pregnancies in South Africa (Bhana, 2008). It has been argued that for research to effectively reduce AIDS fatalities in Southern Africa (Kesby et al, 2006), there is an urgent need for child centred anthropological literature which captures the way contemporary children understand and deal with issues of gender, sexuality, and reproductive health, a theme I explore in a chapter on children’s sexualized songs.

In the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, interest has increased in children’s awareness of sexuality and in their sexual behaviour (Izugbara, 2005). There was an underlying assumption that children are asexual, perpetuated by religious and mythical discourses associated with children as pure and angelic (Heywood, 2001; Reynolds 1996). I deal with these issues in the chapter on the sexualisation of children’s musical performances.

However, numerous surveys contradict this opinion. In a study done by Africare (2000) in Zimbabwe, fifty percent of the sample of children younger than 10 years old; and thirty

percent of the 11-15 year old group, reported sexual experience. These statistics conflict with the conservative beliefs on child sexuality held by parents and the Ministry of Health. Through this child centered ethnography, the reality of the children's lives will be revealed through "their own eyes and voices" (World Bank, 2005:321).

Smith (2003:364) points out the controversy as to whether the acquisition of gender or sexual knowledge translates into actual behaviour. In a study conducted among young Igbo-speaking rural migrants, Smith found disparities in the high level of AIDS awareness and the low levels of protective sexual behaviour. Nigerian youths perceived issues to do with HIV infection as a moral issue. The adoption of modern notions of love and trust also makes the relationship between discourse and behaviour more complex.

Anthropological studies of sexuality have also pointed to the use of pain, or punishment, in teaching children. Last (2000:360) focuses upon the culture of child punishment in Nigeria. The use of pain in sexual education, either through corporal punishment, or public humiliation, is widely used in Africa (Last, 2003). Upon the introduction of virginity testing by the Government of Zimbabwe and the public issue of virginity certificates, some girls who had received the certificates were found, subsequently, to be HIV positive (Mushayavanhu, 2003). It seemed that most of them practiced anal sex as a method of preventing premarital pregnancy. The public humiliation of non-virgin girls through social exclusion raised an outcry from children's rights activists. Indeed, some of the girls who became social outcasts had been the victims of sexual abuse by kin relations or stepparents.

Since the start of the 1990s, researchers have realised that the range of factors affecting the construction of sexual realities is far more complex than initially perceived (Parker, 2001:168), in that not only cultural, but also economic, structural and political factors shape sexual experience

Parker (1991) found that in the patriarchal discourses of Brazil, boys are sexually liberated and associated with notions of violence and "machismo" whilst female sexuality is repressed and associated with weakness. Heald (1982) found notions of anger in use during Gisu initiation ceremonies for boys. The rites of passage experienced by both sexes was explored in the *Chiweshe* study in the context of AIDS.

Simpson (2005:569) shows how masculine discourses on sexuality pressurise young Zambian boys to engage in unprotected and violent heterosexual intercourse in order to prove



their “manliness”. Morrel (1999:32) also highlights how the pressure of masculine discourse exposes young boys to associate “high risk” behaviour with being a “real” man. Rajani and Kudrati (1996:302ff) studied the street children of Mwanza in Tanzania to illustrate that children categorised their own sexual experiences, which differed from the larger societal norms. Young street males practice anal sex as a form of initiation and do not perceive this act as constituting “real sex” which, to them, meant procreative sex. These children have constructed their own discourse about sexuality and gender.

Jones (1993:120-124) argues that knowledge of gender roles is transmitted to children mainly through their work and play. Girls in Lwandle, a hostel complex in Cape Town, spent more time cleaning, washing and cooking, and had very little time for play. Boys, however, spent much time playing soccer, except in cases where their mothers or sisters were absent, and they actively had to help with housework. Notions of dress also instill gender differences in children. Dress code may lead to the public humiliation of women labelled as prostitutes. Chand (2005:361) observed that Danish children use “gender-specific language”. Girls learn to be polite through peer interactions, whilst boys teach each other to be rude and the language symbolises the differences between femininity and masculinity. These notions on gender, sexuality, language and dress are significantly interconnected.

## **2.7 Children as agents within the family**

The family or household in its various forms is seen typically as the prime arena for the socialisation of children (Burman and Reynolds, 1986:3) and anthropological literature points to the changing structure of households in Africa (Adepoju & Oppong, 1994; Simkins, 1986) with the emergence of women and child headed households. However, few anthropological studies recognise the children affected by these changes and “give a voice to the silenced” (Ramphela, 2000:31).

Focus on the migration of children in Malawi and Lesotho in response to HIV and AIDS demonstrates the direct effect of the disease on families (Ansell and Young, 2003). Children engage in “multiple moves” prompted by changes in household circumstances such as death and poverty. In some instances, they opt to work rather than move, or relocate, work and attend school at the same time. Debates on the notions of child “work” and child “labour” reveal contrasting views and theories on how to deal with these issues, each reflecting particular

epistemological viewpoints about children and childhood (Bourdillon, 2000). Children's "work" is linked to the dualistic cognition of children as either competent actors or dependent victims, and to their changing economic values, as shown by research in the global North and the global South (Nieuwenhuys 1994, 1996; Bass 2004; Ansell 2005; Bourdillon, 2006).

Competing perspectives on children's work and child labour are subtly linked to ideologies of childhood. Children's work needs to be understood in the light of different material and cultural conditions and as a variant according to the age, capability and gender of the children involved (Bourdillon, 2006; Nieuwenhuys, 1994). Attempts to prevent children from working is Eurocentric, as their work is an integral part of daily life and indispensable to family livelihoods. Nieuwenhuys (1994) further argues that anthropology has largely misrepresented child work in peasant societies as simply part of the socialisation process. The work of poor rural children in India, which includes housework, child minding and foraging, is crucial for the survival of their families within the specific context of their communities, the local patronage system and the wider global economic structures (Stephens 1998).

Nieuwenhuys (1994:19) demonstrates how the profits of capitalist countries are subsidized by the invisible work done by poor families that is not factored into the total costs of production. The over-simplified evaluation of child work is inadequate and, at worst, incommensurate with the daily realities of children seeking survival and contextualised analysis linking local child work experiences to global structures is more productive.

In giving primacy to what childhood in the era of AIDS means to the children themselves, this thesis underlines the significance of an alternative view of children as social actors shaping their own circumstances, as opposed to submissive recipients of the social processes in which they are immersed. I show how children in *Chiweshe* demonstrate their proactive participation in the economy, through work, food collection, and their role as carers of old people and patients living with HIV. The ways in which the children and young people negotiate gender and generational inequalities by taking on 'adult' roles within their households; develop their own support systems to survive in child-headed households in a context of intertwined multiple crises including an incurable epidemic, multiple deaths, greater workloads and schooling, all display their undeniable agency and resilience.

## 2.8 Conceptualising and accounting for childhood agency

It is necessary to delineate the boundaries of the issues of childhood agency, as dealt with in this study. I draw from the definition of children's agency as being 'active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live' (James and Prout, 1997:8). Agency is a negotiable, acquired capacity and does not imply that children are placed in positions of authority, or on a par with adults. Rather, agency stresses the need to respect children's knowledge and social competencies (Kjørholt 2004; 2005).

Valentine (2011:354) accords this approach with the "difference within equality" social model of agency that acknowledges that childhood is different from adulthood and that children should still have the opportunities to participate in matters that affect their well being. This model of social agency is used often in the context of arguments in favour of promoting the increased participation of children. Starting from the premise of deconstructing the traditional presumptions about the limits of children's competences, the model argues that research increasingly shows that children have the same capabilities as adults. This challenges the social and global models that emphasize the immaturity, irrationality, and ignorance of children, based on early argument from classical studies (Aries, 1962). It is argued that children's agency entitles them to have a say on issues that affect them, in contrast to the traditional Dionysian framework that considers that children should only be seen and not heard (Ansell, 2005).

I found this approach particularly useful, and contextually relevant for the current Zimbabwean context, where the new Constitution of Zimbabwe has incorporated the rights of children giving emphasis to the right of children to be heard, the right to an identity and the right to equal treatment (Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment [No.20] Act 2013, Part 3, section 81). The two points in the constitution on the right of children to be heard and the right to equal treatment works well with the ideas on the agency of children where emphasis is given to children's capabilities in acting and speaking for themselves.

Some scholars have cautioned that the recognition of children's agency does not automatically mean the rejection of the social structures that shape their actions. Although children are regarded as social actors, it is important to recognise the particular environmental factors which may enable or constrain them. The distinction between "positive and negative agency" cover such issues as child exploitation within family, religious and international

structures (Wahlstrom, 2009; Leifsen, 2009) and acknowledges that children need to live in communities with adult interaction.

The “Agency in action” notion by (Maxwell and Aggleton, 2009) captures the complex realities of the structural and gender power limitations of childhood agency in specific contexts. Researchers working with children are cautioned against confusing or equating child agency with ‘autonomy’ or ‘self-determinacy’ (Abebe, 2008). I concur with the consideration of agency as the ability of children to “make” or “break” reality (Honwana and De Boeck 2005) even within restrictive environments, and to develop self enabling strategies. The ethnographic evidence in this study demonstrates how childhood agency affects and is affected by different structures, cultures and governance modes within particular contexts.

There is a dearth of anthropological studies exploring how children deal with the HIV and AIDS pandemic in Africa. Most studies focus on the chronological element that is pervasive in global discourses as portraying young people as agents of the future, “becomings” and, in a sense, removing them from their present social experiences. Notable exceptions encountered considered the survival of HIV positive children living in Zimbabwe (Parsons, 2012); households headed by children (Francis-Chizororo, 2008) and a study of the livelihoods of AIDS orphans (Nyambenda and Aagaard-Hansen, 2003).

These studies provide a challenge to the popular, media driven image of Third World children as objects of pity and charity appeals. NGOs tend to classify these children as “Orphans and other Vulnerable Children” (OVC) which justifies a limited view of them as helpless victims without capacity to act independently. My study of children in *Chiweshe* demonstrates that they have developed strategies to ensure their survival and to fulfill social obligations within their communities.

Classical studies have demonstrated that, in historical and contemporary contexts, (familial, political-economic, socio-cultural, and AIDS contexts), most children in Zimbabwe contributed and still contribute towards family labour, income and livelihoods (Reynolds, 1996, 1991; Bourdillon, 2000; Grier 2004), although how their agency is played out through everyday work routines remains under-researched. This thesis therefore explores the lives of children in daily, gender and inter-generational contexts of growing up in rural Zimbabwe.

I draw and expand on categories of activities identified by Valentine (2011:348) who illustrates that children demonstrate their agency mainly through three modes of thought and

action. First, children should show competence in thought and action. Secondly, through application of strategy in both thought and action. Thirdly, through demonstrating reflexive awareness of themselves and others, as well as the acquisition of specialised skills or knowledge required for them to survive in their particular contexts.

Valentine (2011) also argues for a thorough conceptualisation of children`s agency that accommodates the specificity and diversity of childhood experiences in both local and global contexts. In line with this thinking, Leifsen (2009) cautions researchers working on childhood agency not to assume that childhood agency only occurs in ‘ideal’ contexts of growing up, but also to embrace agency that occurs in the less than ideal situations, including what can be classified as violent, illegal, seemingly irrational, and unconventional or negative forms of agency. The context of the Zimbabwean childhoods outlined in this thesis take cognisance of the paradoxical and controversial subject matter of childhood agency that often eludes universal and simplistic definitions.

## **2.9 Being and becoming in globalised local contexts**

Another theoretical consideration in my research is the view of childhood as a social position in movement, as “beings” in the process of “becoming” (Christiansen et al, 2006; Kesbey et al, 2006;. Bourdillon, 2006; and Katz, 2007:1020). Theories that portray children as next-generation adults reproduce the idea that children are incompetent and incomplete objects in the making. This view also erroneously implies that learning processes are restricted to the period of childhood and youth only, and do not occur at all in adulthood. Bluebond-Langner and Korbin (2007:241) note that children are at once beings and becomings, in possession of both agency and vulnerability. They add that the hallmark of anthropological work is the ability to recognize that these attributes manifest themselves in different times and places, and under particular social, political, economic, and moral circumstances and conditions. My study draws from the multiple meanings and interconnectedness of children`s places based on their position in society, as well as demonstrating how their lives are interconnected with dynamic global processes stretching from the definitions of global childhoods, global children`s rights, and global capital (Stephens 1995; Ansell 2005; Abebe 2008). The multi-level analysis from medical anthropology, combined with considerations of relational place and scale, are important in the analysis of contexts of childhoods.

## CHAPTER 3

# CONTEXTUALIZING CHILDHOODS WITHIN A FRAMEWORK OF ECOLOGIES AND SYNDEMICS

### 3.1 Introduction

Having emphasised, in the introductory chapter, the importance of contextualising childhood experiences in the contexts of AIDS and unofficial enclaves of neoliberal capitalism, I now go on to the methodology I used to research the complexity and diversity of childhoods in the era of AIDS through the lens of what I call the “ecologies and syndemics” lens. This lens can be employed to gain a better understanding of childhoods without overlooking the multiple, interconnected, diverse and even contradictory contexts in which contemporary children are growing up in rural *Chiweshe*. I am not proposing a universal model to understand all forms of childhood agency in extreme contexts, but I developed this model to deal with the current contextually specific complexity of the study of childhoods in Zimbabwe. Thus, I will explain later that the depth and breadth of this particular syndemics and ecologies lens may be its greatest strength whilst, at the same time, also its greatest weakness. My attempt here is not to generalise, but in the true anthropological spirit, to particularise.

### 3.2 Building on ecological anthropologies

I argue that, although the classic literature in ecological anthropology may seem irrelevant and outdated, it still proves very useful in contemporary studies of childhoods that seek in-depth understanding using multilevel analysis. The more I reflected on my data, the more I could see parallels in my attempts to contextualise childhoods with the holism and comparative logic of ecological anthropology and syndemic theory.

Whilst it was clear to me that the fashionable units of analysis were no longer “cultures” and “systems”, I was aware that I was attempting to analyse children within particular context specific and contingent systems or cultures. Thus, I reflected on the potential of looking at the contexts of AIDS and neoliberalism as syndemics (partners) within systems or cultures in which children were growing up. Drawing from the terms by Honwana and De Boeck (2005), I formulated ideas of how to view children, as both subjects of neoliberalism and social agents, were “made” and “broken” by the AIDS contexts or AIDS ecologies, whilst they, in turn, acted

on those same ecologies. In essence, as much as the children were subjects or (broken) victims of exploitative relationships, these same extreme conditions in combination with an AIDS context, triggered unexpected forms of agency which gave the children chances of “making” and changing their social realities.

The complexity of the Zimbabwean scenario is that children were both victims and agents. They were broken by the systems and cultures of inequalities formulated and established under the prevailing difficult context in rural Zimbabwe, and, simultaneously, acted as agents with a capacity to come up with innovative responses to the multiple constraints in their contexts. Although no one theory can fully explain the complexity of childhoods in the context of AIDS, theories may provide the building blocks and concepts through which to make sense of complex sets of ethnographically rich but, at times, contradicting data.

I had already collected my data and was struggling to sort it out according to possible recurrent themes and to identify patterns of meaning. Due to the interconnected nature of the issues and the diversity of experiences and contexts revealed by my data, I was quickly frustrated. Thus began my attempt to develop a critical ecological anthropology of childhoods in the era of multiple crises and AIDS in rural Zimbabwe. Since my topic was on childhood experiences of AIDS, it made sense to attempt to develop a disease ecology that would also contextualise childhood agency in *Chiweshe*.

### **3.3 The roots of ecological anthropology**

Baer and Singer (2009:13) define ecology as “an approach in critical medical anthropology employed in understanding the factors that impact and result from environmental-society interactions and interdependencies”. This approach recognises the fundamental importance of the political economy, including capitalist production, market driven distribution of resources, migration and population growth and this resonates well with my attempts to understand childhoods within the context of AIDS and associated factors. One of the earliest proponents of ecology in the social sciences, called for a political ecology “...inspired by insights from the political economy...” and that “...considers the relation of people to their own environment in all its complexity” (Turshen, 1977:48).

Like Mayer (1996:446), I examine “the total environment” or the “total context” in its broadest sense, as an inclusive term to cover the various contexts, or multiple ecologies in which

childhood is experienced, reconstructed, and negotiated. My overall aim is to locate and understand childhood in its broader global, local, political economic, historical and symbolic contexts. I then relate childhood to the political economic and AIDS crises contexts at both local and global scales to show how global power is expressed in local social relations, the political economy, the cultural, and the health and illness contexts, to demonstrate the diversity and complexity of the experiences of growing up in the context of AIDS. Abel and Stepp (2003: 1) and Kottack (1999:23) note that older ecological anthropologies were too simplistic in their assumptions of environmental determinism. These theories ignored the capacity of individuals to respond to their contexts, and their ability to actually co-construct “contingent” contexts.

I employ the focus on the human agency to children’s agency as a feature of the new ecological anthropology which was lacking in the original formulations of ecosystem ecology and cultural ecologies by Steward (1955), Rappaport (1968) and others whose work focused on the functions and adaptations of cultures and systems.

In this sense then, the context is constructed and reconstructed through its interaction with the child, and both the child and childhood are reconstructed through the interactions with the total context. Thus, both childhood and the context are contingent products of interactions with each other, echoing the ideas of Honwana and De Boeck (2005) on how children are “made and broken” by their contexts, and how they, in turn, make and break their contexts.

Grzywacz and Faqual (2000) argue that paradoxically, one of the main criticisms against ecological analysis is also its greatest strength. Although ecological analysis has been criticized for “lacking a coherent theoretical basis”, this lack of coherence makes this area of study much more flexible and open to development in contemporary fields of study. Its current “two pronged” approach to analyse both the environment and the individual has been said, however, to make research difficult, expensive and ambiguous.

Abel and Stepp (2003:12) contend that unlike its predecessor, the new ecological anthropology suspended the focus on functionalist assumptions, adaptation, equilibrium systems, climax communities and simple deterministic models to understand phenomenon. The old ecosystem ecology adapted by biological anthropologists was mainly concerned with quantifying the internal flows of food and goods to people. They expected to find efficiency between energy spent and energy captured. These “efficiency” biases were carried over into the social analysis of events like rituals. A classic case is that of Rappaport’s (1968) “pigs for the ancestors” where



symbolic or ritual behaviour was explained away as if it functioned to improve these “efficiencies” and thus helped maintain social order and homeostasis (Abel and Stepp, 2003). Cultures were seen as optimizing human adaptation and maintaining social order, so the old ecologies lost significance because they treated the environment in which people existed as isolated, static “niches” with little outside contact (Kottack, 1999).

Biersack (1999:5) was the first to suggest the idea of new ecologies which I drew on to come up with a multi-ecological framework represented in Figure 1. informed by literature on transnationalist flows and local-global articulations, to which I turn in my next chapter on the childhood studies literature. I became aware of the transnationalist flows in and from *Chiweshe*, as well as how local childhoods in *Chiweshe* have linkages with global processes. In the new ecologies, the “environment” is a contingent product of the interaction of the child with the historical, political and economic ecologies. Therefore, as the total environment is a contingent product of interaction, environmental determinism, which was a feature of the old ecologies, falls away.

### **3.4 Synergising towards a contextualised understanding of childhoods**

In developing my thesis, I employed the syndemics theory to consider the experiences of contemporary childhood’s contexts and the ways they may synergise with the AIDS context to produce particular forms of childhood agency despite multiple constraints. Merrill Singer, an anthropologist working at the intersections of anthropology and public health, coined the term “syndemics” in the mid 1990s and later developed the concept to refer to:

...the various interactions among co-morbid diseases and other health conditions that increase the burden of suffering in populations and the encompassing social relations and conditions that amplify the likelihood of adverse disease interactions occurring. (Singer 2010, 2008, 2009).

“Syndemics”, explains the synergy or the partnering of two negative variables, or two infections working together to increase deaths, illness, or suffering. The idea of combinations of infections and inequalities evokes the ideas of Paul Farmer (1992) where variables such as poverty and disease, tuberculosis infections and HIV worked together in rural Haiti with other negative variables such as the lack of medical and transport services, resulting in deaths that could have been prevented in different contexts.

Singer employed the concept of “syndemics” in his research conducted in Southern Africa. He found notable synergism between the AIDS pandemic and food insecurity that significantly threatened the health and well-being of diverse populations in the region (Singer, 2010:8 ff). I extend this idea in suggesting that the AIDS syndemics context in *Chiweshe* created extreme conditions that resulted in extreme forms of agency from the children. I employ the “syndemics and ecologies lens” to attempt an account for the extreme forms of agency that children in *Chiweshe* displayed. Their responses to the negative syndemics or multiple constraints which, manifested as contexts of increasing inequalities, represented the children’s efforts to survive.

Recent interpretations from studies on childhood agency argue that forms of agency triggered by negative contexts of childhoods may work against the children themselves. This may worsen the negative circumstances that children, particularly those from under-developed countries, including Zimbabwe, are trying to deal with and result in some form of “negative agency” (Leifsen 2009; Valentine 2011). However, as Leifsen warns, one must be aware not to reproduce the classical bias in studies of childhood agency which result in the assumption that it is only children from ideal contexts who have the capacity for agency.

Burman (1994) supports this view arguing that, due to the philosophical and psychological foundations of studies in classical child development theories, a fallacy arose that children in less than ideal contexts, such as the Third world, have no capacity to develop agency because the fight to survive becomes their preoccupation. My study challenges this fallacy by showing that, even in extremely precarious conditions, children in *Chiweshe* were able to demonstrate surprising forms of agency through creative and strategic ways of dealing with contextual constraints and use those strategies for survival.

Medical anthropologists such as Singer (2010), and Singer and Baer (2009) have utilised ecological approaches to assess how multiple interactions in the ecosystem, such as the political economy, cultural systems, and biosocial interactions, worsen the nature, concentration, and entwinement of health problems in human populations. My conceptions here differ slightly. I adopted this approach as an analytical guide in this thesis in an attempt to explore the interconnected nature of AIDS contexts and other contextual factors affecting children, and to explore the various ways children exercise their agency within contexts characterised by negative syndemics.

I employ the “syndemics and ecologies” lens to demonstrate that a synergistic relationship often exists between the political economy, pandemics and other factors to produce particular illness distributions, responses, outcomes and fatalities. My research reflect factors including poverty; political economic decline; increasing unemployment; deterioration of education and health services; gender, age and rural-urban inequalities; droughts; food insecurity; orphan-hood; environmental degradation; and withdrawal of the support of NGOs, the state and family; as well as other exploitative social relations, may form syndemics with the AIDS pandemic to create the extreme conditions under which children grow up in *Chiweshe*. These multiple factors trigger extreme forms of agency as the children try to deal with the negative syndemics working against them.

I adopt this approach and recognise the impact of inequalities and the AIDS pandemic to develop a more critical analysis of childhood agency, focusing on whether children benefit from their personal and group agency against these negative syndemics. Asymmetrical power relations shape reality and the particular contexts under which child agency develops, and the constraints to it emerge. These negative syndemics within those particular contexts can either enhance or paralyse childhood agency when they act as structural constraints which limit agency, or result in negative agency which may further victimise the child (Leifsen, 2009 and Valentine, 2011).

The “ecologies and syndemics lens” enabled me to contextualise and locate both the positive and negative agency of children to existing positive and negative syndemics within their contexts of growing up; demonstrated that syndemical contexts and the forms of childhood agency that emerge may mutually affect each other. I was able to consider how the co-presence of power differentials, inequalities, the epidemics and context of political economic decline form syndemics that combine to create the contexts in which negative child-environment interaction occurs.

According to Singer (2010) these syndemics can either be positive or negative and hence I argue that the agency of children can also either be positive or negative. The children’s accounts also reveal an inverse relationship where negative syndemics can trigger unexpected, positive agency, and show the capacity of children to be social actors who can effect change. I attempt to illustrate that these syndemics are not simply environmental insults to which children must adapt to survive, but are largely products of stratified broader social, political economic, symbolical, colonial and biological relations at global and local levels.

Figure 1 gives a simplified diagrammatic version of how the child interacts with these multiple ecologies in order to survive HIV and AIDS ecologies are not operating alone, but have formed implicit syndemics with other factors within the local and global environment. It is within this intense context of engagement with syndemics that extreme forms of childhood agency occur.

### **3.5 Neoliberalist legacy as part of the syndemics and ecologies in Zimbabwe childhoods**

In the background section of this thesis, I argued in favour of including an analysis of the “unofficial enclaves” of neoliberal cultures and form of governance in contexts where neoliberal policies were previously implemented (Hilgers, 2011). It is important to clarify at this juncture that I am not in any way, trying to reduce the contextual complexities of contemporary Zimbabwe to AIDS and neoliberalism, but am merely using these two as prisms to start from. Figure 1 on the syndemics and ecologies lens to childhoods is a diagrammatic attempt to show the complexity, multiplicity and interconnectedness of factors shaping childhoods in Zimbabwe. I concur with Hilgers and argue that, even if neoliberal policy reforms are no longer officially welcome in Zimbabwe, one can still observe traces of neoliberal cultural formations and modes of governance operating in Zimbabwe.

I had also argued that it would be inadequate to understand the AIDS pandemic context in Zimbabwe and its impact on childhoods without consideration of the neoliberal political economic context. Despite its currency, the term “neoliberalism” is highly contested and that there is no single definition agreed by researchers. Hilgers (2011:352) notes that anthropologists generally agree that this term refers to “a radicalised form of capitalism” based on:

- (a) deregulation and the restriction of state intervention;
- (b) opposition to collectivism and a new (security) role for the state;
- (c) extreme emphasis on individual responsibility and flexibility;
- (d) belief that growth leads to development; and
- (e) promotion of freedom as a means to self-realisation that disregards any questioning of the economic and social conditions that make such freedom possible.

Although not exhaustive, these general understandings informed my understanding of the concept. I was aware that neoliberalism is variable, contingent, ambiguous and unstable.

Kingfisher and Maskovsky (2008: 118) argue that neoliberalism as a concept has been abused and presented as a totalising, globally uniform force, treated as “...something that is perhaps more powerful and all-encompassing than it really is...” Its contradictions, ambiguities, fractures, partialities, contingencies, local manifestations and interconnections with other social forces are not given enough attention. Thus, whilst drawing from these anthropological frameworks, I also contextualize, and problematise, the capacity of the local version of neoliberalism to affect the thought patterns and action of children in contemporary Zimbabwe. I take the Zimbabwean variant of neoliberalism not as the main context, but as one of the factors that formed implicit negative synergies in the AIDS context to produce particular contingent cultures, modes of government and worsen inequalities.

Therefore, I draw from three main anthropological perspectives on neoliberalism, summarised by Kingfisher and Maskovsky (2008) and Hilgers (2011), who query the overemphasis on neoliberalism in most contemporary anthropological enquiry. These perspectives include examination of neoliberalism as a culture; as a system or structure; and as governance. Although all three approaches have their merit, I found the cultural and governance perspectives more appropriate for my analysis of childhoods and agency. Anthropological scholars including Comaroff and Comaroff (1999); Gupta and Ferguson (1992), are opposed to the uncritical use of the concept of culture to describe “homogeneous, unitary and bounded set of practices”.

In support of this critique and following Comaroff and Comaroff, I look at neoliberal cultures as the basis upon which children construct and reconstruct their own contingent cultures to enable them to navigate the HIV and AIDS contexts. I suggest that the sets of cultural meanings and practices of agency of children in *Chiweshe* emerged in relation to the multiple ecologies and syndemical conditions present within the specific period that I carried out this study. In this sense then, the children’s responses, exemplified by the “survivalist ethos” of their work bands, their tactful use of metaphors, and their performative agency, or lack of it, are complexly related to the AIDS and multi-crises contexts.

Weiss (2004:3) notes that theorists do not agree as to whether there is anything new and distinctive about the “New World order”, or that it may be just a conflation of conditions and structures that have always existed. Citing the similarities of the conditions of “reversion”, “depression”, and “degradation” that were present in North-West Zambia, he argues that these

conditions closely parallel what is currently referred to as the neoliberal moment. I agree that there are strong parallels in the conditions that existed in Zambia half a century ago and the extreme conditions prevalent in *Chiweshe* during the 2007-8 periods. However, I extend that observation by arguing that the current neoliberal context in Zimbabwe is much more complex than before the advent of AIDS. In addition to the syndemics between the AIDS and the neoliberal context, other multiple factors that exist shape the syndemics and ecologies at work to redefine childhood experiences in *Chiweshe*.

To summarise, my aim was not to propose a model, but an attempt to unpack the complexity and diversity of childhood agency and childhood experiences in *Chiweshe*. The interactions between the child and the multiple ecologies and syndemics involved are too complex for any model or diagram to capture fully. I suggest that the subsequent chapters where I attempt to capture the children`s own perspectives of their experiences are an effort towards completing the circle. This ethnographic account does not claim to represent a universally applicable truth of contemporary childhoods in Zimbabwe. Instead I have presented a reflexive account of how I came to the final interpretation of what I found in my quest of a “partial truth” (Clifford and Marcus 1986:1).

Figure 1: Syndemics and Ecologies Lens for Understanding Childhood Experiences of AIDS in Zimbabwe



*Adapted from Rimmer and Glanz (2005:10)*

## CHAPTER 4

### FIELDWORK AT HOME: METHODS, CHALLENGES, REFLEXIVITY AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS

#### 4.1 Locating childhood ethnographies within wider debates in anthropology

As the epistemological and methodological foundations of anthropology's hallmarks of ethnography are increasingly coming under scrutiny, this chapter argues for a more reflexive, realistic, context specific, and open-minded approach to the production of research on childhoods, particularly in Southern Africa. Based on my personal experiences of conducting explorative childhood ethnography in my own village, in the context an AIDS pandemic, I demonstrate that the practical, epistemological, methodological and ethical challenges I encountered are a critical part of the ethnographic narrative that should not be omitted.

In the new sociology of childhoods approach (James and Prout, 1998) state that ethnography is the most appropriate method to study childhoods. This, they argue, is because this method looks at children as social actors, allows for the voices and views of children to be heard, and enables the researcher to focus on children's specific cultures and relationships. Ethnography's strength comes from its emphasis on the "native point of view" which, in a childhood ethnography, becomes the equivalent of the child's point of view. Since the aim of anthropology is to understand phenomena, understanding childhoods from the views of children then becomes the central aim of childhood ethnographies using participant observation. However, as Crapanzano (1980) cautions, it is often dangerous to assume that all forms of ethnographic writing are a true representation of the informants' views. He states that, instead of objective truths, ethnography is instead a "negotiated truth" where power dynamics and specific roles have to be continuously negotiated throughout the research process.

Whilst I concur with Crapanzano, I also argue that it is the same ethnographic method that allows for the researcher to corroborate initial findings with mixed methods. Ethnography does not rely only on one method of data collection, but since it is research where the ethnographer spends time in the field, which can even stretch to more than a year, the ethnographer has more time to become innovative and include more techniques in their research design. There are very few full ethnographies of childhood, particularly on children and AIDS from Southern Africa, with Parsons (2012) as a notable exception. Thus, I felt that there was a



need to have more studies that explored the methodological possibilities of doing a full ethnography of childhoods. The quality and depth of the data from ethnographic studies that produce “thick descriptions” as Geertz (1973) notes, overrides the demands of time and money required to conduct a typical anthropological ethnography.

Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) notes that even classical anthropologists, such as Margaret Mead (1928), who conducted childhood ethnographies, have been accused of misreading and misrepresenting the cultures of others. The scholar highlights how, after a lot of indigenous communities in Asia protested against ethnographic misrepresentations of their cultures, the approaches to ethnography were changed to incorporate the views of local research informants, giving them the role of active participants in the interpretation of their own cultures. Kuwuyama (2003) terms this move in native anthropology the “natives as dialogic partners” approach, which I, in turn, translated to the ‘children as dialogic partners approach in childhood anthropology. This forced out other related issues of power and positionality in ethnographic research. Traditionally, the researcher had a more powerful position over the ethnographic research process and these dynamics are also changing in favour of techniques which emphasize children’s agentic and participatory potential in research.

In an effort to reduce the possibility of misreading and misrepresentations of children’s views in my childhood ethnography, I utilised a number of child-focused methods, such as the use of drawings, dreams, stories and informal conversational interviews, where the children were free to lead and select what they wanted to talk about. This was an effort to try and ensure that children had more spaces to be active participants and, to some extent, even determine the nature and content of the informal conversational interviews, for highly sensitive topic like AIDS, death, illness and sexuality. The childhood ethnography on street children in Brazil by Hecht (2008) illustrates the advantages of doing full ethnographic studies that utilise innovative and participatory research designs that enable children to be active participants in the collection and interpretation of data.

Ethnographic enquiry at the local level in *Chiweshe* enabled me to get a nuanced understanding of childhood experiences, and the ways children deal with the AIDS pandemic in a context of silence; limited state support; increasing individual hyper-responsibilisation; and political economic decline. Contemporary scholars, such as Sande Lie (2013), have shown how that, despite all its weaknesses and the lack of clarity on the definition of ethnography,

researchers from other disciplines are increasingly adopting ethnographical methods in their research work. Researchers from largely quantitative disciplines such as community medicine, international relations and management sciences are starting to appreciate the unique contributions that only ethnographical studies can make. Despite the recent upsurge in critiques against ethnography, I argue there are many ways to deal with the challenges of ethnographic research. Therefore, ethnography is arguably still the most appropriate method to study childhoods and contribute to meaningful evidence-based, contextually relevant and child-centred interventions in Southern Africa.

#### **4.2 Doing native anthropology in a context of an epidemic**

Discussions on native anthropology are not new and have been a central issue in anthropology with the continuing debate on the insider-outsider dynamics at the centre (Narayan, 1993; Abu-Lughod, 1991). As early as 1952, anthropologists like Whorf (1952:5) pointed out that it is not possible nor practical for any researcher to "objectively" collect and interpret ethnographic data without the influence of their native culture and personal views coming in the way. It has also been argued that very few researchers actually acknowledge the impact of their personal views, cultures and experiences on the ethnographies they carry out, even though this was a methodological approach of the classical founding fathers of ethnography exemplified in Malinowski's diaries (Malinowski, 1967).

Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) and Abu-Lughod (1991) highlight how it is more difficult for native anthropologists to create enough distance between themselves and their own cultures and, at the same time, be able to analyse data for patterns and meanings with total objectivity. Thus, even if it is more challenging to "distance" oneself from their culture, one is still expected not to give up and find possible ways of dealing with such situations.

Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) experienced this difficulty of distancing himself from his native Japanese culture although he had been away from Japan and stayed in the USA for more than a decade, and had been absorbed into Ainu culture where he had been conducting fieldwork. In order to deal with this challenge, he had to withdraw from the field for a while and, when he came back, he was able to observe patterns of behaviour he could not see before. Hence, the call to be reflexive and be able to 'distance' oneself from the cultures one will be studying, even if it is one's own culture.

The situation was even worse for me, trying to do ethnography on childhoods, in the context of the silence around AIDS, illness, death and sexuality (Parsons, 2005). Although I had a lot of advantages because of my cultural proximity, it was again the same cultural proximity and familiarity which later produced problems for me in the field. In some extreme cases, some children were stopped by their parents from participating due to issues like unresolved family conflicts and the villagers' assumptions that I would identify with the adults and not with the children's perspectives which were based on my training as an ethnographer using child-centred methods. In the next section of this thesis, I go into detail of my personal and intellectual journey into the ethnography of childhood, in a context of an AIDS pandemic.

Having been born in *Chiweshe* Communal Lands at Howard Mission Hospital in 1980, the year of national independence, I am from the generation referred to as the "born-frees", that is, born in time to benefit from the free education and medical care introduced by the new "socialist government". Being the first-born daughter in a family of four children, I was named Eve after my paternal grandmother, and stayed with my grandparents for most of my childhood as was the custom then, a traditional practice which seems to be under serious revival in the HIV and AIDS era.

My grandmother, one of the few well-educated women in the community, was a nurse at Howard Hospital. My grandfather was a headmaster at *Nyachuru*, a local primary school, and owned a shop and a grinding mill in the area. During that time, teaching and nursing were the occupations aspired to by most educated black people. I would say generally that I had a fairly pleasant, protected, and well-provided-for childhood. Although I conducted chores at home like most children, it was nothing similar to what I witnessed when I started my doctoral research.

I had the opportunity to go to a mission boarding school, Howard High, in the same area, from where I proceeded to a state-subsidized University in the city. Both the high school and the hospital were run by the Salvation Army and the quality of services provided were so high that they were preferred by people from the cities as well as the local clientele. Although education at the school was not free, fees were moderately priced, and subsidised by the church. Health services at the hospital were free and people did not even pay for the hospital card, for which a minimum fee is now required. Despite the introduction of ESAP in the 1990s, which led to the introduction of user fees for various social services, I never went to bed hungry, lacked health care or education. My personal background did little to prepare me for the surprises I would

encounter whilst doing research in my own village. I was of the impression that I was doing research in a place that I was familiar with, and hence did not anticipate any challenges.

The first aspect that grabbed my attention as I began spending more time with the female children in the village, was the greater burden of responsibilities, both at school and at home, in comparison to the boys. This was particularly the case when the girls were the eldest child in the family, and when they stayed with extended family members. Being an eldest child myself, I struggled to remain an objective researcher in the field to collect information for scientific analyses. I struggled with issues of positionality and had to reflect and remind myself constantly that the primary role of the anthropologist in the field was to collect information, and ensure that they do no harm to their research participants. (Becker et al 2005; Mkwanzazi 2005).

This was particularly a challenge for me in a case where a child who was related to me was staying with his paternal kin and doing chores in the home in exchange for shelter, food and an education, and the adults failed to honour their side of the bargain. Scenarios involving both physical and sexual abuse, and exploitative relations where girls under the age of sixteen were given off into child marriages, or used as unpaid domestic help within close family relations where it is often assumed to be the safest place for children. Witnessing such scenarios during fieldwork made me realise the practical complexity of even really defining what the so-called “best interest of the child were” in such circumstances. It also made me start questioning whether a researchers role was to report such issues to the police or child rights organisation without the consent of the child or to just collect information and respect peoples’ privacy

When the children trusted me enough reveal to me their illegal gold mining activities and mining sites, I struggled with my moralistic tendencies. Initially, I had come up a non moralistic conceptualisation of agency that I adopted later from Leifsen (2009) to include violent, or even unconventional forms of agency. The child agency theorist gave an enlightening example of a study by Taylor and Hickey (2001) of a group of children, named the “tunnel kids”. These were a group of Mexican street children living in area adjacent to the tunnel system linking the two cities of Nogales on each side of the Mexican-US border. These young girls and boys demonstrated surprising modes of agency and did not deny that they were heavy drug abusers, teenage parents who survived a challenging life of poverty and a brutalizing political frontier economy as criminals and occasional murderers.

New and innovative interpretations of the children's activities, using a child focused lens, enabled these researchers to go beyond their personal moralistic boundaries to interpret this behaviour as negative agency. This, then, enabled me to also appreciate the merits of going beyond my own moral boundaries. My status of being a mother myself and having grown up in a fairly conservative Christian family in a rural area did not make it any easier to accept such forms of agency without thinking about what I would want for my own children.

The clash between my Christianity and rural conservative background made me question my motives in interpreting unconventional or criminal behaviors in children as agency. Even after reading literature by researchers, such as Bhanna (2007), the idea of thinking about the sexual agency of children and promoting their reproductive health rights clashed with what I thought appropriate for my own daughters. I had to remind myself that it is not always the case that children are passive, innocent, ignorant, victims in issues pertaining to sexuality.

I reflected on these paradoxical issues and continued to research them until I concluded that all children have a right to be properly researched and represented objectively, if anthropological research is to make any meaningful contributions towards children's well being, particularly in difficult contexts in Africa.

I struggled, too, with the literature on child labour that I encountered that classified most routine chores, that the children did on a daily basis, as harmful practices that should be abolished, and I wondered that in a context of hardly any state or NGO support, what would be the best possible intervention. From this, I developed an interest in evidence-based research seeking contextually relevant solutions to issues as controversial as the child labour *vis a vis* the child work demarcations (Bourdillon, 2000: Introduction).

At that point, the solutions for working children, proposed by the UNCRC and ILO, began to appear inadequate and I felt powerless as a researcher who lacked sufficient legal knowledge and training to advocate for more contextually relevant interventions based on grounded research. It was no longer good enough for me to get merely "the native point of view" required of me as an anthropologist. The policy-making processes in Zimbabwe, where it is well known that the state has no separation of powers, has politicians as the policy makers and implementers, as they have access, and the power, to mobilise the resources to effect and affect policies. Academic researchers, however, are often regarded as having neither power nor resources to effect change in policies (Gaidzanwa, 2001).

My initial interest on childhoods started in 2005 after I conducted fieldwork for my Masters dissertation titled “*Indigenous knowledge as a means of achieving sustainable rural livelihoods*” in a project run by the Centre for Total Transformation (CTT). I was surprised by the extent and quality of knowledge held by the children in *Chiweshe*. Most children travelled great distances to participate in the community development projects and some came from villages as far as 50km away. Most of the children informed me that they had many ideas on how they could improve their lives, but had to travel the long distance to the CTT training center because they had no access to government or NGO assistance. This made me wonder how these children were coping in a political-economic context characterised by the rollback of state and NGO assistance.

When I got an offer to further my studies through the University of Pretoria, the initial idea was to build on my previous work on local knowledge focusing on children. Dr Isak Niehaus, then my doctoral supervisor, guided me in shaping the initial proposal into a broader and more topical study that led to this thesis. As I waited for ethical approval from the University, I started planning and reading about how to do anthropological fieldwork. I was excited because I was in essence “going home”, to become the local Malinowski. I did not realise that, although I had grown up in *Chiweshe*, had married someone from the same area, and had relatives and in-laws there, I had never spent more than five consecutive months in the village.

As a child, I was always away at boarding school, then went away to university, got married just before I graduated and went with my husband to Zambia. It was only when I began fieldwork that I realised that doing fieldwork “at home” is not as easy as is often thought. While it may make entry into the field easier, since the local people already know the researcher, it also poses numerous challenges as local people already have certain expectations and pre-conceived ideas. To some villagers, for instance, I was just their daughter, to others I was the child of an enemy, a daughter-in law, or the spoilt grandchild of the local businessman. As far as some children were concerned, I was their big sister, their aunt, their teacher and an expert researcher. The fact that I had Nicole, my newborn daughter with me when I began fieldwork, helped me fit in easily with most mothers in the village. My own status as a mother was reassuring to parents in the village; and many were comfortable regarding my research with their children. A few parents, however, were not too pleased that I was asking children questions related to sexuality and death.

Despite the fact that I had been reintroduced at several village meetings, political rallies and school functions by local leadership, some villagers remained suspicious of me, and most elderly men did not accept that a South African university could provide a scholarship to a Zimbabwean woman to do research without expecting anything in return. I was not the first person from that village to receive a scholarship from outside the country. I felt their fears were connected with the land reform programme in progress at the time, and to the general suspicion people had of the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change which was rumoured to be under the sponsorship of foreign white governments. Anyone perceived to be relatively more affluent than others was suspected of being a spy or informant for the opposition party and white farmers from whom land had just been repossessed. Like most rural areas, *Chiweshe* was portrayed in the media as a stronghold for the ruling party, ZANU PF. I tried to remain as politically impartial as possible although this was not always easy because the political context was a key part of the total context of the children I was researching.

There was a general tendency to associate women who engaged in cross border trading in South Africa with sexual immorality and sometimes I was viewed in a similar way. One day, for instance, an elderly man asked me why I was not content with “keeping my home and my husband” and why, instead, I had chosen to “shame” my husband. Apparently, my decision to pursue studies externally was seen as evidence that I was dissatisfied with my husband’s ability to provide for me and the family. Some of the villagers had heard that I was doing a doctorate and thought I had come to be the village medical doctor. A 5 year old girl asked me what the point of doing doctoral research was if it would not help bring medication or injections to “save” my own relatives. This made me realise that, although I was worried about my seemingly superior position in doing research with children, these children were more intelligent than I had assumed. Since I did not have much to give them materially, although often compelled to, I was the one who would benefit more from whatever the children were able to give to me. I had to learn to be really tactical and flexible to adapt to the various positionalities and roles required by the research settings.

As fieldwork progressed, I soon realised that decisions about whom to help financially, or assist with food or advice, were not easy when the people involved are your own relatives or in-laws. The multiple deaths and illnesses that I witnessed were difficult to deal with and I suffered a tremendous sense of loss when two children involved in the research passed away. In many

cases, reciprocal relationships developed with the children with whom I was researching. For instance, those children who had seen me at the funerals of their siblings or relatives made an effort to attend funerals that occurred on my family side. Whenever there was any seasonal fruit available, I would often find a bucket of fruit outside my house. I was very touched since this was the period when there was no food available in the shops, while the persistent drought in the area meant that there was also very little fruit locally. Despite this, the children still shared their food with me.

## 4.2 Research design

My initial idea was to explore the lives of children in the context of the HIV and AIDS epidemic in rural Zimbabwe. I drew up a mixed-methods design to examine the ways in which children were affected and dealt with their experiences. After doing some reading on how to carry out proper anthropological research in the Malinowskian traditions of “going native”, I could not wait to start my fieldwork.

Reading in grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998) and Vayda and Walter`s (1999) “event analysis”, I was determined to go to the field with an open mind, without any prior theory or preconceived ideas. As exciting as it sounded, it transpired that my initial proposal was unfocused and became too broad for the limited time available. I was in a situation where, in order to gain “thick descriptions” of children`s lives in *Chiweshe*, it was imperative that I utilised the classic ethnographic research technique of participant observation. This would require me to establish rapport and spend considerable amounts of time with children in the village. Thus, I set out for fieldwork with the humble objective to “observe” events around me and be a participant in *Chiweshe* village life.

The complexity of my task deepened as I came to realise that AIDS was not the only factor affecting Zimbabwean childhood. There were multiple factors involved and, at times during observation, factors could not be completely isolated for they were interwoven in complex webs. In the midst of the multi-crisis context, I decided to be flexible and observe as much as possible, even if it did not appear immediately related to the AIDS epidemic. Thus began my journey into Zimbabwean childhoods.

I carried out fieldwork from January 2007 to March 2008. I used a triangulation of qualitative methods, a household survey, and projective techniques adopted from Reynolds



(1989). I also combined ethnographic methods such as observation, open-ended in-depth interviews, as well as sex-segregated and small mixed-sex group discussions to permit corroboration and check the validity and reliability of my data. I utilised household surveys for demographic data, and focus group discussions for shared meanings and projective techniques. I asked children to describe their experiences through drawings and sharing stories of recurrent dreams. I observed and recorded children during play and at performances. These various activities were especially useful for dealing with illiteracy and sensitive topics.

#### 4.4 The study site

The study was conducted in *Chiweshe* Communal lands, which fall under the Mazowe Rural District, Map 2) one of seven districts in the Mashonaland Central province. (Map 1). Alternatively known as *Chiweshe* Reserve from the colonial era, the *Chiweshe* Communal Area lies about 125km northeast of Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. According to the Mazowe Rural District Council (2011), *Chiweshe* covers an area of about 1330 square kilometres (above 210,000 acres).

*Chiweshe* has a total population, as last estimated in 2002, of approximately 52, 951 people mainly classified as *Shona*. Bourdillon (1987) and Holleman (1952) observed that *Shona* does not refer to one homogenous group of people, but is a foreign term from the days of British colonial rule that was used to refer to a conglomeration of the majority of the population in Zimbabwe. Parsons (2012) states that the term is used to refer to a group of people with similar dialects such as the Zezuru, the Karanga, the Korekore, the Manyika and the Ndau people, excluding minority groups such as the Tonga and Ndebele.

Bourdillon (1987) and Holleman (1952) noted that the majority of the people in central Mashonaland, mainly referred to as the Zezuru, were relatively more affluent and more “modern” than surrounding people due to their close proximity to Harare and access to employment in the industries there. Most inhabitants of nearby places argue that it is not a typical rural area and that they are similar to city people due to the access to industries in Harare and higher levels of affluence.

*Chiweshe* is surrounded by farming and mining towns and communities, namely, Glendale, Concession, Mvurwi, Centenary, and Bindura (Bessant and Muringai, 1991). It has a central business center, Nzvimbo growth point, where urban services are located. Growth points

are central business centres in rural areas of Zimbabwe set up by the government to stimulate economic growth within rural areas, through the provision of most urban-based services, creation of small scale (home) industries, retail and banking services.

The Mazowe District is divided into twenty-nine wards, thirteen of which make up the *Chiweshe* communal areas. These wards fall under three different chieftainships, Chief *Chiweshe*, Chief Makope and Chief Negomo. This study focuses on the wards under Chief Negomo. There is a large irrigation initiative in the area, Negomo Irrigation Scheme, which is located along the main highway in *Chiweshe* and covers an area of 357 hectares. The irrigation scheme is made up of 296 farmers, each of whom owns a piece of land of approximately 1.2 hectares. The farmers were initially trained by the Germans to grow cash crops such as baby corn, granadillas, and gooseberries for export. Most of the Germans, however, left in the wake of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) in 2000, and since then, the farmers have diversified their crops to include tomatoes, sweet potatoes, beans, maize and local vegetable varieties. The irrigation scheme created tensions between villagers, since only some households benefitted directly from the scheme (Nyawira 1999). The district is famous for the production of citrus fruit at Mazowe Citrus Estate, near Mazowe Dam, the biggest dam in Mashonaland Central which is visible from the Harare-*Chiweshe* tarred highway( *Chiweshe* 2012).

Mazowe District land is classified under both Natural Regions 2 and 3. Region 2 is characterised by intensive farming and receives moderately high rainfall (750-1000mm) during the summer season (October and April). Region 3, on the other hand, is suitable for semi-intensive farming with moderate precipitation (650-800mm), severe mid-season dry spells and high temperatures (Zikhali, 2010). Thus, the Mazowe region is suitable for intensive cropping, livestock production, fodder and cash crop farming. The soils are fairly fertile, though not as rich as the lands to the south and west of the communal area, where the ancestors of most of the present population had chosen to settle before the colonial intrusion. The soils are also prone to erosion, particularly in the more steeply sloped parts of *Chiweshe* (Bessant and Muringai, 1991; Mutsvairo, 1995).

The main topographical features of the district are the high plateau of the Great Dyke and the rivers along which gold panning and artisanal mining is carried out, such as Mutoradundu, Munwahuku, Ruya and Changa rivers. Most of these rivers, however, are dirty with silt and are no longer sources of fish. (Map 4) Prior to the FTLRP, sixty-four percent of the land was

occupied by commercial farms and thirty-six percent by communal areas, and agriculture was the dominant source of livelihoods for most households (Magaramombe, 2010).

Wards 9 and 10, where I purposively selected to focus my research, had only two primary schools, Kakora Primary, and Bellrock Primary run by the Salvation Army and the government. The only secondary school within Ward 10, Kakora Secondary, offers study up to Ordinary Level. Kakora Primary was built in 1930, and in 2006 had an enrolment of almost 900 students. Bellrock Primary was built in 1949 and had an enrolment of approximately 600 students, hence my choice to volunteer at the bigger primary school. The only secondary school in Ward 10, Kakora Secondary was built after independence in 1981 and had an enrolment of about 600 students. Enrolment, reportedly, had gone down due to effects of the political-economic crisis and AIDS.

Both schools had problems of inadequate classroom facilities, ablution services, books, desks and chairs for students, insufficient staff, and poor staff accommodation ([www.parlzim.gov.zw](http://www.parlzim.gov.zw)). Some students at Kakora had to practice hot-seating, whereby some would attend classes only in the afternoon. Some of the staff members had gone past their retirement date but, due to the mass exodus of teachers from Zimbabwe during the crisis, retired teachers had to continue teaching.

Ward 10 children who wanted to proceed to Advanced Level study, a requirement for entry to a University in Zimbabwe, have to go to Nzvimbo Secondary, approximately 20 kilometres away from Kakora Primary and business centre. Only a few of the children from Ward 10 could afford the boarding schools at Howard and Langham Girls High School. Howard High, in Ward 13, is approximately 25 km away, whilst Langham GHS in Ward 9 is approximately 12 km from Kakora Primary. Since some of the school children already had to travel about 10 km from their homes to Kakora, adding those distances made the travel impossible for most.

Ward 10 had no health facilities of its own. The nearest available clinic was Rosa Hospital, located at the Rosa business centre in Ward 9, approximately 3 kilometres from Kakora business centre. Rosa Hospital was staffed by 9 nurses, but had no doctor, has 18 general and 6 maternity beds, and is State-owned. Due to problems of inadequate staff, medication, and health facilities, Rosa Hospital often had to send patients to Howard Mission Hospital, the nearest referral centre for the Mazowe district.

Howard Mission Hospital is approximately 25 kilometres from Kakora business centre. It was founded in 1923, and has a total of 140 beds, 100 of which belong to the maternity ward. Thistle (2011) and Taderera (2012) observed that Howard had a catchment of more than 300, 000 people and more than 75, 000 patients on treatment per year, with some coming from as far as Harare for the ARV programme. The numbers were reported to have increased significantly during the 2007 medical staff strike which led to the closure of Parirenyatwa, Harare`s major government hospital. Thistle (2011) reported that Howard Hospital had two permanent, qualified doctors and 25 nurses. He also stated that the hospital had been facing challenges since the Ministry of Health had reduced their operating grant. In addition, local pharmaceutical distributors and ARV manufacturers had becoming increasingly unreliable due to political-economic instability. These factors, combined with the long distance to the hospital, transport problems and fuel shortages, explains why the children from *Chiweshe* resorted to alternative treatment sources, even at their own peril.

**Picture 1: Some of the Medical Staff at Rosa Hospital**



#### 4.5 Methods and sample selection

To explore childhoods in the context of AIDS in *Chiweshe*, I used a combination of convenience and snowball sampling techniques to select the relatively few informants to whom I had easy access. Robson (1995) points out that, in cases where the rationale of the project is to get in-depth information on fewer cases rather than for statistical generalization, non-probability sampling is appropriate. I chose the snowball sampling technique to select my initial respondents due to the sensitive nature of HIV and AIDS research with children. I chose children in the 10 villages within reasonable walking distance (about 20 kilometres) to *Kakora* Primary School where I was staying, and *Kakora* shops where I bought my daily utilities. The selected villages included *Badzarigere*, *Kamoto*, *Gatsi*, *Gombera*, *Kanengoni*, *Damiso*, *Chinyoka* and *Majanga*. From a nearby irrigation scheme, I also covered *Muroyiwa* and *Mahonde* villages, making a total of ten villages. ( Maps 3 and 4).

To get a general feeling of the ten villages in Wards 9 and 10, I initially volunteered to accompany one of the few home-based carers on her daily household visits within these and in other nearby wards. In fact, during my entire fieldwork period, I met very few home-based carers. It was later disclosed that most had stopped work as they had not received salaries for over six months and they did not have basic equipment such as bandages or gloves.

My main sample comprised of 25 boys and 25 girls ranging in age from four to sixteen years of age, with most between the ages of 7 and 16. However, my study included other children with whom they interacted in the community. Children included those attending school and those who did not. I spent my early days visiting households in the 10 selected villages so that children would get to know me and be comfortable talking to me. After a period of two months, I asked the children I had met to gather at a specific place and had them write down their names and place them in bowls separated by age and village location. I used age ranges used in the formal education system at the local school, namely: 4-6 years (early childhood development stage), 7-13 years (primary school age) and 14-16 years (high school age). I randomly selected one child from each age group and had this child, in turn, randomly pick out a name from each bowl. In the 4-6 age range, the child would pick out one name; in the 7-13 age range, and the 14-16 age range, the child would pick out two names. I wanted children to be part of the selection process.

I included children as young as four years for a number of reasons. Many children in *Chiweshe* start attending the local Early Child Development Centre at the primary school at age four. Culturally, too, four years is a pivotal age for the *Shona*. Gelfand (1979) found that, at this age, adults start sending children on errands outside the home, such as to fetch water, go to the shops, and herd cattle with the older boys. At this age, girls start being taught how to sit properly, how to sweep and cook. Gelfand notes that it is also at age four that children graduate from a soup-based diet and start eating meat. Both sexes are also expected to bath themselves and sleep separately from their parents. I chose 16 as the closing age for my sample as it is the age when most children finish secondary school. I included children above 16 years only if they were still enrolled in school.

Following Abebe (2009:452) who advocates the use of multiple methods when doing sensitive research with children, I designed a mixed method ethnographic study. I made use of diaries, small group discussions, interviews, stories drawings, and dreams to collect information from children. I had initially planned to ask only those children younger than 7 years to use drawings and stories to share their experiences. However, it turned out that some of the older children had major reading difficulties so they, too, used drawings and stories to share their experiences. I found projective techniques, in-depth interviews, and observational techniques particularly useful for research with younger children, who faced problems entering data chronologically in diaries. I asked literate children to write stories on topics chosen by them and myself, such as ‘my family, my father, my mother, my holiday’ and “AIDS,” then later analysed the data to see whether factors such as the age, sex and position of the child in the family had any bearing on the data.

I utilised children’s dreams as an anthropological research tool. Reynolds (1989) argues that children’s dreams are culturally informed, and reflect a society’s values and way of life. I analysed the gender differences in the dreams, and they revealed children’s encounters with AIDS, sexuality and relationships. Nashef (1992:98) agrees that dreams are culture-specific and culture revealing. He specifies that dreams of “cattle rearing” are common in Ghana, but are not found in societies where the practice does not exist. Dreams may reveal hidden, traumatic, encounters and fantasies of the children under study.

James (1992) encourages ethnographers working with children to pay particular attention to detail through observing and recording children’s daily experiences. It is only through careful,

lengthy ethnographic observation that one gets to capture the “minutiae of the mundane” revealed in Reynolds’ (1989) study of children in Crossroads. This is in line with the contemporary anthropological changes where the focus is no longer on “exotic” and different cultures, but on the ordinary “anthropology of the everyday”. This study focuses on children’s daily experiences that might otherwise be ignored or taken for granted. I observed children at play until they adjusted to my presence which, according to Greig and Taylor (1999:151), is necessary to prevent children from altering their behaviour when they feel an adult is watching them.

Observing children at play (through games, songs and dance performances), as well as at work (daily chores) enabled me to gain insight on their self-organised networks, gender roles and sexual relationships. I paid particular attention to their conversations and how they related to each other through network and discourse analysis, for which Izugbara (2005:54) argues the use to get at the “hidden” and “missing discourse” on children’s sexuality through the children’s subjective descriptions and depictions of themselves. Following Izugbara (2005) and Coplan (1994), I employed songs and discourses as “mines” or “treasure troves” to elicit information on ethically, culturally or politically sensitive issues, including sexuality and the AIDS epidemic. I attended social functions and paid particular attention to sexual and gender discourse at homes, church, schools, rituals, and workshops. Participant observation enabled the collection of information on children’s discourses and songs regarding HIV and AIDS, sex and sexuality, and to observe how the interactions differed when adults were present and when children were on their own.

James and Prout (1990) have questioned the appropriateness of ethnographic techniques when working with children. They queried the extent to which an adult researcher can accurately capture children’s perceptions, and the extent to which a child can be a real participant in research done by adults. Sundran (1989) and Mandel (1991:80) suggested that the researcher can adopt the “semi-marginal participating role”, which I used in observation of the children at school, as they played games and performed chores. This version of participant observation put the children at ease and allowed them to lead the discussions.

Hecht’s (1998) study of street children in Brazil found this role useful when he let children interview each other and ‘act out’ role-plays through his radio-workshops. The workshops elicited detailed and sensitive data on robberies and murders, topics which were

difficult to question. The semi-marginal participating role was especially useful in the culture of silence surrounding issues of sexuality in Zimbabwe where discussions between adults and children on sexuality are a social taboo, and especially in relating to children who are, in many parts of the world, assumed asexual.

Following Malinowski, I took detailed field notes and made an effort to record my impressions and experiences as soon as was possible after each observation, social encounter, interview and focus group discussion. Based on extended observations, I was able to document precise ‘facts’ regarding various aspects of children’s lives in *Chiweshe*, such as their daily house chores. I also documented the problems and challenges I encountered during fieldwork, and kept notes on the various methodological choices and decisions I made in the field.

The headmistress of Kakora Primary School had offered use of a spare bedroom in her house. I used often to pass by the school on my way to visit my in-laws, but I had never been inside the schoolyard. I was shocked by the state of the house of the school head, and by the state of the school toilets. The school, run by the Salvation Army, had governed the high school I had attended, and I had assumed that the school would be in similar condition to my former school. My husband, who had attended Kakora Primary in the 1980s, was also surprised by the limited infrastructural development that had occurred at the school over the years. Instead of experiencing “culture shock” as is often the case for anthropologists, I encountered what I can only call a “material reality shock”.

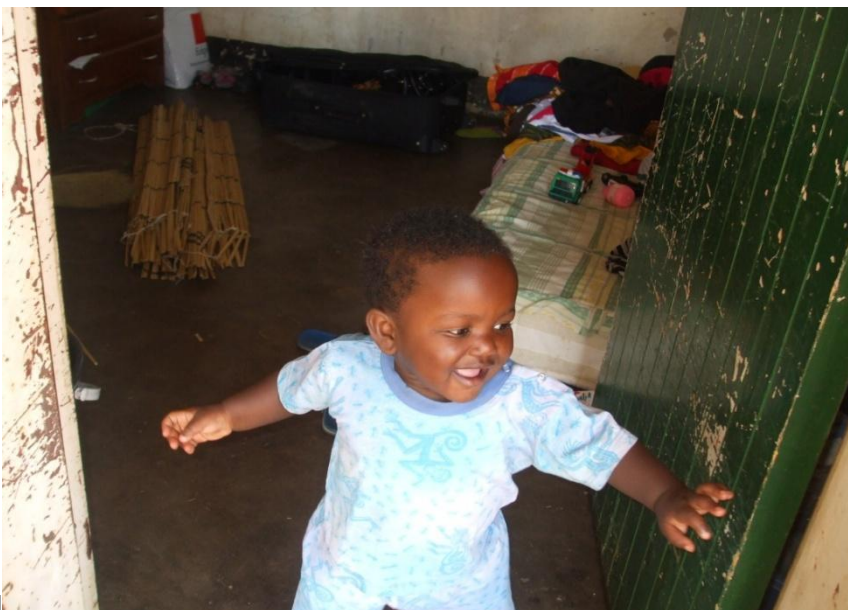


**Picture 2: The house of the school head where Nicole and I**



stayed

**Picture 3: My daughter, Nicole, in front of the spare room we**



used

**Picture 4: The Early Childhood Development Class where my daughter attended**



**Picture 5: Some pupils at Kakora Primary School had to make do without furniture**



**Picture 6: The state of toilets at Kakora Primary School**



**Picture 7: Me with some of the pupils who attended afternoon classes as hot-sitters**



#### **4.6 Ethical issues**

Parsons (2005) emphasized the importance of ethical issues when conducting research with children on intimate topics such as HIV and AIDS, sexuality or national politics. Given the vulnerability of children, ethical considerations were given prime consideration in this study and the children were treated as subjects, and not objects. Before I started fieldwork, I obtained written approval from the University of Pretoria Ethics Committee, *Chiweshe* District, Ward and Village authorities and The District Offices of the Ministries of Health and Education.

In the field, I obtained both written and oral consent from children and their guardians or parents. In order to ensure that all the research participants understood the voluntary nature of the research, the consent forms were written in the local language, *chi-Shona*, which is also the dominant mode of communication at school and other formal settings. In cases where either the legal guardian or the child were illiterate, a translator from the local school staff was made available, and the contents of the consent form were verbally explained in the local language so that the children, or illiterate guardians, understood clearly what was involved. Louw (2004) argues for the conveyance of information to subjects in local languages and through terminologies comprehensible to the lay person ensure fairness. I also obtained consent to take photographs during research.

Pseudonyms are used throughout the thesis to preserve the anonymity of my research participants. I also assured children and their parents and guardians that the information I collected would be used for research purposes only. Furthermore, study participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the research process at any point, and that non-participation would not disadvantage them in any way, while participation would not bring any monetary gain.

Thankfully, none of my research participants withdrew from the research process, and many children stated that they often felt better after talking to me. This put me in rather a dilemma, since I had no background in counselling. I later discovered that one of the local church pastors was a trained counselor, and thus often referred children who cried during interviews to him. Some children refused to go to him, however, out of fear that their parents would not approve of them talking to a pastor of different denomination. Those whose parents were atheists seemed more open to the suggestion of the pastor/counsellor.

Stanley and Sieber (1992:153) point out that researchers often face ethical dilemmas when they observe illegal or culturally inappropriate acts. There were times during fieldwork when even knowing what is culturally acceptable, or ethical, did not help. For example, controversies over what could be legally or culturally defined as child abuse or neglect; and whether to report these instances, produced ethical dilemmas for me. During fieldwork I witnessed a mother's seemingly nonchalant attitude when two teenage boys sexually molested her 4 year old daughter. I was shocked when she asked me to keep quiet about it. I also encountered religious sects whose children died in a measles outbreak because their doctrine did not allow them to seek biomedical treatment.

In two separate incidents, two girls below the age of 10 were "given" to elderly men in the *Johane Marange* religious sect. When I had an opportunity to speak to one of the girls, she informed me that she was fine and that she did not expect an adult like me who had been "corrupted by the white man's world and education" to understand. She said that she was proud to have been married off to a man who held the record for the greatest harvest in the village and that, since being married, she could have eggs as part of her daily diet. It tore my heart to imagine my own two daughters being 'given off' in this way, but this young girl was seemingly happy with her new circumstances. As I encountered these various ethical dilemmas, I had to remind myself that the role of an anthropologist is to capture respondents' realities in detail, and not to judge them.

Schoepf (1991:757) notes that purposeful omission or falsification of information has rendered some anthropological work invalid. This has been a common phenomenon in research on sexuality and AIDS. Moreover, Kumar (2005:211) considers any form of incorrect reporting by the researcher to be unethical. Thus, I made an effort to ensure that my research was not marred by unethical conduct, even if I acknowledge that no research is value free. The fact that I am a “citizen anthropologist” (Becker et al, 2005:125) helped in reducing “outsider” biases, as well as in gaining entry and establishing rapport with respondents.

## CHAPTER 5

### MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD

#### 5.1 Introduction

Gone are the good old days when life was good. I came from a house of royalty and was a very wealthy man. If it was not for the interference of the white people, we would be the current chiefs. I had four loyal wives and fourteen children who helped me in my shops and land. I had a lot of cattle before the Rhodesian forces took them away when we went into the keeps. After that, I had to go and work in South Africa because I had nothing left after the war. Now, after working for a long time I still have nothing! Even the poor people now call me poor! People had no jobs back then, but they could still feed their families. I came back from South Africa to find almost all my children had been taken away by AIDS and I have a lot of grandchildren to take care of. The war was bad, people died, but not the way they are dying now! This disease is nothing like we have ever seen. Now with these modern immoral children of ours, it will finish us all and the white people will come and take all our land again!

(Interview with *Sekuru Madzime*, Kanengoni Ward, *Chiweshe*, 2007)

The quotation above illustrates that the experiences of childhood are a product of complex interactions of current ecologies with historical ecologies, disease and inequalities. The total contexts in which *Chiweshe* children are able to display their agency today, and the constraints acting against them, have been simmering for a while in the “cooking pot” of history.

This chapter traces the historical trajectory of current childhoods and the crisis context in *Chiweshe* Communal Lands. I draw on historical records, adult memories, and ethnographies from Zimbabwe to examine how experiences and roles of childhood have changed over time in Zimbabwe, and the roles that AIDS, colonial and developmental processes, and the current political economy have played in this. I examine how trajectories of power, the political economy, natural resource management and climate change, state expansion, subsistence intensification, increases in inequalities, all relate to how AIDS impacts and is impacted by childhood experiences in rural Zimbabwe. Current childhoods and the complete environment or total ecologies in *Chiweshe* are both contingent on antecedent social relations of production, reproduction and exchange mediated by cultural and historical processes.

I also give a brief history of the emergence of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, showing how childhood in Zimbabwe is, and was, socially, historically and discursively constructed to meet the needs of specific production systems at specific times. Childhoods and the total environment in *Chiweshe* are thus regarded as historical and cultural products of human-nature interactions (Biersack, 1999:9). In this context, “humans” refer to both adults and children in *Chiweshe*, and the “environment” is understood in its broadest sense to include the social, political economic, cultural, physical and relational ecologies. Since both culture and nature are understood as “contingent products of interactions”, then the traditional dichotomies between them are no longer the focus, but the linkages between them. As children act within “cultures” and “nature” in their everyday business of survival, they are recreating both what is conceptualised as “culture” and as “childhood” in the local community.

I also utilise historical accounts of *Shona* childhoods and general historical records from *Chiweshe* to show how different the lives of children there are from the global ideal of childhood, in the manner of geographers including Aitken (2001); Kesby et al (2006); Robson (2004; 2000). I will show how the lives of children in the global south are dominated by work, and adult occupations and roles. I will also highlight problems of globalised notions of childhood and offer an alternative approach that takes local contexts of childhood into account. Some of the problems that Zimbabwean children experience are a result of complex webs of current ecologies interacting with historical ecologies to produce the specific multi-ecologies within which the children are acting.

Chapter 7 in this thesis illustrates how for young girls participating in mining activities, “spaces” in the natural forest were historically embedded with cultural knowledge and divisions of appropriate and inappropriate spaces for children, mediated by gendered norms as well. As Biersack (1999) argues, historical ecology is also about the creation and defining of spaces for those without control, by those who are in power. By showing how space, nature and culture are social and historical products of interaction, one may demonstrate that conceptualisations of childhood are more historical and social, than they are biological or genetic. The current HIV/AIDS pandemic and its related syndemics have created ecologies of increased suffering, illness and deaths where childhood experiences are constantly redefined. Although many children’s lives improved substantially following Zimbabwe’s independence in 1980, children are currently living in a time of great extremes because of AIDS and its syndemics.



## 5.2 The foundation for Zimbabwe's multi-crisis context: Historical ecology

Southern Rhodesia (1890-1965) gained its independence from British colonial rule in 1980 after a locally led and regionally supported long liberation struggle. During the colonial period, the British rulers put in place a policy of racially segregated land ownership that relegated the majority black population to overcrowded “native reserves”, now referred to as rural areas. These areas were characterised by poor soils and prone to drought (Moyo, 1995). This land alienation was legalised by the Land Apportionment Act of 1931 and the Land Tenure Act of 1969, which resulted in the allocation of fifty percent of the land to whites, who comprised about five percent of the population (Francis-Chizororo, 2008). The settlers had reinforced their control over many sectors of development such that, at independence in 1980, Zimbabwe inherited a dual economy characterised by, on the one hand, a reasonably developed infrastructure and a well-developed industrial sector; and, on the other, by poor rural communities. The impoverished African rural areas provided eighty percent of the migrant industrial labour force, and subsistence agriculture and rural livelihoods were highly dependent on inputs from wages remitted from men in the industrial sector (Kiire, 1995).

During the first decade of independence, Zimbabwe made exceptional improvements in the provision of social services including education and health. Land redistribution, however, remained slow due to insufficient funds, lack of political commitment and the unwillingness of commercial farmers to sell highly productive land (Gaidzanwa, 2001; Maphosa et al, 2007). Although some progress was made to redress Zimbabwe's inequalities, internal disparities emerged within the local population.

In the early 1990s, the government adopted ESAP with encouragement from the Bretton Woods institutions, which claimed that structural adjustment programmes would liberalise and reinvigorate the country's highly regulated and stagnating economy. This resulted in the removal of subsidies on all social services and basic commodities; the introduction of user fees and cost recovery measures in health, education and housing; and resulted in the liberalisation of foreign exchange and foreign trade rules (Maphosa et al, 2007).

ESAP also ushered in soaring interest rates, increased the cost of living, rising inflation and a decline in real wages and job losses that led to unprecedented levels of poverty and desperation (Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, 1995). Even with the existence of the Social Dimensions Fund to mitigate the negative effects of ESAP, the majority

of the population continued to live below the poverty datum line. Poor political decision-making and corruption, the current land invasion, political instability, lawlessness and hyper-inflation all contributed to economic chaos in the country. ESAP reversed the hard won gains in social development achieved immediately after independence.

The negative effect of these policies on rural populations, particularly women and children, cannot be underestimated (Mwanza, 1999; Harold-Barr, 2004; Maphosa et al, 2007). While there is little literature on the impact of ESAP on children, specifically, Mupedziswa (1997) noted that ESAP negatively affected children's education, health, nutrition, housing and other basic needs. Mutisi and Bourdillon (2000) argued that after the implementation of ESAP, children engaged in vending for survival in both urban areas and rural growth-points.

Official denial of the existence of HIV/AIDS by the Zimbabwe government preceded the recording of the first AIDS case in 1985, and Zimbabwe, like many other African countries, went through a phase of blame and counter blame (Meursing, 1997). It was only in 1990 that the government introduced a national AIDS policy, and published HIV/AIDS morbidity and mortality data. Attention was not given to the effect of HIV/AIDS on children until the mid-1990s after almost a decade focused on awareness and prevention efforts among adults. The Zimbabwe government developed a National Orphan Care Policy to mobilise resources for the support of orphans through institutionalisation, fostering and community based care (Government of Zimbabwe, 1999).

### **5.3 *Chiweshe*, a paradoxical history of affluence and loss**

Bessant (1992) and Mutsvairo (1995) trace the origin of the current population in *Chiweshe* to five chiefdoms of the western Mazowe District, namely, *Chiweshe*, Hwata, Makope, Negomo and Nyachuru. These chiefdoms were comprised of *Shona* peoples who had moved from an area referred to in oral history as Guruuswa (Mutsvairo, 1996). Study of migration patterns trace Guruuswa from Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Bessant (1992) reports that the Hwata clan, for example, was forced to move from the fertile deep valley soils in the Mazowe citrus area, 'kuGomba', in 1922 and onto the less fertile soils in the colonial reserves in *Chiweshe*.

Weinrich (1977) found that *Chiweshe*'s proximity to the capital city enabled its people to contribute substantially to the national economy through maize production. Duggan (1980) and

Mazur (1991) note that, prior to the liberation war, African farmers produced seventy percent of the country's food requirements; by 1977, however, their agricultural activities had been disrupted and they were only producing thirty percent.

Weinrich (1977) noted that during the colonial times, the educational system in the area was so well developed that *Chiweshe* men easily acquired skilled and clerical jobs in the capital. Progressive African farmers in the area had access to special credit facilities from neighbouring European farmers and, as a result, *Chiweshe* became famous for production of high quality tobacco and maize, sufficient for local consumption and sale. Many African farmers in *Chiweshe* had the capacity to build themselves modern houses and to buy good furniture whilst, contrastingly, education systems, agricultural production levels and the general quality of life in *Chiweshe* seem to be on the decline, for which adults placed the blame on young people.

These children of today love money but, they neither want to work at home nor the fields! All they do is spend time at the shops, walking aimlessly up and down the roads, especially these young girls! They do not have time for their books and do not want to go to school. They laugh at us stating that they do not want to be poor like their teachers when they grow up! These days you hear so many stories of how these young people are using diabolical means to make fast money. No wonder the rains have decreased, the ancestors are angry! When we were growing up, we worked hard on the farms and raised our own school fees. These children do not know the value of education nor hard work. That is not how our people behave! But who will listen even if we try to tell them? Rather, they now tell adults what to do.

(Casual conversational interview with Mrs Gwenzi, elderly teacher from Kakora Primary, 2007)

The evidence from adult accounts leads me to state that most adults in *Chiweshe* grew up in times of relative affluence. *Chiweshe* (2012) notes that in the 2004/2005 agricultural season, most wards in *Chiweshe* communal lands were affected by dry spells which threatened crop yields and that the rainfall was increasingly more unreliable in terms of amount and duration. The onset of the rains, critical for planting, was no longer predictable. *Chiweshe* (2012) also noted the problems of overgrazing and deforestation and attributed this to the incommensurate relationship between the *Chiweshe* population and the resources available. Economic hardship

led to deforestation when people cut trees for personal use, and for sale to nearby urban populations experiencing electricity load shedding.

For most adults spoken to, a renaissance or revival of past cultures was often seen as the solution for the perceived crisis of the current generations (Honwana and De Boeck, 2005). This is reflected in the approaches to the HIV and AIDS problem, such as the resurgence of virginity testing and the public “graduation ceremonies” for “confirmed” virgins organised by chiefs in rural Zimbabwe (Masvawure 2010; Mate 2009). The accounts from adults must be understood within the broader historical shifts in *Chiweshe* which are, in turn, connected to the contemporary contexts of AIDS, neoliberal transformations and associated contradictions, ruptures, displacements, and realignments in the meanings and experiences of childhoods and cultures (Weiss 2004; Stephens 1995; Honwana and De Boeck, 2005). I argue that the particular historical shifts in *Chiweshe*, the current AIDS and neoliberal contexts combine to produce the particular dimensions of current childhood experiences and survival.

Weinrich (1977:213) noted that, in contrast to more remote and underdeveloped areas like the Zambezi valley, *Chiweshe* was viewed as one of the most progressive African areas in Rhodesia. Better education and incomes, and close proximity to white farmers contributed to a high level of political awareness among the local Africa population. It is unsurprising, therefore, that this area was well known for supporting the liberation movement which led to subsequent resettlement in protected villages during the war in 1974.

Weinrich (1977: 225-226) contends that the *Chiweshe* way of life was disrupted by European administration in the 1940s and 1950s with the introduction of the centralisation programme that facilitated the implementation of modern agricultural methods; and that this was the source of all the problems in family life, health, education and agriculture that were faced in subsequent years.

I concur that these circumstances still form the root of the current problems faced by children in *Chiweshe*. The *Shona* were a patriarchal kinship-based society and the family was the pivot of social life (Bourdillon 1987). Traditionally, a village consisted of a patrilineage made up of the families of brothers, and kinsmen constituted the largest percentage of co-residents which made up villages, units which facilitated the organisation of work groups that used a traditional communal model of production called *nhimbe*. The *nhimbe* concept was a communal model of work where families would pool their labour to work in every family's field, until all the fields

had been worked on. Children also contributed their labour under this model and ideas of individualism were not part of their local notions of personhood. Thus a child did not perceive themselves as an autonomous individual being, but their personhood was constructed in relation to others under the logic of *tsika* and a higher form of morality termed *hunhu* (Pearce 1990).

According to Pearce, the definitions of the concepts *hunhu* and *tsika* are contextual, contested and gendered, such that even most Shona elderly people do not always agree on what these two concepts entail. However, it has been found that the dominant values that come through from both are the ideas of the communal logic of personhood and respect of adults which discourages questioning the authority of one's biological parents, but flexible when it come other relations such as grandparents.

Bessant and Muringai (1993) concur that the "moral economy" which specified one's rights, obligations, and responsibilities changed alongside material changes, the introduction of new technologies such as ploughs, and the rise of the "African businessman". In addition, the disruption of social relations and the new moralism brought about by the Salvation Army also altered social relations, and the ways that children behaved (Bessant, 1994).

Suspicious of witchcraft, accusations of being an informer or "sell out", and the large numbers of people who died due to the lack of hygiene and health facilities in the protected villages also contributed to the further disintegration and distortion of kinship support (Weinrich, 1997). I argue that the lack of kin support for the current generation in *Chiweshe* is not only due to the over extension of families due to the HIV and AIDS epidemic, but that the social problems initiated during the colonial period have synergised with the current political economic context to produce child headed households. I further argue that the current conditions of impoverishment; underdevelopment of health and educational services; food insecurity; the culture of "seemingly disrespectful and uncontrollable children", and the culture of silence surrounding the deaths of children, are all contingent products of historical, cultural and economic ecologies.

## **5.7 Shona childhoods**

Kesby et al (2006) acknowledged the difficulty of trying to separate historical fact from modern tradition and to talk with certainty about how pre-colonial Zimbabwe's *Shona* people conceptualised childhood. However, Kesby's study showed that even before colonisation,

childhood was already a discrete category of experience although the *Shona* did not use sophisticated rituals of initiation to mark the transition to adulthood. Even if children could only access resources through their guardians and had limited decision-making power, they still held a central position in a society where wealth and status were reliant on the health, labour, and reproduction of human beings.

Parsons(2012) and Gelfand (1979) note that studies from anthropologist who have studied Shona children have portrayed them to be the happiest, pleasant and well brought up children they had ever met. Gelfand even argued that the indigenous ideas of parenting of the Shona seemed to be a main factor in contributing towards the pleasant nature of their children. This they attributed to the balance between restrictive and generative attributes of their culture of raising children. According to Gelfand (1979) by the age of 4, children were seen as participants in chores and other activities that contributed towards the survival of members of the family.

At age 4 is also when the child would no longer be given soft foods only, but had meat introduced in their diet on the assumption that by then, their teeth would have grown strong enough to be able to chew meat. Little boys would start getting labour allocations such as herding cattle and making sure that cattle would not stray off into other villagers fields. The little boys would also make sure that crops that fields that were owned by their own families would not be destroyed by both wild and domestic animals. Four year old girl on the other hand would start helping in all the domestic chores their mothers carried out at home. However, both girls and boy at that age would also start going to the field to work communally with all other family members, though mostly under the guidance of the mother.

Gelfand (1979) noted that amongst the *Shona*, gender-specific child labour was central to a lineage mode of production that required the sharing of domestic, arable, and pastoral work, hence the high value placed on adults who had many children. Kesby (2006) concurs that the ability to have children was also a determinant of marital success and status before the changes in indicators of wealth changed to monetary value, clothing and ability to send children to school (Bessant and Muringai, 1993).

Reynolds (1996) also noted that Shona children in Musami were allowed to be apprentices of traditional healers. Under these traditional healers they would act as the assistants during the therapy sessions until they had acquired enough knowledge to start practicing and training others as well. Kesbey et al (2006) observed that in *Shona* society, sex was viewed

positively as an everyday part of life. At the same time, sex and fertility were also associated with powerful mystical forces controlled by the spirits, and sexual taboos were central to identity formation. Hence, Gelfand (1979) noted that there were arenas for age-specific, informal sex education through games, riddles, *jiti* performances, songs and imitation role play, in contrast to the sex-negative, and frequently dysfunctional school based sex education (Chifunyise et al, 2002). Transition to adulthood was marked by marriage and procreation.

However, Schmidt (1993) and Wells (2003) noted that in times of crises or food shortages, female children could be married off in exchange for food or security, and this situation worsened after 1930, when the Land Tenure Act was passed and resulted in the impoverishment of many *Shona* families. These events demonstrate that the value of girls was not only culturally determined, but was also a result of historical ecologies interacting with political-economic ecologies and inequalities. Kesbey et al holds that child marriages prompted the moral crusades and attempts to civilise the *Shona* against the “African culture” of child corruption and exploitation. In agreement with Jeater (1993) and Schmidt (1990; 1993), these marriages were socio-economic strategies rather than purely sexual arrangements. Colonial legislation established age as a key delineator of adulthood which later led to the Legal Age of Majority Act which established age 18 as the legal definition of adulthood (Gaidzanwa, 1992).

The introduction of wage labour and hut tax forced children and women to migrate to urban areas and changed the socio-cultural position of the *Shona* woman and child (Kileff and Kileff, 1970). To counter the development of more autonomous youth and female identities, Schmidt (1991:753) notes that an “unholy alliance” developed between patriarchy, colonial capital and Christianity aimed at preventing “run away” women and children from being ‘corrupted’ by modernity and urbanity. This, in turn, created a culture to restrict the movements and activities of women and children that is still largely in effect in Zimbabwe.

Reynolds (1996) also notes that childhood was substantially redefined during the national liberation war as children were orphaned. In another study, Reynolds (1990) notes that even during the war of liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, children acted as informants for the guerrillas. Little boys took the roles of the *mujibha*, whilst girl informants were referred to as *chimbwido*. These processes of the redefinitions of childhoods and their evolving capacities for agency have continuously been reconfigured by the changes in the political-economic, historical, socio-cultural context and the advent of the AIDS epidemic in Zimbabwe.

## 5.8 Conclusion

I have attempted to trace historical ecologies of contemporary childhoods in *Chiweshe* through historical accounts. Most adults interviewed held on to the circumstances of the past to provide the solution to, and try to make sense of the current national and intergenerational crises. Thus, I argue that the accounts from adults must be understood within contextual, intergenerational and broader historical shifts in both *Chiweshe*, and the country as a whole. The historical, political, economical, religious, and sociocultural changes are, in turn, connected to the experiences of children in contemporary Zimbabwe, which in turn sparked innovative agency in children as they tried to survive in their ever changing environments.



## CHAPTER 6

### CHILDREN OF AIDS: UNDERSTANDINGS OF AIDS AND THEIR DISCURSIVE AGENCY

#### 6.1 Introduction

Contemporary anthropological studies reveal that AIDS interventions are more successful when they are grounded in local and contextual realities (Mogensen 1997; Thornton 2007; Thomas 2008; Allen and Heald, 2004; Barnett 2004). Despite this, a dearth exists on “local” children’s voices on their understandings and experiences of AIDS.

Children are often misunderstood, stereotyped as passive, ignorant, “beings in the making”, in need of protection (Honwana and DeBoeck, 2005). Children’s understanding and experiences of illness and death are often ignored, regarded as immature and predictable, and omitted from policy dialogues. Their knowledge is often associated with ignorance, imagination, superstition, and neglected as a credible source of information.

Through ethnographic work carried out with children in *Chiweshe* Communal Lands, I illustrate that the placement of the knowledge and context of children at the centre of HIV and AIDS research is the first step in taking them seriously. but narrow my focus to the experiences and understandings portrayed in the metaphorically rich discourses employed by two children.

According to Gwanzura-Ottmoller and Kesby (2005), children’s exclusion from research for AIDS programming in Zimbabwe was due to the initial misconception of them as an “AIDS free generation”, and not an at “risk group”. Van der Heijden and Swartz (2010) also note that childhood studies done in the developed North are assumed to be applicable to childhood experiences in Africa. My study aims to give a contextualised, child-centred account of *Chiweshe* children’s understandings of AIDS. Drawing from fieldwork done in *Chiweshe*, I illustrate through children’s stories, how growing up under a specific context created by the syndemic of the AIDS pandemic and the political-economic and social crises, articulates with the local AIDS discourses used by children.

I argue that the syndemic context created by AIDS and the socio- political economy increased the assault on Zimbabwean children’s lives, and simultaneously triggered the agency of children and the subsequent backlash against them. I focus on specific metaphors, which

recurred in children's everyday conversations, and on the stories that they wrote and drew about their encounters with AIDS. I demonstrate that their children's stories, their "childish" and "mundane" discourses and activities is of critical importance in engaging them and taking them more seriously. I see the local language and discourse as an "untapped" part of the political-ecological context (Undie et al, 2007).

I discuss children's understandings of AIDS within the syndemic context characterised by pervasive deprivation, illness, loss, death, stigma, exclusion, hierarchical adult-child relations, and political repression as part of everyday reality. I examine the children's understandings of AIDS in relation to their position within global and national discourses, and government policies in Zimbabwe, thus providing a holistic, political-ecological child-centred account. *Chiweshe* children convincingly draw from all these everyday realities, and appropriate political and economic discourse in order to make sense of and provide a social commentary of their daily realities with AIDS.

I found that contrary to most Western, psychological and bio-medical assumptions of children's understandings of illness as simple, mythical, superstitious and predictable developmental stages, *Chiweshe* children's conceptions are complex, embodied, and grounded in their everyday realities. Multiple factors such as birth position, personal HIV status, family encounters with AIDS, gender, support networks and the crisis socio-political context in Zimbabwe, also have an impact in shaping these children's worldviews and understandings of AIDS. This demonstrates how social conditions and the political-economic ecology contributes to the children's understanding of AIDS.

The children also appropriate local metaphors of corruption, distress, crisis, contamination, pollution and transformation as platforms to provide social commentaries on everyday struggles and the physical impact of AIDS whilst they maintain hope and scope for possible multiple therapy sources. Their metaphors provide a way to engage and negotiate their realities, rather than denial, or escape. They regain mastery over their existence, rather than viewing themselves as victims bound by fatalism and hopelessness, in a context where stigma and a culture of silence reigns supreme. This study may provide an alternative, non-western, child-centred perspective, which may aid in developing relevant health programmes for similar African childhood contexts.

## 6.2 Children's voices: Whispers from the periphery

Despite many studies with titles that relate to children's experiences of AIDS related illness, loss and death, children's own voices and concerns are often surprisingly missing (Hirschfeld, 2002; Mitchell, 2006; Levine, 2007). This is partly due to the conception of children's knowledge as far removed from reality and nearer to playful myth, imagination and superstition (Argenti, 2001; Bluebond-Langner and Korbin, 2007). Exceptions encountered include Bluebond-Langner (1978), Reynolds (1995), Parsons (2005), and Van der Heijden and Swartz (2010).

Most studies on children's understandings of illness, death and AIDS are influenced by Western thought, psychological and bio-medical paradigms which view children as incomplete, immature beings following universal, systematic and predictable stages of cognitive and bodily development and show the influence of Piaget's three stages of cognitive development: moving from the pre-logical to concrete or formal logical thinking; from primitive logic to civilisation; and from the irrational to rational logic (Perrin and Gerrity (1981); Schonfeld et al (1993); Walsh and Bibace (1991); Peltzar and Promtussanon (2003). While these theories have merit, I argue that they are of limited utility in the Zimbabwean context where AIDS-related illnesses and deaths are pervasive enough to challenge established patterns of childhood.

Even anthropologists who had critiqued psychological works as limited, continued with the assumptions of rationality, and over-emphasised culture as an impediment to child development and AIDS interventions (Levine, 2007; Airhihenbowa and Obreg, 2000). Early functionalist scholars viewed children as passive recipients of culture, born in a state of "*tabula rasa*" and regarded all children's activities as mere imitations of adult actions. As a result, most early researchers like Mead (1928), Malinowski (1927) and Whiting (1963) concentrated on issues such as social learning and socialisation, whilst ignoring the creative ability, agency and the voices of the children themselves. Recently there have been promising and contextualised studies done on Zimbabwean children and AIDS experiences (Wood et al, 2006; De Baets et al, 2008). However, these studies still gave primacy to the views of adults, village elders and health workers.

Hardman (1973) and Stephens (1995) argue for "...seeing children as competent social actors who could be articulate about what the social world is like for them." Reynolds (1989, 1995) also advocates that children should be studied in their own right as "children" rather than "miniature adults", who are passive receptacles of socialisation. Bearing these perspectives in

mind, my child-centred ethnography gives primacy to children's understandings of AIDS and shows how children's realities cannot be reduced simply to socialisation, cognitive development, superstition, myth, denial or childish ignorance.

### **6.3 Notes on children's metaphors**

I found it useful to draw from the works of Niehaus and Stadler (2004) who argued that cultural performances can be viewed as "stories people tell themselves about themselves". I approach children's stories and their metaphors as stories told by children about themselves, which provided them with an opportunity for social commentary as well as a means to manoeuvre and negotiate new possibilities for themselves.

Metaphors in this study refer to ways of understanding one thing in terms of another, not just as a figure of speech, but also as articulations of reality and "metaphors to live by" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Foley, 1997; Mawadza, 2004) and, in some instances, ironically, "metaphors to die by". Fernandez (1986) and Lelerc-Madlala (2002) argued that social conceptualisation accrued meaning through metaphors, hence metaphors are both embodied and lived in experience; they are also forms of presentation, enactment and representation. The use of metaphors is a "dual meaning-making process" in which the creation of meaning is dynamic and dependant on the context as Kirkmayer (1992:323) stated:

Illness experience is articulated through metaphors that are grounded in and constrained by both bodily experience and social interaction.

As part of my analysis, I looked at children's illness and AIDS experiences as grounded in biological, social, and political constraints. I consider the metaphors of children as a form of "indirect talk", (Hendry and Watson, 2001) that encompasses coded talk, linguistic avoidance and slang (Wood and Lambert, 2008). I do not imply that metaphors determine children's behaviour as it is well documented that action does not simply spring from knowledge or belief, but that is part of complex and strategic negotiations for power or inclusion where one is excluded (Kirkmayer 1992; Smith 2003). I embrace children's uses of metaphor as legitimate ways of knowing and experiencing AIDS, not as myth, fantasy, fiction or nonsensical childish talk.

## 6.4 Metaphors, silences, indirect speech and AIDS

Scheper-Hughes and Sargent (1998) have shown that metaphors arise during times of social disruption, epidemics and change at the household, national and global levels. Weiss (1997) argued that metaphors are often used to make sense of the unfamiliar, difficult to cure diseases. Wood and Lambert (2008) noted, in South Africa, there was a reluctance to refer directly to AIDS and that people use coded words or indirect language. They showed how this indirect talk was not confined to rural areas or traditional settings but was present in urban areas, educational and medical institutions. They suggested that silence or indirectness is not unique to AIDS, but possibly to all fatal conditions.

Mawadza (2004) notes that metaphors in the *Shona* language in Zimbabwe may, at times, be used indirectly to stigmatise AIDS victims. IRIN (2008) revealed that the use of negative, stigmatising metaphors was still prevalent. Mashiri et al (2002) argue that indirect talk and the use of euphemisms, or metaphors, when referring to AIDS, has been taken out of context and interpreted as ignorance by both Western and local African writers. They reveal that indirect speech is part of a structured way used by *Shona* people to address disputes within the family or village, without disrespecting social, gender and age hierarchies.

In my study, I look at the context and intention of metaphorical use by children. Disclosure of HIV infection is reported to be increasing in everyday life, but generally in specific contexts such as at funerals (Zungu, 2004; Muula and Mfutso-Bengo, 2005). In *Chiweshe*, where stigma is pervasive, children below 10 years are still largely excluded from funeral rituals and, in most cases, are not informed of their own HIV positive status. Wood et al (2006) and De Baets et al (2008) have documented how children in Zimbabwe live in a context of “adult imposed” silence. Writing on children’s exclusion from their parents’ funerals in Uganda, Marguerite et al (2009) argue that the adults fear that younger children will be contaminated by the aura of the dead.

In Zimbabwe, these “cultural values” are being challenged as many adults now die in the care of children. Robson (2000) It is also increasingly difficult to keep one’s HIV positive status a secret. In *Chiweshe*, since ARV treatment became available at Howard Hospital, regular hospital visits led to exposure of HIV positive status as an “open secret”. However, at the time of my fieldwork, most people could not afford the bus fare for hospital visits and drugs were more easily available on the “black market”. It was at this time that *Parirenyatwa* hospital closed, and

many urban patients accessed drugs from rural hospitals because they could afford to pay for them, whilst rural people could not.

The culture of silence in Zimbabwe is not related only to the AIDS epidemic, but is reinforced by a repressive political context (Parsons, 2005). Vambe (2008:141) echoes those sentiments in stating that the current government has “the power to silence everybody”. He argues that this is a tactic employed since the liberation struggle and *Gukurahundi* era of mass massacres and enforced silences. At the time of my study, there was heavy military and police surveillance in *Chiweshe*. Vambe (2003) also noted that in post-independent Zimbabwe, authors of high school set books and fictional novels often used AIDS as a metaphor for the betrayal of the masses. Although some of the children in *Chiweshe* were no longer attending school, due to the combined effects of the economic and AIDS crises, these books could have fed into their discourses.

## 6.5 The politics of indirect talk on AIDS

I now focus on the stories, metaphors and drawings of two children in *Chiweshe* in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences of AIDS and to elicit the “hidden” and “missing discourse” on everyday experiences (Izugbara 2005:54). This proved fruitful, as the children seemed comfortable to discuss AIDS without direct implications to themselves or close relations. Pseudonyms protect the identities of the children, throughout the thesis.

### Matriq

Matriq was fifteen when I met her. Her parents had both died of AIDS related illness in 1998, and she was staying with her paternal grandmother, her twin sisters (7 years old) and four other male grandchildren, Bhubhi, Bernard, Jeremiah and Terrance, aged nine, seven, six and four respectively. Two of the boys were the children of a late paternal aunt and they had moved back to the village after losing their home in the capital city during Operation *Murambatsvina* in 2005.

Matriq’s grandmother was a traditional healer until her death in 2007. Matriq and her siblings were thus under the care of *Babamukuru* (uncle) who stayed in the city and hardly visited them, except to demand money. Matriq attended the local school, but engaged in illegal underground gold digging at night to pay for her and her siblings’ fees. Matriq and her sisters had been tested, and were HIV positive, but they could not get regular medication due to the lack of bus fare to get to the clinic. Their HIV status was a source of gossip in the village because the

twin girls were always ill. However, these rumours were explained away by other rumours that suggested the twin girls had been cursed after stealing food from a witch's field.

By the time I decided to include Matriq in my study, I had heard the term *kuzviitira* in general everyday adult discourse, and thought I understood exactly what it meant. In everyday translation, it refers to the notion of self-reliance. The term *kuzviitira* is used interchangeably with the metaphor *muindijenasi* (indigenous businessman), which normally refers to the “newly empowered,” often corrupt, local businessperson, a product of the implementation of the government programme of “black indigenisation”, which seeks to redress colonial imbalances by “giving back” ownership of local businesses and industries to black Zimbabweans. However, Matriq used the term *kuzviitira* within the same sentence to refer to both being ill and weak and to being well and able to work for her siblings as follows:

When I realised that my sisters and I had started that continuous process of *kuzviitira*, I knew we had it too! My friend from school who also had it died last year. I won't die earlier than I should, I will use all the knowledge and herbs grandmother taught me about, keep the house clean, and drink clean water. I can't afford to worry; I have to stay alive for my sisters! Besides me, they have no one else to look after them. *Babamukuru* only does (*kuzviitira*) for himself. I have to help myself through *kuzviitira*.

(Interview with Matriq in *Chiweshe*, 2007)

Matrique played with the metaphor and created dual meanings of *kuzviitira*. For her, *kuzviitira* referred to a negative attribute that is AIDS related chronic diarrhoea and secondly to the act of being self-employed or self-reliant. She used the metaphor to make sense of both her experience of illness and to encourage herself to overcome her fears in a context where she had limited access to ARV treatment.

Matriq also understood that living conditions could worsen the health status of one who is ill with AIDS. Matriq understood that there was an “HIV infection” which, she explained, originated in the stomach as “dirt” and would later spread pollution throughout the body via the blood. I attribute the pollution and dirt concerns to the daily experience of constant contact with dirt, through diarrhoea, dirty toilets at school and dead bodies, in a context where contact with dirt is seen as potentially polluting, particularly to children. Matriq could also have drawn this knowledge from her grandmother who had been a traditional healer. Simmons (2009) found similar forms of knowledge amongst traditional healers in Harare.

*Kuzviitira* could be used to refer to different issues in different contexts. I was familiar with the term used to refer to children at school when they had spoilt their clothes due to stomach problems or diarrhoea, which were common problems amongst the school children. Teachers and other adults considered having diarrhoea as a normal part of growing up. In most cases, the teachers would even shout at or beat the child for being “careless”. Those common stomach problems could have been an indication of somaticisation or chronic AIDS-related diarrhoea (Wood et al, 2006). Although diarrhea is the most fatal disease after respiratory infections among children in Zimbabwe, adults often did not take the condition seriously (Pitts et al, 1996).

One day, I found Matriq sitting behind one of the school toilets. Children with acute stomach problems required quick access to the toilet to avoid being mocked and laughed at by their peers. In younger children, *kuzviitira* was associated with positive growth, particularly the teething stage, and was referred to as *manyoka emazino* (teething diarrhea). Among older schoolchildren, however, *kuzviitira* was a term of embarrassment and referred to a dirty and careless child at the school. This was the way that most school children used it as well.

However, in the same village, if an adult had soiled their clothes, *kuzviitira* was associated with a condition, *runyoka rwemanyoka*, ( a sexually derived condition affecting males only) that traditional healers had previously associated with AIDS. It was said to afflict adulterers; curable only when the guilty person confessed and apologized to the wronged husband. If no cure was found for adult diarrhea, then adults would attribute *kuzviitira*, in indirect speech or metaphor, through gossip and rumour, to someone they believed was HIV positive. In adult use, *kuzviitira* was a purely negative metaphor.

Matriq also used the metaphor of *kuzviitira* to speak of her siblings when they were seriously ill, and to make light her fears of death and the looming inability to work:

When you have the *kuzviitira* condition it means your body is weak and it is difficult to work or study. I cannot tell people that we are like that. They will think my parents were immoral and I do not want that. I might end up being removed from the work-band where I earn money. Nobody wants to work with weaklings, so my sisters and I keep our condition a secret.

(Discussion with Matriq and her siblings, *Chiweshe* 2007)

The metaphor provided Matriq with a platform to express her fears of bodily incapacitation, social and economic exclusion, lack of social support from relatives, and her feelings of being overburdened with work.



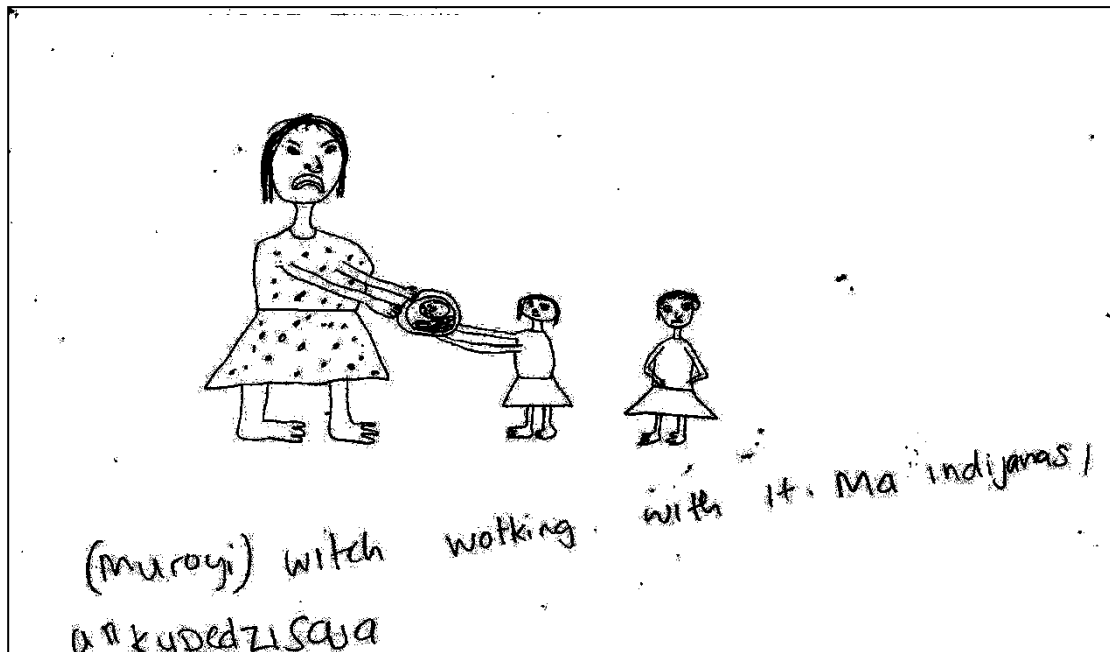
Early in 2008, Matriq's twin sisters died. She could not understand their deaths despite all her efforts to provide the correct herbs for treatment, keep the house clean, and provide food and material resources. Since she had previously always been positive, she had to explain this sudden rupture. She made use of a different metaphor, *kupedzisa*, which literally means, "finishing them off". She had this conversation with their family friend (*sahwira*), the only adult she felt did not judge her:

Even if my younger twin sisters had the *kuzviitira* condition, I know that witch finished them off! She came with food from South Africa they call GMO when there was no food in the shops, and tempted my hungry sisters with it. I know they were already sick, but she must have put something in their food, some kind of poison. Plus that day their diarrhoea was full of blood!

(Matriq in a conversation with a family friend)

It became clear to me that this was not a direct witchcraft accusation, but a form of indirect speech between her family, and friends. Matriq thought the *sahwira* would be able to help her address her grievance about neglect by relations who were supposed to take care of them. The metaphor of "witch" was drawing on the similarities between an actual witch who is said to kill people through magic and her aunt who had the power and wealth to help Matriq and her sisters access treatment and good food, but did not. Matriq provides a meta-narrative of her relatively powerlessness position in a world of unequal chances. Traditionally, the *sahwira* is expected to assume the social role of addressing social tensions in families through indirect verbal means, which Matriq attempted through a familiar metaphorical discourse of a witchcraft accusation.

Picture 8: Matriq's drawing



### Dhevhi

Dhevhi, a 14 year-old boy, stayed alone with his sister after his brother and grandfather had passed away from AIDS related illnesses. Dhevhi had been told that he was born HIV positive, but that his younger sister was HIV negative. Dhevhi attended the same school as Matriq and worked at night at underground gold digging and panning in order to care for his sister. Dhevhi had nursed his brother right until his death. His brother had not used any traditional or anti-retroviral medication because he was a member of an apostolic sect that permitted only the use of spiritual-based therapies. Dhevhi still referred to himself as a religious person, but no longer attended the same church. Adults from his church saw him as a rebellious boy. He travelled frequently to the city to get his medication from a cross-border Nigerian trader and was responding well to treatment.

Dhevhi never used the word AIDS directly even though his parents had been open about the disease. Instead, he referred to AIDS as *kuzviitira* or being a *muindijenasi*, as used by children of his age. He worried about becoming ill as he had to rely on his own strength and ability to work:

I know my brother died of the *kuzviitira* condition. I saw his body waste away because he would not take any treatment. As for me, I started taking the medication that those Nigerians bring me and I am growing strong. I am going to be a business man too, soon! A real business man who gets a lot of money through *kuzviitira* with my own hands and brain. I will not need to be given money by the government like those weak and corrupt business men of today. I will work hard.

(Interview with Dhevhi, in *Chiweshe*, 2007)

Dhevhi knew that there was an HIV virus, but did not refer to it by name. Instead, he chose to focus on the positive elements of the metaphor that everyone else used negatively. He spoke positively to himself. Later, in an in-depth interview, he told me that he had stopped going to church in order to increase his therapy options, and said that as long as there was something to help keep him alive, he would adhere to it. In both his daily conversations and drawings, Dhevhi constructed himself as strong and juxtaposed himself to the weak bodies of corrupt businessman.

Dhevhi had a metaphor that he often used to talk about taking his medication. He said he had made it up while joking with other HIV positive boys he met at the Nigerian's house. At that time, ARV drugs were more easily available in the "black market" than in hospitals. The Zimbabwean dollar was depreciating rapidly in value. There was a popular slogan by the opposition party called *Chinja* from the statement *chinja maitiro*, which called for one to just change their ways, while indirectly advocating for regime change. Dhevhi explained:

These days I have regained my strength because I am in the process of *kuchinja* at all levels.

For Dhevhi, the metaphor of *kuchinja* signified positive transformation brought about through ARV treatment. He explained that this metaphor gave him hope that transformation was possible physically, as well as economically and politically. Metaphors allowed Dhevhi to make sense of his illness experience, and he drew from local political and economic discourse to comment on his experiences within the syndemic of AIDS and political-economic crises in Zimbabwe.

Dhevhi commented on how politicians went overseas to get more effective pills to "wash out" the dirt in their blood, a process he referred to as *kusukwa ropa*. According to him, the pills did not cure AIDS, but made the person feel better by lessening the viral load in the blood. This echoed the concerns of Matriq and traditional healers that AIDS was dirt in the blood and, to some extent, biomedical explanations of the virus living in the blood (Simmons, 2009). However, in Dhevhi's case, his use of metaphors was also a commentary on the corrupt and greedy nature of politicians in Zimbabwe picture 9 below shows the depth of Dhevhi's

understandings and his ability to clearly represent that on through a drawing that echoes his views on the impact of the AIDS pandemic.

Picture 9 below shows his cognitive competence of how the political economy, represented by the indigenous business man (*indigejenasi bhizinesi*) man who is the “last man” standing after the AIDS epidemic has ravaged everyone else in his homestead. According to Dhevhi, the posture of the business man shows how he is not affected by what is going on around him, even his brother’s child represented in the picture 9 as “*mukomana azviitira indijinasi*”.

Dhevhi’s linguistic or communicative competence is shown through his ability to switch the same metaphors of *kuzviitira* to have double meanings. He uses it to refer to both the aspect of self-help or the increasing individual hyper-responsibilisation that is associated with neoliberal economies, and to comment on the ability of the Indigenization policies where the already elite folk or what Bond (1996) called the new powerless middle class, forcibly and inequitably took over resources in the name of black empowerment policies. The same metaphor is also used to refer to the small boy who is lying seemingly powerlessly, on the ground due to diarrhea since messing up one’s body with dirt from diarrhea is also referred to as *kuzviitira*.

According to Dhevhi both the boy and the elite business man are HIV positive, but because the business man has money to fly off to the overseas to have his “dirty blood” cleaned (*kugeza ropa*) using his “dirty money”, he fools himself into thinking he is not affected by AIDS. The metaphor of *kugeza ropa* or cleaning one’s blood shows that locally in their village, AIDS is seen as dirt in the blood, but Dhevhi’s comments show that he understands that AIDS cannot be cleaned out of the blood, thus demonstrating that he is knowledgeable on HIV and AIDS issues.

Dhevhi also argued that both the boy and the indigenous business man will die of AIDS. He explained that even if the boy may die of neglect from his close relatives like that business man in picture 9 who is his uncle, the boy may rise up again and get better because he is not yet “finished” (*kupera*) since he is not a threat to anyone. The metaphor of *kupera* here is a daily term used to also refer to being skinny associated with the AIDS pandemic, and also a state of having no money or being completely broke. This also shows Dhevhi’s ability to be reflexively aware of others, and his employment of a strategy of using metaphors that have double

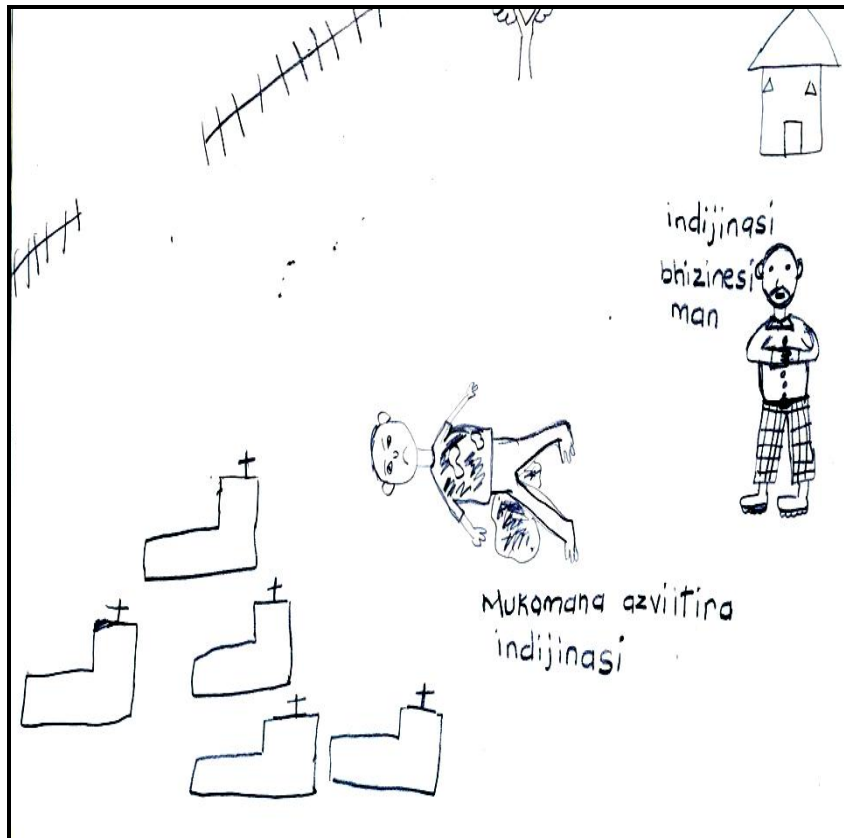
meanings to speak about AIDS in a context of cultural silence on terminal illness and disease (Parsons 2005).

According to Dhevhi, the business man may die sooner than the boy due to the fact that he will attract bad luck because of his pride and greed. This pride and greed is what led him to take other people's wealth and those offended people may end up finishing him off (kupedziswa) echoing Matriq's metaphor. The similarities and connections in Matriq's and Dhevhi's metaphors ensured that even in the presence or absence of adults who were incompetent in their language, they could still speak on the taboo subjects of AIDS related illness and death amongst themselves.

I found their communicative agency intriguing because most adults did not employ the complexity of the double meanings that the children did. Although here I drew out the examples of Matriq and Dhevhi, they shared this language within the groups of children they often associated with. At the same time, not all the children in Chiweshe understood these metaphors and applied the double meanings in the same way. Therefore these children demonstrated the ability to create a context specific language to use to communicate about what they were not allowed to speak about. They did not only use this language to speak about what they had been barred from, but also strategically and reflexively employed the metaphors to speak positivity to themselves in a context characterized by powerlessness, increasing political-economic inequalities, AIDS related stigma and neglect, illness and multiple deaths.

Picture 9 of Dhevhi's drawing is clearly indicative of the impact of AIDS on most homesteads in the village. It struck me that Dhevhi had drawn a picture of a homestead where at the entrance the first thing one noticed was a row of graves, and this tallied with my personal observation of rows of graves in the yards of many homesteads in Chiweshe. This brought to my mind a metaphor used by Parsons (2012) when he carried out an ethnography on children living with HIV in Manicaland which he argued children referred to as a "vale of tears", sadness and depression. Even if this was the case for some children in Chiweshe like Dhevhi and Matriq, whose homesteads were littered with graves from HIV related deaths, they still creatively and intelligently speak about what they would otherwise not be able to speak about.

Picture 9: Dhevhi's drawing



Dhevhi advocated that the “adult imposed silences” and stigma should be dealt with because as more people started treatment their status would eventually be revealed. He commented:

Adults should get into the *kuchinja* mode, what is the point of hiding when in the end people will know anyway?

Through the use of metaphors derived from daily political and economic discourses and personal experiences of AIDS, Dhevhi constructed an alternative way to understand and deal with his reality.

The accounts of both Dhevhi and Matriq reveal a context of silence and fear, and the syndemic context of their discourses and personal experiences constructs their specific AIDS understandings. Matriq's metaphors, seemingly largely negative, express how she perceives herself in relation to the bodily and societal constraints from the village, national and global levels. She tries to reconstruct her seemingly hopeless situation by blaming the witch (her aunt) for her sisters' deaths in an effort to deal with her reality. Matriq's use of metaphor in her

understanding of AIDS gravitate around issues of domestic hygiene, domestic relations, provision of food and clean water, and appropriate herbs, which notions demonstrate gender-specific domestic concerns over which she has some control.

On the other hand, Dhevhi's metaphorical employments are influenced by the association of masculinity with the domination of the public sphere, and demonstrations of masculine strength in his die-hard spirit. Both children do not deny the biological and pathological origin of AIDS, but mingle their ideas with an already existing schema and discourse. Their flexibility is not surprising considering that Zimbabwe is pluralistic in terms of religion and treatment options (Simmons, 2009). However, I found it significant that, contrary to views of HIV positive Zimbabwean children as depressed, angry, and aggressive, (Guest, 2003), children in rural Zimbabwe still have relative respect for hierarchy and order, and do not seem to internalise trauma and self destruct. The rural children I met were creative and resilient agents and used the knowledge and resources available to them to understand and deal with AIDS in socially acceptable ways.

The dominant concern for both Matriq and Dhevhi was the threat of bodily incapacitation that would prevent them from working. These children do not see AIDS in the negative, fatalistic and stigmatising manner of adults, the media, and politicians, but are redefining AIDS understandings in an increasingly positive ways. They also do not regard themselves as victims in a totally hopeless situation, but see the potential for transformation and hope. The dominance of the business and self-help metaphors also illustrate children's concerns of exclusion from local, national and global economic development and AIDS programming initiatives. Setel (1999) found similar concerns among young children in Tanzania.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

I have presented evidence which demonstrates the importance of paying attention to children's stories, discourses and drawings in order to gain contextually relevant information for AIDS interventions. Children in Chiweshe drew from various discourses and personal experiences with the AIDS pandemic and their everyday experiences of political economic processes to strategically and creatively employ new understandings of AIDS that reveal their main concerns and fears. This is reflective of their linguistic or communicative agency. Contrary to the dominant psychological and biomedical assumptions of simplicity and predictability, children's

understandings of AIDS are complex; dynamic, vary from context to context, and sometimes contradictory. However, the fact that they understood each other amongst themselves and not necessarily with adults, demonstrates the capacity of children to construct their own linguistic cultures. Thus, giving children's voices a chance to be the centre of my analysis has enabled me to get child centered, alternative contextual revelations of how children appropriate local fatalistic AIDS metaphors, politicise them or reverse their meanings. I have also demonstrated how these meanings are co-constructed through the articulations of children's experiences, cultural silence and indirect speech contexts. Therefore children's understandings of AIDS cannot be reduced to cognitive stages of development, socialisation processes that are in ideal homes and adult led. Children's knowledge goes beyond superstition, denial or ignorance, but are grounded in their everyday realities. Thus paying attention to seemingly childish forms of knowledge is the first step in listening to children so as to come up with contextually relevant interventions for improving their well being.



## CHAPTER 7

### SURVIVAL AGAINST ALL ODDS: CHILDREN'S SURVIVAL STRATEGIES AND SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores ways in which children's "work bands" provided a platform for them to learn, survive, and negotiate childhoods in *Chiweshe*. The work bands demonstrate survival efforts as children navigated and negotiate non-child spaces, gender and generational constraints within the context of AIDS and political economic change. Despite a plethora of organisations which claim to represent children's interests by insisting on a labour free, happy, safe, carefree childhood, children in *Chiweshe* work daily to survive in contexts where the state, non-governmental organisations and adults are absent.

#### 6.2 The AIDS context, crises and working children

Once labelled the "breadbasket" of Africa, Zimbabwe is entangled in global power struggles, and contending with internal and external crises. The national and global struggles lead to shortages of crucial commodities, foreign currency and insufficient imports of agricultural inputs and farming equipment. This, coupled with an on-going land-redistribution programme that does not adequately support its "new farmers" and the synergistic impact of AIDS and ESAP, have forced most agricultural populations to seek alternative livelihoods in the informal mining sector (Spiegel, 2009). My study illustrates that, although children in *Chiweshe* still relied on subsistence agriculture, they were forced to supplement their income through other activities.

As the AIDS epidemic takes its toll on young parents, the burden of care and child work is increasingly falling on children (Nieuwenhuys, 1994; Robson, 2000; Grier, 2004; Montgomery, 2005). The combined effects of AIDS, political and economic instability and increased cross-border migration by women has created "free" spaces for children to subvert gender and age constraints regarding work. There is a greater demand for girls to work both inside and outside the domestic sphere, particularly in the small-scale mining activities.

I argue that changes in the current contexts of growing up, the sexual division of child labour and the growing socio-economic importance of the female child and grandparents worked together to shape children's experiences in *Chiweshe*. Through children's own accounts, I illustrate how global debates on the “elimination of child labour” fall short of the realities and concerns of working children trying to eke out a living in a context of limited possibilities. I show how a singular focus on working children as victims of exploitation limits our ability to see children's realities and capacities to negotiate for survival.

Montgomery (2005) argues that the gendered experiences of child work have been overshadowed by the common assumption that the realities of children and women are the same. In this chapter, I will show that while women and children's realities, power and positions were not similar, there were instances when the two groups temporarily became allies in their quest for survival. Studies on child labour typically focus on age and ignore factors like gender, birth position, household composition, and kinship support systems (Montgomery, 2005). My chapter will demonstrate the complexity of gender and age influences on child labour, and I will attempt to place these relations within household, and national-global political economies (Nieuwenhuys, 1996; 2007). I will also show the deficiency of the one-sided view of children as victims of “child labour”, and illustrate the tremendous “agency” of the children.

### **6.3 Gendered childhoods, child work and appropriate places for children**

Anthropological and historical studies conducted in Zimbabwe have acknowledged the “gendered” and “aged” nature of child work (Bourdillon, 2000; Robson, 2000; Reynolds, 1991; Pfigu, 2004; Mangoma and Bourdillon, 2001). An underlying assumption in most theories of socialization and “global childhoods” is that children cannot challenge, subvert or redefine their realities, gender roles, age, and space restrictions. Grier's (1994; 2004) study is an exception in its focus on the agency of working boys during the colonial era. This chapter will complement this work by focusing on the agency of working girls in postcolonial Zimbabwe.

Two divergent paradigms seem to emerge from child labour studies. The “protectionist” paradigm is based on the Western ideal of “global childhood” which emphasizes child dependency on adults, children's need for protection, and their non-economic and non-political status. This approach sees child work as exploitative, incompatible with formal education and, as such, supports legislature to eliminate child work. The liberal paradigm, on the other hand,

acknowledges the existence of different childhoods, and emphasizes the agency of children, and supports initiatives aimed at regulating child work conditions rather than abolition (Bourdillon, 2006). Within this liberal approach is the variant that recognises the possible compatibility of formal education with child work (Bourdillon, 2000; Grier 1995).

Nieuwenhuys (1996:238) argues that anthropologists have criticized Western development experts who often take a simplistic view of child work in the developing world and explain it away as “socialisation”, education, or training whilst ignoring the global and local politics at play. Exceptions are Reynolds (1991) and Grier (1994) who analyse child labour in the context of colonial capitalism and politics. My study demonstrates that child work, in the crisis context in Zimbabwe, is complex. In the absence of a coherent rule of law, work bands provide children, especially young girls, with a viable means for survival and enable children to challenge existing gender, age and space restrictions to create new meanings about the nature and value of child work.

Nhenga (2008) comments that the unilateral view of child workers as helpless victims and the accompanying sterile debates on the elimination of child labour, are out of sync with the realities of Zimbabwean children. Nieuwenhuys (2007) comments on the agenda of NGO “child saving rituals” which serve the “global womb”, supported by personal interests of African elites. This is similar to what Mararike (1999:65) termed as the NGOs’ hidden “client-creation” agenda.

#### **6.4 Children’s survival bands in *Chiweshe***

I draw on the concept of a “survival band” as used by Turnball (1972:134) in his study among the Mbuti people. Turnball noted that while “survival bands” were similar to friendship, they were created essentially for economic survival and could “band-up” and “disband” at anytime due to the fission-fissure pattern characteristic of foraging bands. A member’s ability to work and adopt a survivalist ethos was the determinant in keeping band members together. Membership and leadership within these bands was flexible, and emphasis was placed on the ability to multitask and demonstrate multiple specialisations.

In *Chiweshe*, these bands were involved in diverse subsistence activities, including hunting small animals, gathering wild foods, small-scale mining activities, and artefact making. The groups obtained their food, medication, raw materials, and gold from their surrounding environment, although some children also grew vegetables in home gardens. Leadership in the

work bands was based on personal charisma, mastery of survival-enhancing knowledge, and interpersonal networking skills. Gender roles were flexible and interchangeable. The survival bands enabled children to acquire and exchange knowledge, and acted as a labour pooling resource to deal collectively with challenges, and earn some income. Children could join these work bands from the age of four or when they started attending the Early Childhood Development center at the local primary school. The work bands enabled children to their meet their daily requirements.

## 6.5 Survival bands: An historical ecology

In 2007, the government and the Reserve Bank began a campaign to arrest individuals involved in illegal mining activities. The campaign was referred to as “Operation *Chikorokoza Chapera*”, that is, Operation End Gold panning (Spiegel, 2009). River bank gold mining, legal since 1991, was declared illegal again in the panic of “illegal miners out of control”, and the Reserve Bank’s sudden concern over the environmentally destructive acts.

The arrests were directed mostly towards unemployed male adults involved in small-scale mining, commonly known as *makorokoza*. The term *makorokoza* is a colloquial term used to refer to informal, unregistered, or illegal miners, who practice both panning and artisanal mining. The practices that they carry out which are usually done with the aim of making fast money, is what is called *chikorokoza*.

Adult groups of *makorokoza* were made up of two or more males who had been laid off from the mines as giant mining conglomerates downsized in response to ESAP. Some of the males were former farm workers, mostly of foreign origin (Mozambican, Zambian, or Malawian), who had settled in *Chiweshe* after losing their jobs in the wake of the FTLRP. *Kukorokoza* was a colloquial term referring to the act of using various informal forms of work strategies and tactics, legal and illegal, to make ends meet. These activities were also known by other names, such as, *kujingiridza*, *kubatanidza*, *kukiya-kiya* and *kukonekta*. Children’s work bands appropriated these terms as names for their groups one of which, for instance, went by the name *makonekti*, from *kukonekta*, which generally referred to the act of “hopping off” one mode of public transport onto the next, a tiresome and laborious activity associated with cross border traders who had to take multiple commuter buses to reach their destinations. In everyday usage, an individual who was able to *konnekt* often was one who had strategic alliances with politicians,

the police or other influential people. This role was similar to that of the *makonekts* in the survival bands.

Police raids were typically directed at men. although my observations were that there seemed more women and children engaged in gold panning than men. Like Dreschler (2001) and Hinton et al (2003), I observed an increase in the number of young girls involved in illegal mining activities. Most of the small-scale miners in *Chiweshe* belonged to various Independent churches, whose members had an ethos of hard work and the capacity to exist outside the structures of the state and the formal economy. Members of the Independent churches referred to each other as *madzibaba* (respectable gentleman) and *madzimai* (respectable lady). One of the children's groups went by the name *madzibaba yan'a* (younger *madzibaba*) as the boys who made up the group pointed out that, since they were much younger, they preferred to operate independently of their fathers.

By 2008, the majority of adult *makorokoza* bands engaged in small-scale mining activities had become less visible. However, I discovered that the adult *makorokoza* had not dissolved, but were instead recruiting children to take over their activities. Hence the establishment of the child bands in 2006. Most adult *makorokoza* restricted their activities to “underground” and “night shift” work, which afforded them less visibility. A few adult women worked with young girls and trained them to operate as “expert” foraging groups during the day. The groups also engaged in prospecting, digging, transporting rubble, crushing stones, and processing gold using mercury. Some women working with the survival bands were cross border traders and would, at times, smuggle the gold and foraged products into neighbouring South Africa. These women would then pay the children's groups in foreign currency and with maize-meal.

The adult *makorokoza* in the area stated that they had made alliances with child bands because the police would not suspect children of being involved in such activities, especially girls, who made up a greater proportion in the groups. Girls were said to be better at gold-panning than boys. The gender preferences of girls over boys in the small-scale mining sector in Zimbabwe, and most parts of the world, has been confirmed by McIvor (2000) and the ILO (2007). Young boys were more likely to attract police attention as boy gangs are often associated with violence or illegal activities. The new farmers who had recently been allocated land, and who lacked basic farm implements and infrastructure, often hired young girls to work in gold

mines at their farms in order to supplement their incomes. Recurrent droughts contributed to an increase in survival bands as more people turned away from peasant agriculture to gold mining (Dreschler, 2001, Spiegel, 2009). Some children had turned to illegal mining after being cheated out of their inheritance by kin.

Factors other than gender determined group membership. Only girls from 10 years onwards were seen as able to successfully multi-task, and those below that age were restricted to foraging activities. Children as young as four years were said to be the experts at gathering edible insects like beetles (*mandere*), which were found in the rainy season and, if plentiful, would be dried and shared by the group, or bartered for other commodities. The groups included orphans, children of migrant workers, children who lived with foster parents, or were from polygamous, divorced families, even children from households considered as affluent. Some children, like Matriq, stayed with extended family members who had volunteered to foster them but, instead, overworked them and in many instances did not give them enough food.

A number of boys joined the work groups as a way to “reaffirm their manhood” when they were taken care of by kin who often assigned them feminine household chores. Their work groups afforded these boys a platform to play-out their masculinity by taking on manly tasks and also enabled them to contribute to their households. Boys who could return home to kin carrying a “live chicken” felt like “real men”. Children had diverse reasons for participating in these groups.

One girl had joined the band because her parents had poorly-paid city jobs. Her parents rarely visited due to the lack of bus fare and often failed to pay her school fees in time. By joining the work band, she could provide for her school and examination fees.

A shopkeeper’s daughter told me she had joined the group through the invitation of a friend although I later found out that her father’s shop served as the trading centre for gold transactions and as a storage facility for the monthly rations of groceries that the children received as payment for their work. The children preferred payment in non-monetary goods and food rations, which were critical in the 2006-2008 food shortages and poor harvests.

AIDS, ESAP, local politics, the increased participation of women in trade, and poor living conditions at home, all combined to push girls out of the domestic sphere into public spaces. The children’s stories highlight that the main reasons for participating in these bands was the need for basic necessities.

## 6.6 Working children's own accounts

This section gives primacy to children's own accounts of their diverse working experiences in their total contexts, and how they understood and dealt with their experiences.

### **“Just “hanging out” with friends**

In the survival bands, the *makonekts* served as mediators between different parties. These could be two children's groups, children and adults, the producers and the market, the police and the child workers. Whilst other children worked at the mining site, those on duty as *makonekts* would be strategically placed along the roads used by police conducting village raids. At times, they set up stalls at the village market, “*kwa* OK supermarket”, and sold various household utensils, fruits and vegetables from their foraging activities. The selling activities were often used as a “front” to disguise their main role as informants for the bands.

*Makonekts*, who worked in pairs, would be rewarded by villagers, other child groups, and the police, with monetary and non-monetary contributions, locally known as “*kupiwa* cut” (getting a slice of the cake,) in exchange for information. This role operated on a rotating basis, and both boys and girls over 10 years old participated. Children acquired their skills by observing others, and then improvising. The police often used the gold they had impounded from illegal gold mining to bribe the *makonekts* into giving them information.

Reynolds (1996) notes that during the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, both boys and girls acted as informants. Female informants were called *chimbwido*, and boys were called *mujibha*. The capacity of children to slip through different spaces, and their presumed innocence made them effective informants. There was a growing reluctance by villagers and the police to give them “cuts”, due to rumours that the children often sold them out to their enemies and that many village robberies were often committed by these children.

### **“Pimping” for “gold points” and chickens**

The role of children as “pimps” was not part of the prescribed band duties, but a choice of the children with necessary interpersonal skills and relevant connections. This challenges common assumptions about the participation of young girls as victims without option but to engage in sex work; always at risk of sexual abuse and HIV infection (Rau, 2003; Rurevo and Bourdillon, 2006). I found that the girls made friendships where they linked adult males with widows and to

village women whose husbands were frequently absent. They even linked males to “sexually generous women” who are known locally as “Mother Theresa” or *Mai Muponesi*.

Most girls informed me that they would not have sexual relationships with *makorokoza* because they always had disposable income of their own, although one cannot be really sure if this was the truth. Instead of putting themselves at risk, the girls made “friendships” with the boys in their work groups and hooked them up with women, thus acting as their pimps. Sometimes, girls would facilitate the booking of a room at the newly-built booking rooms at the shops. On a good day, a girl could go home with a live chicken or the cash equivalent, which amounted to two “points” of gold. A “point” is about the size of a grain of sugar.

At the time of fieldwork, the minimum requirement to make a sell of gold was one gram, the equivalent of ten “points” of gold, with a value of approximately US\$20 or ZAR200. At the rate applicable at that time, two points of gold was roughly equivalent to US\$4 or R40. In comparison to the US\$100 introduced in 2008 by the government as a “monthly allowance” for civil servants, these girls could easily surpass their salaries. Hence the popular joke about local teachers who often drink village brews from *shebeens*, because they cannot afford to drink the clear beer that comes in a “brown bottle”, which had come to be associated with *makorokoza*.

### **Grooming male “chefs” in the forest**

The children in the survival bands could sell most of the food produced by the group, particularly on weekends and during school holidays when they worked from 5am to 12 pm. The advantage to the “chefs” was that they could take home the surplus food to feed their family members. This particular task required specialisation and boys who cooked at home had an advantage. Dhevhi, the group leader for *madzibaba yan`a* was well known for his ability to cook wild vegetables and mice.

### **Becoming owls and chameleons in the forest**

Mining bands were largely made up of girls aged between 10-16 years. There were two gold mining groups with different work schedules and specialisations. The “owls” or *mazizi* were the best paid because their night work was seen as more dangerous. *Mazizi* worked underground, usually from 7pm to 10pm, digging shafts to find the “gold belt”, hauling and transporting rubble and gold. Matriq, with craft specialisation in both underground mining, and alluvial gold panning, belonged to this group as a group leader.



Underground mining was an activity seen as a preserve for boys (McIvor, 2000). However, as the ILO (2007) acknowledges, there seems to be a shift in gender roles as impoverished rural populations struggle to survive. Owls” (*mazizi*) do not sleep at night. It is also significant that all the gold mining groups had names of wild animals, which indicated a close relationship between the children and the wild. It could also be a tactic for the children to deal with fears of the forest, traditionally a space where spirits of the land reside. Although the gold panning, and underground mining activities of the *mazizi* contributed towards their survival, children were at risk from accidental burial or were swept away by rivers. They also faced the threat of arrest.

Chameleons (*kamilionzi*), carried out their mining activities during the day. Their name implies that they were able to blend into the forest and not be seen. Chameleons specialised in alluvial gold panning and did not go underground. To graduate as an owl was the ultimate goal of every chameleon because it expanded one’s the survival options. The invisibility of *kamilionzi* was due to their strong networks with *makonekts* who always made them aware of the activities of the police. The bands pooled their labour to “roast the stones” (*kukanga matombo*), and to “crush the stones” (*kudzvura matombo*). The process of crushing the stones was done using a pole and mortar (*duri ne mutswi*) and, in some cases, they used conventional grindstones (*huyo ne guyo*). These tools are used by women to process food for daily consumption, such as maize and millet. Miller (2000) and Pikirayi (1993) noted that archaeological evidence reveals that indigenous gold miners in Zimbabwe used the same simple technology, practiced mining as a family, but that women only crushed the stones and did not participate in the digging process.

The crushing and processing of gold was performed at the homesteads of the women in the children’s bands. The children referred to these women as mothers, “*mathazi*” and processed the gold under their supervision. Only adults were involved in marketing the gold. Girls were sometimes involved, but only in a limited way. This was the reason why girls eventually established their own separate, child managed “survival band” because they felt it was unfair for them to be excluded from monetary transactions. The initial child groups set up under *makorokoza* had partial supervision by adults, and the children felt they were being short-changed when it came to marketing the gold. Survival bands thus gave girls in *Chiweshe* a chance to participate in work and spaces that had been constructed as “male” by the colonial process.

### **“Gold diggers”: A feminine occupation?**

Some of the women and girls from the bands formed new alliances aimed at making the processing and marketing of gold in South Africa easier for women. This group operated alongside the other bands and went by the name “*gee dees*”, which was a shortened version of the word gold diggers. This group of women and girls excavated underground pits for gold during their spare time. I noted that this new group comprised entirely of women and children who were followers of the *Johwani Marange* Apostolic Sect. *Mai* Javangwe informed me that she had been a cross border trader since the early 1980s. She explained that the reason for establishing another group was that they felt that male *makorokoza* paid them very little when they exchanged gold for money.

*Mai* Javangwe explained that the children did not only supply her with gold, but with various other items as well, such as dried vegetables, dried rabbit meat, and beetles. She claimed that the items had a ready market in South Africa where she sold them to other Zimbabweans residing in the country. The girls in her band also obtained various household tools like cooking sticks and sweeping brooms, which she sold in South Africa. When the group needed urgent money or food items, they sometimes called a well-known white male gold buyer known as *Murungu wekuBindura*, ‘the white man from Bindura’. The women and girls met with him often and negotiated for better prices for their commodities. Despite their involvement in this group, young girls were still at a disadvantage because only older women were directly involved in the sales, which gave them great power. Most girls, however, testified that they preferred working with the *mathaz* rather than the males because the *mathaz* allowed them to negotiate for flexible working hours, especially on those days when they could only attend school in the afternoons. I was still unsure if the girls truly benefitted from this alliance, or if they were being subjected to a new form of “feminine” tyranny instead.

### **Child hunters and gatherers in the new millennium?**

In this section, I highlight how, even if hunting and gathering activities were viewed as an inferior survival strategy and were often used as a “cover” for gold mining, they opened up extra livelihood possibilities for impoverished households. Hunting and gathering knowledge and skills facilitated food, medication, sweeping brooms and utensils for food production and processing for the households. Some of the vegetables, beetles, and fruits gathered by the

children fed the cross border commodity market as the women took the items along with gold to South Africa and Mozambique.

### **Matriq's story**

Matriq was a 15-year-old girl who stayed with her ill grandmother and siblings after the death of her parents. She informed me that working in the child bands were her only source of hope as she and her immediate family had been accused of witchcraft and were thus ostracised in the community. She wrote the following in her diary:

It was a terrible time for us, we had just lost our parents, but people turned us away, nobody wanted us to visit their houses or even help us with clothing or food. They were afraid that we would “bewitch them and eat them like we had done all our relatives whose numerous graves filled our yard” they said! We almost starved to death whilst our relatives watched, what was surprising, though, was that my uncle was not afraid of utilising the land that belonged to witches. Even now, he refuses to let us use my late father's land. So this is my only way out...I have to be brave and work like the other girls. God will keep me safe.

(Matriq diary notes, 2007)

I argue that these witchcraft accusations were part of the larger politics of survival in the village given the context of political-economic change, hardship and uncertainty prevailing. Like Honwana and De Boeck (2005: 211), I argue that “child witches” represent “figure[s] of crisis” during periods of rapid change and alienation in communities. In this case, the rapid changes were the result of the combined effects of the AIDS pandemic and the political economic changes, to which both adults and children were responding. Nhenga (2008) notes that stigma of any kind often results in the isolation and neglect of children by relatives, thus forcing children to work outside the home. In this case, witchcraft accusations were meant to discourage and control the mobility of girls, particularly those who were known to be working at night in the goldmines.

There were also large numbers of children who took on the responsibility of nursing their family members whenever there was an illness in the home. These children often had no support from the “culturally appointed” family guardians who were supposed to help them. One girl complained bitterly:

I went to uncle's house to ask for money to pay my examination fees. He shouted at me, and complained that I pretend to be working with *makorokoza*, and that I only go there to look for

men. He kept saying that I am lazy and wasteful, and that should work as hard as he did when he worked on white settlers' farms. I would rather work more hours than go and hear that white farmer story again...I will work hard and get a good job...then I will buy a full chicken for each of my sisters with my first salary.

(Field notes from casual conversation with Tambudzai, 12 years)

Matriq said she often had dreams of her father angrily questioning her why she had let a stranger stay in his house, and why she left her siblings in the forest. Her dreams enabled her to voice her grievances about being cheated out of her inheritance by her uncle. The reference to the twins abandoned in the forest may be mere projections of her burden of care, rather than predictions (as she believed) of the twins deaths. Abandoning twins in the forest also reflected her constant battle for survival by working in the mines and subject to conditions that are widely regarded as improper and dangerous for young girls. Her dreams are thus reflexive and reflective of both her reality and of the cultural values in *Chiweshe* (Reynolds,1989; Nashef, 1992 on children's dreams).

### **Gathering fruits and vegetables**

All the girls I spoke to from the survival bands still had to perform their gendered roles when they returned home. The knowledge and food gathered in the bands greatly contributed to their household food requirements. Matriq and her "friends" often gathered food on their way home from school and did so in their respective bands. Collectively, they gathered edible insects, plants to make various teas, mosquito repellents, firewood, vegetables and fruits. They usually gathered any fruits that were in season, such as snort apples, wild loquats, sweet monkey oranges, and *mobola* plums amongst others. Matriq confided in me that some of the fruits could be fermented quickly with the aid of yeast and heat in order to produce a popular, cheap illegal beer known locally as *kachasu*, to sell to *makorokoza* gangs. Matriq ensured that her siblings had food to eat at school, and had invented numerous recipes that she used to prepare meals for her siblings.

### **Digging for "cell phones"**

Matriq informed me that they often went digging to catch small mice, *mbeva*, which were shared or used as a relish, which they had nicknamed *chamboko chesadza* because having any type of meat made meals more palatable, especially for those who were sick and often had no appetite.

The phrase *chamboko chesadza* thus literary translated to “a whip for the *sadza*” and referenced the gusto and speed with which meals containing mice were consumed. Mice were also light-heartedly referred to as *maserufoni*, cellphones, because of their shape. The tail of the mouse was jokingly likened to the aerials of cell phones. Humour was a large part of the children’s lives and they used it to talk about serious issues.

Gelfand (1979) notes that digging for mice, and hunting for small animals, was a gender and age practice in the past. Small boys were expected to hunt small animals first, before they could hunt bigger ones. Digging for mice is done anywhere where one notices mice tracks leading to a hole in the ground. Matriq had never dug for mice until she joined the survival bands; she had also learnt how to this from the young boys in her group.

### **Knowledge and skills development in the survival bands**

I was struck by the quality and quantity of knowledge of the *Chiweshe* children. The adults in the groups and the community were also learning from children like Matriq who had vast survival-enhancing knowledge. The children ate more fruits and knew more varieties than most adults. Through knowledge and skills from her survival band” and what she had learnt from *Gogo*, Matriq was often able to raise money for school fees. She told me that since joining the gold diggers, her situation at home had improved. She could afford bus fare to take her sisters for the *chirongwa*, AIDS Programme, at Howard Mission hospital where they got free Cotrimaxozole. She complained that, since Howard was one of the few hospitals with such a programme, the hospital was always overcrowded. At times, this meant that Matriq had to go home without any medication for her siblings. When I accompanied her to Howard hospital one day, I noticed that preferential treatment was given to adults and people from Harare.

Since the local clinic often had no medication, Matriq told me that she used a herb that she had learnt about from her grandmother, called “Black Jack” (*Bidens Pilosa*) or *mhuwu* or *tsine*. This herb helped treat dermatological conditions, such as the recurrent skin rashes her siblings experienced. She had learnt that the plant could also be consumed as a vegetable from Mutsa, a fellow band member. She, in turn, shared her knowledge of the dermatological effects of the plant, and other group members were impressed. The survival band thus provided a platform to share survival-enhancing knowledge. Zimdahl (2007) argues that as plants classified by agricultural scientists, weeds are an underutilised, highly nutritious food source that even

people in the developed world use. These “weeds” have multiple advantages over cultivated vegetables, such as that they grow rapidly, are abundant, and contain high quality protein, and multivitamins (Shava and Tasosa, 2000; Pieroni and Price, 2006) This demonstrates that children acquire knowledge, money, and life-enhancing skills from their participation in these work-bands.

Nyazema (1986) argued that while the use of wild herbs as food and preventive medication helps the poor in Zimbabwe, there were also a lot of deaths from poisoning. I did not hear of any case of food poisoning, even in child-managed households, which tended to rely extensively on wild foods for their subsistence. Matriq informed me that when she was not sure whether gathered food was toxic or not, she always gave it to her dog to eat first. Mutsa, an eleven-year-old girl in Matriq’s band, proudly displayed her knowledge on edible wild foods:

When my parents were alive, we never ate any wild mushrooms because we often had other foods. After their death, I had to learn about the different types of mushrooms that are edible, so as to supplement what we got from the fields. From my friends, I came to know that mushrooms can be eaten fresh, boiled or dried and are a good substitute for meat. We often exchange our mushrooms for food, chickens or anything else of value.

(Transit notes, whilst walking, 2008)

It is significant that children had such extensive knowledge and that they were utilising resources that otherwise would have gone unnoticed. Children’s groups were also aware that trading in the local currency was not lucrative and thus operated on a non-monetary basis as a way to deal with the inflation of the Zimbabwean dollar.

One day, I saw Dhevhi holding some beautiful handcrafts and I asked him where he had bought them from. He replied that he and some friends from church had made them from natural products they collected from the forest. His band had taught him how to make the artefacts using natural dyes derived from indigenous trees, and other natural products such as the reeds, grass, (sisal) *gafe*, cattle hides, goat skin, and rabbit skin. His group made wall hangings, baskets, mats, shoe straps, shawls, and blankets. His friends from church also carved wooden products, such as cooking sticks, pounding mortars and sticks (*duri ne mutswi*), bowls, wooden plates and various musical instruments like “*hosho*” (a percussion-like semi-oval instrument) and *ngoma* (drums).

Dhevhi and his group used the bark of the *muzhanje* fruit tree (*Uaparca kirkiana*) and the waterberry tree (*mukute* :(*Syzigium guieense*) to make two different shades of brown dye. The

process involved grinding the bark from each tree and boiling these together with the fabric to be dyed. After the boiling process, the fabric will have turned brown. At times they would tie up the fabric with bits of string derived from wet tree barks of specific trees, which they call *rwodzi* or *gavi* (which is also used to bundle-up firewood for easier transportation, or during construction), to produce a patterned effect on the fabric, which is locally known as “tie and dye”. Dhevhi stated that his band copied this idea from a women’s cooperative group in the village. He claimed that his band had better “contacts” to potential buyers because of their links with gold buyers. The women’s cooperative was not too pleased with the group and was trying to discredit them by alleging that the young boys used the church as a cover for illegal activities.

### **Dhevhi’s story**

One afternoon, during my first week of fieldwork, I decided to visit Dhevhi (14 years) who lives with his sister, Dadi (8 years), and their grandfather, *Sekuru* Murambiwa. Upon my arrival, I was surprised to see what appeared to be a deserted home, but with a cleanly swept yard. I later discovered that Dhevhi made it a point to sweep the yard every day before he left for school. *Sekuru* complained that his grandchildren always came home late from school because they liked “playing” and doing non-productive, childish activities (*zvisina-maturo*) on the way back. I was thirsty so I asked for water, but there was no water to drink, since that morning the children had not had time to go to the village well. The children arrived after a while. Dhevhi had a bundle of firewood and another of wild okra (*derere rechijonga: Truimphetta rhomboidea*), and Dadi had a plastic bag full of beetles (*mandere*). When she saw me she could not contain her joy because they were going to have a “proper supper”. *Sekuru* Murambiwa took the packets that the children had collected and insisted that they needed to be dried properly to ensure that they would last several days. All this, despite his charge about children’s after school activities being childish and non-productive activities, that is, *zvisina maturo*.

*Sekuru* Murambiwa was made an outcast by his relatives due to family conflict over the chieftaincy title. Most of his brothers and close kin had relocated to Murehwa village after he was awarded the position of headman (*sabhuku*). *Sekuru* Murambiwa was the eldest son of the late chief, but he was considered illegitimate, and not recognised as a legitimate member of the family. When he won the chieftaincy title and two of his brothers mysteriously died in the village, he was accused of having caused these deaths. According to village gossip, both brothers

seemed to have died of AIDS-related meningitis since their wives had died too, all within a very short time of each other. All the children, however, survived, thus Dhevhi had many double-orphaned cousins whom the community was more willing to help. Dhevhi's mother and grandparents were still alive.

Dhevhi's mother had remarried after his father abandoned her for another woman and since moved to Manica, at the Mozambican Boarder. She had an abusive husband who would not let her visit Dhevhi even when she could afford to. Dhevhi's father passed away just after I began my fieldwork. According to *Shona* cultural beliefs, children are viewed as having the same bloodline as their father such that when a man dies, the woman cannot claim the children, especially if she wants to remarry from a different family. A woman is seen as an alien (*mutorwa*) and is therefore not related to her children. She has to leave them with the paternal relatives, unless she agrees to be inherited by one of her late husbands' brothers. Dhevhi's mother had even failed to attend her own sister's funeral the previous year. One day Dhevhi remarked:

I have to work to look after my sister because no one in this village will help us. They say that our mother chose her husband over us, so she is a prostitute, but I know that we are not staying with our mother because she is poor. I shall work until I have enough money, then bring my mother back to the village, and look after her.

(Interview with Dhevhi, 2007)

*Sekuru* Murambiwa was accused of having obtained an evil charm, known as *chikwambo*, from South Africa, which he used to acquire political power and to cause the death of the two brothers, his children and wife. These rumours had served to alienate him further in the community, even among his closest neighbours. Dhevhi stayed with his grandparents and elder brother. Dhevhi's grandmother had died suddenly, followed by two of her children, all within a space of two years. His brother, who had been the breadwinner of this family, belonged to a religious group that encouraged men to have multiple wives. Dhevhi's brother thus had two wives and a total of five children: three children with the first wife, and two with the second wife. He could not afford look after Dhevhi and Dadi.

Dhevhi himself indicated that he did not like his brothers' wives because he felt that they treated him badly and tried to make him suffer even more. He was therefore not interested in having them take care of him and his sister. According to Dhevhi, whenever his brothers' wives



dished out the food, they always gave him and his sister the smallest shares. This was why he had decided to join the survival bands and ensure that he and his sister never went to bed hungry. Dhevhi had a recurrent dream in which he was surrounded by good food, and yet was unable to eat it. He recalled the dream in the following way:

I always dream...I am selling in a shop. I am feeling very hungry... so ... so hungry...but every time I want to steal something to eat, the fat adult shop owner always comes in shouting at me for being lazy, useless and better off following my dead parents! It is a nasty dream, but I keep dreaming it!

Nashef (1992) argues that dreams are symbolic representations of their context-specific concerns, and that dreams provide children with a culturally acceptable way to question adult authority on issues that concern them. Dhevhi's dreams on hunger reflect his main concerns about hunger and inadequate food. I found it interesting that *Sekuru* Murambiwa only cooked and shared food with his grandchildren on those days that Dhevhi brought home rabbit meat. On all other days, he did not share in any house chores. Dhevhi learnt to cook and to fend for himself from an early age as his father hardly visited or provided for them even when he was still alive. His father had taken another wife in South Arica where he worked as a migrant worker. Dhevhi's experiences of hunger were immediate and he had to work in the bands to earn food to eat. His grandfather died during my fieldwork and Dhevhi and his sister were living on their own in *Sekuru*'s homestead.

### **Man, the gatherer: Gathering insects**

Dhevhi and his *madzibaba yan'a* group collected and trapped edible insects, locusts, grasshoppers, mice and certain types of flying ants. The grasshopper types included *madzomba*, a favourite due to their high fat content, which made them much tastier. There was a wider variety of grasshoppers during the rainy season, the most common types being the long horned grasshopper known locally as *tsunya-tsunya* (*Acrididae*). A version of the non-horned grasshopper was the *Cyrtacarithacris tatarica*. The most commonly collected ants included a type of flying ant known as *ishwa* (*Macrotermes falcigar*), and beetles ,*madzambarafuta*. There were different types of beetles; however, the most favoured types were *mandere* and *majuru* (termites). When it came to trading and selling, the flying ants, *ishwa*, were the most lucrative.

Morris (2008) argues that major studies of societies by anthropologists such as Turnbull's (1965) study of the Ik foragers did not give much attention to the relationship between insects and human beings. He notes that Lee (1979) only mentions three types of insects, and yet the !Kung San utilised seventy different types of insects as food. Bodenheimer (in Morris, 2008) argues that insects are among the most nutritious foods, high in calories, protein, fats and minerals. Defoliart (1999) states that insects were, and still are, consumed by many communities in the world. The introduction of agriculture and the domestication of animals were among the main reasons why the consumption of insects came to be associated with "backwardness" and "primitiveness". In *Chiweshe*, insects often were the only type of food available for the next meal, or the only available income generating activity for raising school fees. Dhevhi knew how to prepare wild foods properly, and told me that, if cooked incorrectly, some foods would not be palatable. Improper preparation could also destroy all the nutrients as well.

As stated earlier, hunting of smaller animals like mice, by *madzibaba yan'a*, was regarded as the inferior form of hunting for small boys (Gelfand, 1979). According to La Fontaine (1978), the hunting of small animals is seen as an "improper" activity for males, and does not qualify as real hunting. When contrasted with the preference for girls' labour in mining activities, the hunting of small animals and gathering of insects by boys may demonstrate the decreasing social value of boys' work in *Chiweshe*. It also shows how in a time of crisis, the gender and age divisions of labour lose value to a survival ethos.

Arrehay et al (2006) argues that internationally and locally there has been an unjustifiable focus on "AIDS orphans" at the expense of other children in the community also affected by HIV. Dhevhi, Matriq and their siblings suffered lack of access to food, health services, social and economic support from relatives because they did not fit into the existing typology of "vulnerability". The fact that Matriq's uncle was well known for helping the less fortunate in *Chiweshe* prevented people from seeing the child neglect that was going on inside his own family. Most children, orphans or not, were thus turning to non-kin relations outside the family, and creating their own networks for survival. AIDS is increasingly transforming the social organisation of the *Chiweshe* society through the children, and transforming the relationship of children to the natural environment, by shifting the dependency relations from the parents and children (intergenerational) to amongst the children themselves (intragenerational), and between children and the environment.

The children informed me that the work bands had given them new social relations and networks essential for survival. They noted there was a change in the use of the phrases like *kudya tese* (eating together), which is an activity that is normal with close family relations. In the survival bands, the phrase was used to refer to the sharing of resources within the children's groups. The emphasis placed on shared food implied relatedness and illustrates how social boundaries were being repositioned through the children's work-bands. Pikirayi (1993) observed that the whole family participated in gold digging process in the past, but new forms of relatedness are emerging as children work in order to survive.

### Double shift

I examined the amount of time that Matriq spent daily on various household chores in order to better understand what life in a child managed house-hold entailed. Unlike most children, Matriq did not participate in afternoon activities at school as her afternoons were largely devoted to survival activities.

#### Matriq's schedule

Below is a general summary of Matriq's typical activities on Mondays, when she does not have band activities at night, nor laundry to wash.

**Table 1: Matriq's daily routine**

Time of day	Tasks performed	Total Working Hours
5.00 am – 5.20 am	Gather firewood	20 minutes
5.20 am – 5.40am	Prepare fire	20 minutes
5.40 am- 6.10 am	Sweep yard	30 minutes
6.10 am – 6.40 am	Wash plates and pots	30 minutes
6.40 am- 7.20 am	Walk to school	1 hr 20 minutes
7.30 am- 1.00 pm	School sessions	6 hrs 30 minutes
1.00 pm- 3.30 pm	Band activities	2 hrs 30 minutes
3.30 pm- 4.50 pm	Walk home	1h
4.50- 5 .30 pm	Fetch water	40 minutes
4.50 pm- 5.30 pm	Home garden	45 minutes
5.30 pm – 7.30 pm	Cook supper	2 hrs
7.30 pm- 9.00 pm	Bathe child and siblings and give medication	1 hr 30 minutes
9.00pm-10.00pm	Homework/study	1 hour
<b>Total hours per day</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>18 hours</b>

### Dhevhi's Daily Routine

In comparison, below is Dhevhi's schedule of tasks on a Monday. He shares chores with his sister, and there are fewer demands on him.

**Table 2: Dhevhi’s schedule of tasks**

Time of day	Tasks performed	Total Hours
5.30 am- 6.00 am	Gather and chop wood	30 minutes
6.00am – 6.20 am	Cook porridge	20 minutes
6.20 am- 6.50 am	Sweep yard	30 minutes
6.50 am- 7.10 am	Walk to school	20 minutes
7.30 am – 1.00 pm	Schooling Sessions	6hrs 30 minutes
2.00 pm- 4.00 pm	Band activity	2 hrs
4.00 pm- 4.20 pm	Walk home	20 minutes
5.30pm- 6.30 pm	Cook supper	1 hour
6.30-7.30	Study/ Homework	1 hour
<b>Total hours per day</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>12 hours 50minutes</b>

Dhevhi’s schedule of tasks is much shorter than Matriq’s even though both children get resources from the environment. Dhevhi’s activities are less bound to the home space and give him direct access to cash that he has relatively greater control over. In contrast, Matriq’s tasks constituted largely of unpaid and “invisible” work. The schedules also show the increased burden on Matriq since she worked both at home and at the mines. If the chores that girls also have to perform at schoolteacher’s houses are included, it becomes even more apparent that the girls in *Chiweshe* face a tremendous burden compared to their male counterparts. On numerous occasions during fieldwork, I noticed that teachers at Matriq’s school would send her to fetch water or to babysit for them, for no payment at all. Although the work bands enabled the children survive, it added to their work burden. It is also interesting to note the reversal of the gendered division of labour in both Dhevhi and Matriq’s lives.

**Picture 10: Some of the edible insects the children collected**



**Picture 11: Young girl panning for gold**



**Picture 12: One of the sites where children practiced small-scale mining activities**



## 6.7 Conclusion

The overall aim of this chapter was to understand the complex links of AIDS contexts and child labour issues using an ethnographic lens that captures children's views and experiences. In my attempt to do that, I demonstrated that children's survival groups, and the networks, knowledge and interpersonal skills acquired through them facilitate multiple possibilities for survival. Furthermore, I showed that the groups opened up spaces for children to tactfully negotiate, challenge and subvert gender, age and spatial restrictions that hampered their attempts for survival. In the process, I highlighted the agency of children; particularly the eldest female child whom I noted had been overshadowed by the focus on the agency of women and boys only.

I illustrated that the gendered division of child work was flexible and that young girls in *Chiweshe* were increasingly taking on roles that traditionally had been dominated by adult males work such as in the small-scale mining work. Some boys, on the other hand, were increasingly adopting roles that they classified as "feminine", whilst finding other spheres through which to reaffirm their masculinity. Contrary to the popular conservative view of children as non-productive, I have managed to show how children are crucial actors in household, national and global economies. These children saw their activities as part of the ordinary, everyday business of survival. Going beyond the children's own views, this chapter has demonstrated the agency of children in contexts of an HIV and AIDS epidemic and political economic change.

## CHAPTER 8

### SINGING ABOUT AIDS, SEXUALITY AND GENDER: SILENCES, EXCLUSIONS AND HEALING

#### 8.1 Introduction

As I got out of the bus and started walking towards the hall where the AIDS Day dance competitions were being held, the blazing midday sun made me realise that I was already late for this annual event, which was organised by the National AIDS Council in peri-urban Glendale. From the main road, I could hear sounds of excitement, mingled with the rapid beating of drums and rattles and the occasional laughter and cheers from the audience. I arrived in time to see a performance by a group of children who were arranged in two semi-circle rows, with one boy and one girl in the centre, wiggling their waists and hips towards each other in sync. With the rhythmic movement, the girl and boy moved closer until their groins were slightly in contact and then they quickly moved away from each other as though the contact had burnt them. The audience was singing along to the familiar tune of a traditional dance song with the words *Guva rangu, kana ndazofa, ndoiswa paruware!* (When I die, place my grave on a solid rock!) Then the pace of the drum became faster and faster, the audience stopped singing and the children began singing a new song that was unfamiliar to the audience. One of the children started blowing a whistle, and the girls in the group formed three rows and, with their backs to the audience, bent down and wriggled their buttocks in very fast motions. The boys danced directly behind them in a sexually suggestive manner chanting *Cele! Cele!* Initially, there was stunned silence among the audience, which was made up of school children, some teachers, local youths, a few National AIDS Council (NAC) and local health officials. As the performance continued, the audience broke out in giggles tinged with embarrassment, anger, astonishment and enjoyment all at once! Shortly after that, one boy and girl took centre stage again, and the boy swept the girl up in his arms and ran off the stage with her, with the other boys seemingly in hot pursuit. That was the final performance of the day. I then sat down next to a staff member from the local clinic whom I had recognised. Upon seeing me, he stopped laughing and made the following comment:

We only give condoms to adults; the children here are not promiscuous! Giving children condoms will only give them ideas that their innocent minds are not yet thinking about! They should just concentrate on school and pass, and then the rest will follow!

In the previous chapter, I analysed the ways in which children creatively used metaphors to talk indirectly about illness and death in a context of multiple and untimely deaths associated with AIDS, and high stigma. I will now focus on the songs and dances that children used to comment performatively on AIDS-related silence and stigma, deaths, illness, sexuality, gender deconstructions, and other related issues affecting them. This will allow me to assess the extent to which the HIV and AIDS total contexts affect and are affected by the children`s actions and experiences. I give primacy to the children`s interpretations of their performances, and compare them with those of adults which reveals tensions, and contradictions in experiences and understandings of childhoods, and the intricate linkages between HIV and AIDS and sexuality and gender.

“A picture is worth a thousand words and a performance a thousand experiences”.

**Picture 13: Primary school children`s enactment of the “bridal kidnapping” or Musengabere tradition**





**Picture 14: Preserving local traditions through children`s musical performances?**



## **8.2 Preserving local traditions or enacting the complex contradictions of childhoods in late modernity and AIDS contexts**

As evidence of the assault of AIDS and neoliberal economic changes on children mounts, research into children`s knowledge and experiences of AIDS, sexuality and gender is increasingly gaining importance. Most researchers claim that this growing interest is due to the information`s potential to inform sexual and reproductive healthcare services, sex education, and the now famous “edutainment” and health promotion initiatives for young people (Izugbara, 2005; Bhana, 2007). Some researchers have pointed out that the increased interest in young people has more to do with concerns about decaying values, intergenerational relationships, moral and AIDS panics, and the need to control and curb the unruly and risky behaviours associated with the young ( Mate, 2012; Bhana, 2008).

Dominant in the literature are conservative and traditional psychology-based health behavioural models, focusing on adolescents who fall in the 13-16 years category, which resonates with biomedical categories of “risk groups”. Those children who are younger, usually of primary school going age, in the 4-12 years category are often left out of most analyses (Izugbara, 2005; Chikovere et al, 2009:503). Classifying children as at risk (youths and infants), as “little innocent angels” or as “little depraved devils” can be traced back to the Apollonian and Dionysian views of children. These have been linked to Puritanism and have been used to justify “intrusions” from adults aimed at either protecting or controlling children (Ansell, 2005:11). I argue that these neat categorisations do not fully capture the messy realities of these children’s lives, particularly those living in multiple crises contexts where age is not always a criteria for inclusion or exclusion.

### **8.3 Childhood innocence, AIDS, and sexuality in Zimbabwe**

Images of childhood sexual purity and innocence are found in most historical, religious, and cultural accounts, oral traditions, poems, paintings and other forms of representational aspects of life (Heywood, 2001; Bhana, 2007). Amongst the *Shona* people of Zimbabwe, childhood sexual innocence is epitomised by the well-known story of *Pasipamire*, spirit medium of the legendary *Chaminuka* who was said to have prophesied the arrival of white colonial rule in Zimbabwe. According to the legend, as *Chaminuka* and his retinue were on their way to meet *Lobengula*, they were attacked by the king’s warriors and only *Chaminuka* survived. The following story shows how childhood and sexuality are traditionally perceived:

*Chaminuka* alone survived the slaughter. He sat calmly playing his *mbira*. His death was decreed. But lo! The spear of the enemy failed to harm him. Perplexed, the warriors fired their rifles at him, but the bullets merely fell in a heap before the intended victim. Even fire – so says the account of another – was built all around him, but it did not scorch him. *Chaminuka* revealed to them the secret that his death could only be caused by a young boy, sexually pure, who could stab him with fatal results. Once dead, the warriors cut up his body.

(Reynolds, 1996:xii)

Gwanzura-Ottmoller and Kesby (2005) note that, despite growing evidence that children are willing to contribute to discussions on sexuality and AIDS in Zimbabwe, children’s views,

experiences and agency regarding these issues are often not given adequate attention. The exceptions are those instances when the focus is on children as innocent and passive victims.

A study conducted in Zimbabwe by Centre for Reproductive Law and Policy (CRLP) and Child and Law Foundation (CLF),( 2003) reported that approximately fifty percent of both boys and girls had their first sexual encounter at the age of 12 and that more than eighty-five percent of both sexes were sexually active by the age of 16. Despite this evidence, church groups, adults and the state in remained in denial about childhood sexuality, hence any form of sexual agency among children is often not tolerated. For instance, children cannot access reproductive health services such as condoms, pills or even reproductive health counselling services, out of fear that such exposure will incite inappropriate behaviour in children (Chikovore et al, 2009; CRLP and CLF, 2003). I argue that these beliefs present an incomplete picture of childhoods and may have fatal and negative consequences for children’s health and wellbeing given the context of AIDS and political economic decline.

Correa, Petchesky and Parker (2008) note that one of the ironies of the advent of the AIDS pandemic is that, it has promoted “opening up” on issues of sexuality whilst, at the same time, there has been what they called “the sad return of the religious”. I argue that these contradicting modes of existence are the norm in *Chiweshe*, where the church has “closed up” on sexual issues and the state continues to offer stale messages on abstinence and chastity. In a Zimbabwean context where the formal education and health systems are on the decline, coupled with a legal system and AIDS policy fraught with inconsistencies and contradictions on children’s reproductive health issues (Chikovore et al, 2009; CRLP and CLF, 2003), I suggest that attention to children’s performances offers a crucial starting point in any serious analysis of childhoods, and how they intersect with issues of sexuality, politics, and gender.

#### **8.4 Performances and anthropology**

Although there is a wide range of anthropological studies that deal with musical performances, I outline below two anthropological studies which directly influenced this chapter. My work draws from James and McNeill (2011:193) who propose that a critical analysis of musical performances can help the anthropologist gain “privileged access to layers of consciousness that are normally not available to scholarly examination”. They also argue that performances represent the “the tip of the iceberg of culture floating in a sea of history and consciousness”

where performers get a platform to “sing what they cannot talk about”. In a similar fashion, I contend that due to the silences surrounding AIDS illness, death and sexuality in *Chiweshe*, children’s performances and their interpretations of these performances reveal that they, too, “sing what they cannot talk about”. These children artfully and purposely draw from existing musical genres such as *Jerusarema* traditional songs, Zimbabwe’s liberation struggle songs, and church hymns with which people are already familiar.

These children tactfully took advantage of any opportunities and platforms available to them to communicate their messages to the wider public. They performed at funerals; AIDS Day commemorations; sports competitions; and political rallies. The contrast between the girls’ and boys’ songs and the commentary provided by both performers and the audience reveals complex, multiple and divergent, historically constituted understandings of the problems at hand. These performances act as “stories people tell themselves about themselves”. Niehaus and Stadler (2004) argue that studying such performances remains valid in contemporary anthropology. They argue that dancing contests, like those they studied in Bushbuckridge, South Africa, cannot be reduced to single, simplistic interpretations as either resistance or acquiesce. Performances are a “war of images and words” that reveal the deeper complexities of everyday realities.

I argue that closer analysis of the songs and contexts of performances by children in *Chiweshe*, demonstrate that the actions and songs had unintended and unexpected consequences whose roots can be traced back to current both neo-liberal and historical, intergenerational, gender, and sexuality struggles. By publicly performing sexualised AIDS songs, the children reinforced adult perceptions of them as “agents” of modernity, immorality and by association, the vectors of the AIDS virus. For many children, however, the performances were about the serious business and politics of survival. James and McNeill (2011) highlight the need to go beyond the concerns of most early research that seemed to focus on the functions of musical performance in maintaining social order, delineating life cycles, or gender and age positions. They urge contemporary researchers to pay more attention to the particular contexts of performances, such as neo-liberal and contexts of high AIDS prevalence, and how these contexts shape and are shaped by these performances. Children’s performances in *Chiweshe* can therefore be seen as either contributing towards maintaining the existing social order, or contesting it. They should also be viewed within the total contexts of AIDS, the accompanying syndemics, gender and generational inequalities, and neoliberal political economic contexts.

From Butler's performativity theory (1993), I use my term "performative agency under multiple constraints". I argue that the children's performances can be re-read as illustrations of performative agency under multiple constraints within the contexts of AIDS and political change. Butler (1993:2) defines performativity as "the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects it names". She argues that it is through repeated acts of reiteration and citation that gender and sexual realities are constituted. I argue that within the children's performances are similar processes of reiteration and citation. Their dances also enable them to constitute and reconstitute themselves and their realities. Performativity, thus, involves discourses and the actions that support those discursive reiterations.

Singers (2008;2010) concept of syndemics is a useful way to think about the multiple constraints in the children's environment and how these work together to increase suffering, illness and death. The syndemics that are at play here include HIV and AIDS, multiple and untimely deaths, illness, stigma, poverty, food shortages, gender and generational inequalities, exclusions, silences and denials, among others in *Chiweshe*. The performative agency of children enabled them to recreate themselves as knowledgeable on issues of sexuality and health promotion. Concerns over children's performances were only "the tip of the iceberg" (McNeill, 2007) because they reflected broader local-global and intergenerational struggles to re-define the appropriate spaces for childhood and definitions of culture.

In this chapter, I show that a critical analysis of children's performances, paying close attention to both adults' and children's interpretations, and the total contexts in which these performances occur, is a critical starting point to access the deeper, underlying meanings. In the following section, I introduce and examine two children's groups whose performances were controversial. However, the groups were gaining popularity as 'professional mourners' given the broader context of frequent funerals and one child remarked that "the villagers tears are finished" from crying almost every day.

### ***Bhoz dzemorefire: Innocent little boys just being boys***

This group was apparently established in 2000 by a now deceased schoolteacher who had an interest in resuscitating traditional modes of music and dance, which he felt were disappearing through modernity. The group became known through performing at school ceremonies and the NAC functions during World AIDS day commemorations. This popularity increased after the

death their patron because the boys were given a platform to perform at the customary “night vigil” that is held before a burial. The boys are reported to have sung continuously all night and gained popularity as “professional mourners.” The group got its name from a well-known local song that audience demanded to be sung repeatedly at the schoolteacher’s funeral. I was informed that the church women who had initially led most songs at the funeral were apparently too drunk to sing; the boys were then asked to step in and take over the singing so that people would stay awake during the night vigil. Falling asleep at such an event is generally viewed as disrespecting the dead.

The group *Boyz dzemorefire* was made up of 16 permanent members and two auxiliary members who attended a distant boarding school and joined only the school holidays. The ages of the boys ranged from 7-15 years and permanent membership could be earned by displaying that one had various skills, such as the ability to beat the drum, dance or sing. Decisions on which songs to perform and who would lead were based on audience responses to different members’ performances. The group had, however, chosen the eldest boy, to be their “pleasure manager”, here given the pseudonym, Brian.

Any member in the group could compose, or come with a song they knew and teach the group, and even lead the song. The boys often wore t-shirts and shorts underneath grass skirts similar to those worn for the *Jerusarema/Mbende* dance (Asante,1985). In line with the view of the *Jerusarema* dance as a traditional war tactic dance to distract the enemy, the *boyz dzemorefire* saw themselves as warriors, hunters, and guardians of traditional culture, and interpreted their activities as acts to preserve the dignity of local cultures and hegemonic masculinities, themes that were prominent in some of their performances.

### **Girls *dzecele*: Modern girls out of place?**

The popularity of this girls’ group grew after their joint performance with the boys’ group at an AIDS Day competition and, recognising the popularity of the girls performance with local youths, the *boyz dzemorefire* group started inviting them to their own performances. Girlz *dzecele* comprised of six girls, two of whom were teenage mothers still in school and who led the cheer leading squad for the school girl’s netball team.

The girls stated that they had formed the group because the boys group had refused to let them join. The girls therefore wanted to prove that they were better performers. The group seems

to have become popular at their school when they incorporated the dancing moves of a celebrated *Sungura* dancing queen, *Cele Mamma*, whose distinct style was adopted by the girls. One of the girls, Maidei, had a relatively wealthy uncle, from whose shop they could watch television and learn new dances. The *cele* dance was highly sexualised and performed mostly at night during funerals, because it was assumed that all the pre-teen “little children” would have gone to bed. However, I noticed young children in attendance at many of the night vigils I attended. In a casual conversation about the formation of “*girls dzecele*”, Maidei, made the following telling remark:

When I dance and sing and people pay attention, then I don't feel ignored. Everybody here knows what my father's brother did to me but they just pretend and keep blaming me for getting pregnant. Even the girls from school judge me, and yet it is known that they have sex with male teachers and gold panners, but still everyone judges me yet I don't even have a boyfriend! So, I will keep singing and dancing through it all to show other girls how to protect each other from those evil adult men! Maybe one day I will make a lot of money, leave, and also come out the television like the original *cele mamma*! I am only telling you these things because you are modern like me, and will not judge me like my aunt and her church friends... plus, like me, you also have a small daughter who needs to be protected! I have to protect myself and my daughter, here in this village, there was nobody to protect me.

(Notes from a casual conversation with Maidei, 14 year old *cele* dancer)

This chat with Maidei demonstrated to me the complexity of both childhoods and performances. It forced me to reflect on issues surrounding the ethical dilemmas faced by researchers working on sexualities with children, such as Montgomery (2007), whilst doing research with child sex workers in Thailand. The difficult position Maidei was in, and the contradictory way she responded, that is, by preferring to act out the tensions in her life through the *cele* dances demonstrated to me that I could not simply reduce her to a victim or an agent, but had to consider her as an extra-ordinary survivor.

From her point of view, the performances were her way of finding a sphere of her life that she could control when everything else seemed to be out of control. When she was on the stage, temporarily, she was a heroine, not a poor orphan dependent for her subsistence and school fees on a sexually abusive adult relation. According to Barz (2011), musical performances have the potential to bring healing. Through controversial performances, she embodied and

displayed the tensions and contradictions in her life and saw them as a means for healing and possible future livelihood. The healing she got from performing was not only emotional and psycho-social, but also curing the economic deprivation and gender inequality.

In the following section, I outline and analyse some of the songs the children performed at events to show the complexity of children's performances. In referring to these performances, I use the word songs and performance interchangeably. My analysis goes beyond mere textual analysis to include the total contexts and meanings of these acts. Though I focus on the children's meanings of these performances, I also examine adults' interpretations to help uncover the underlying realities these children sing about.

### **Songs of the children**

Children's songs borrowed extensively from familiar song genres familiar to most people in the community. Common genres included church songs, traditional and liberation struggle songs. The children often altered the lyrics and added verses of their own to suit different occasions and audiences. The children chose songs that were simple and based on cyclical repetitions of a "call" (*kuvamba/ kushaura*) and "response" (*kubvumira*) with a repetitive stanza (chorus) that all the performers would sing along to, with the audience often joining in. However, some of the songs produced great discomfort and anger, rather than participation, due to their sexualised nature and also because they were being performed by young children. In 2012, I heard that the girls' group had been banned from performing because their songs and dances were seen as "indecent" and "uncultural". The boys group, in contrast, continued to sing but only at the funerals of ostracised community members, whom the other adult villagers had no time to give a decent burial with proper church hymns.

### **Appropriating and sexualizing church songs**

In the previous chapter on memories of childhood in *Chiweshe*, I showed that missionaries had a great influence on the lives of local people.. One of my most salient images of Sundays in *Kakora* ward are people, mostly women, dressed in their Salvation Army uniforms and making their way to church. The young people in the area often made fun of how adults joined the church only so they would get a "proper burial" when they died. The latter included having a pastor present to officiate at a funeral and a "farewell parade" given by uniformed soldiers of the "Lord's army".



Most of the schools and hospitals in *Chiweshe*, including *Kakora* Primary and Secondary, the ward schools where I carried out fieldwork, were run by the Salvation Army. As the local people would casually say, *Kakora* ward was basically Salvation Army “territory”, though other churches such as the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church also had schools in nearby communities. The Apostolic or Zionist churches also had a significant share of followers, but no buildings or hospitals and thus, arguably, not much influence in the village. For most children in *Chiweshe*, church songs were one of the most familiar and readily available music genres. Especially so given the large number of funerals due to HIV and AIDS deaths and the current “boom” in the gospel music industry in Zimbabwe (Togarasei, 2008). Although many people seemed to practice both traditional and Christian religions, most modern churches frowned upon traditional religion.

Bessant (1994) gives an account of how the missionary perspective equated traditional *Shona* religious practices in *Chiweshe* with sinfulness, immorality, the spread of diseases and backwardness. Therefore, it is at funerals and burials that one’s religious affiliation is publicly confirmed or declined. The children’s songs borrowed from popular hymns sung in their churches, which they usually adapted to give alternative lyrics about HIV and AIDS. Through the songs, the children could display their knowledge and provide a commentary on their experiences of sexuality and gender, thereby constructing themselves as knowledgeable agents.

I concur with McNeill (2007) that analysis of the contradictions and micro-politics of performances can reveal the tensions and alliances concealed beneath the wider issues. Following this, I look at juxtaposed positions — e.g. children and adults, boys and girls, girls and elderly females, Christians and those identified as non-Christians — and how blame is apportioned. I also examine what people do not openly talk about. Most adults expressed anger against these lyrics and labeled the children as disrespectful and blasphemous.

An example is a Catholic hymn whose original words the children substituted:

**Song 1: Original Shona Catholic hymn**

<b>Shona words</b>	<b>English Version</b>
<i>Mwari wangu ndonyika midzi</i>	My God I sink my roots
<i>murudo rwenyu</i>	In Thy love
<i>midzi yangu mamuri Ishe</i>	My roots in Thee Lord
<i>Ndimi Mwari wangu</i>	You are my God
<i>Ndimi Baba vangu</i>	You are my father

**Song 2: The Catholic hymn which the children recomposed**

<b>Shona words</b>	<b>English translation</b>
<i>Sheila wangu ndonyika midzi</i>	My Sheila I sink my roots
<i>Murudo rwako</i>	In your love
<i>Midzi yangu mukati-kati mako</i>	My roots deep inside you
<i>Ndiwe mudiwa wangu</i>	You are my love
<i>Ndiwe mai vevana</i>	You are the mother of my children
<i>Tichangosungana(added)</i>	We shall just fondle (added)

The “recomposed” version is speaking of a male having a pleasurable sexual experience with a female named Sheila, in whose big thighs he has “immersed”(ndanyika) his reproductive organ. In the original version, a convert is speaking to God that they have “immersed” their roots in God’s love. After an interview with the lead singer of this particular song, I learnt that Ranga, a 15 year old boy, was actually boasting publicly about a sexual experience he had had with a female prior to that performance.

The casual manner in which Ranga informed me that he loved this girl, and that they had engaged in non- penetrative thigh-sex because Ranga’s girlfriend, a 14 year old, had suggested it as a method of safe sex that they referred to as *kusungana*. Ranga’s girlfriend had learnt about this from her city friends at nearby boarding school. In this instance, Ranga was sharing and show-casing his newly acquired sexual experience , and sexual knowledge, even if some of his friends criticized him for not being “man enough to do the real thing”.

Ranga insisted that his girlfriend was a Christian, wore decent clothes and was *yekukanda pakicheni* (wife material) and he was planning to marry her when they completed their education. However, he also commented that if an “*amai muponesi*” (loose girl”) came along, he would not let “free special meat go”. When I asked whether he would use protection, he stated that he usually got condoms from the local bar where his friend worked after school. Double standards of morality can be observed where girls are expected to be virgins when they marry, but boys are not policed as much. It was also interesting how school-going boys had established networks of accessing condoms where conservative adults would not supply them.

Another example is a *Chewa*-derived (Zambian) chorus one of the boys had learnt from the local Salvation Army youths with the words:

**Song 3: A Chewa Salvation Army chorus**

<b>Chewa words</b>	<b>English Version</b>
<i>Ambuye-ee!, munditsogolele</i>	Oh Lord!, be my guide
<i>Ambuye ee!, paulendo</i>	Oh Lord!, On my journey

The new version by the boys with added stanzas:

**Song 4: The recomposed Chewa Salvation Army chorus**

<i>Shona version</i>	English translation
<i>Gorgina uri chocoreti!</i>	Gorgina you are a chocolate bar!
<i>Gorgina wepamubhedha wangu</i>	Gorgina you belong to my bed
<i>Gorgina Undifongorere!</i>	Gorgina bend over!
<i>Gorgina pamubhedha!</i>	Gorgina right there on my bed!

Counter response by the female performer from a professional musician, the late Leonard Dembo:

**Song 5: The late Leonard Dembo's Song**

<b>Shona words</b>	<b>English translation</b>
<i>Unoda ndikuitire zvaunoda iwe!</i>	You want me to do only that which you want me to do for you!
<i>Handingazvigoni zvaunoda iwe!</i>	But I cannot do all that you want me to do for you!
<i>Mumwe nemumwe anoita zvaanogona</i>	Each one of us just does all that they can do
<i>Kwete nhingi zvaanoda iye!</i>	Not what that other person wants them to do for them!

The original song was a request to God for guidance on one's journey. In the reformulated song, Gorgina, representing females in the song, is equated to chocolates and then given instructions to bend on the bed. Then the tone changes as the female retaliates and tells her male counterpart that he cannot dictate to her what to do, and that she will only do that when she wants to. These songs enact the tensions between modern independent females and dominating patriarchal males, both as partners and abusers. Echoing the observations of Niehaus and Stadler (2004), I also argue that these performances comment on and enact the tensions between modernity and tradition, males and females. One could argue that counter-response, Gorgina, was a protest against sexual violence against females through performance and dance.

More contradictions are revealed through a performance described in the vignette of this chapter and captured in the photographs below it. In that song, the children also re-enacted a traditional way of acquiring brides, known as *musengabere* in which males would kidnap a prospective bride where they could not afford *lobola* bride price (Kileff and Kileff, 1970). This kidnapping method was also used when it was suspected that the girl was "playing hard to get". The boys indicated that they strongly supported traditional ways of marriage, such as *musengabere* and elopement, in contrast to the expensive weddings imposed by the churches.

In order to publicly humiliate one of their gang members` in public, as a "corrective measure" the group took an original Catholic hymn called "Lamb of God" and sang:

**Song 6: Catholic hymn – “Lamb of God”**

<b>Shona Version</b>	<b>English Version</b>
<i>Hwayana, Hwayana yaMwari Munobvisa Mataaadzo Apasi Tinzwireiwo tsitsi</i>	Lamb, Lamb of God You taketh away The sins of the world Have mercy upon us

**Song 7: Recomposed Catholic hymn – “Lamb of God”**

<b>Shona words</b>	<b>English translation</b>
<i>Brayeni, Brayeni WaMunatsi</i>	Brian, Brian of the Munatsi family
<i>Unodisa, mhata dzovakadzi!</i>	You crave women`s buttocks too much!
<i>Ucharwara ne”sicki”</i>	You`re surely going to die of <i>sicki</i> . ( <i>Sexually Transmitted Infetion</i> )

Whilst adults complained about the naughtiness of the “*bhoyz dzemorefire*”, they were appropriating some of the church songs to publicly ridicule one of their own members, for being too much of a lady’s man and cautioning him that he was going to catch *sicki* (local vernacular for any Sexually Transmitted Infection). One can argue that this song displays a different masculine discourse, where the young boys are starting to show interest in “safe” sexualities.

The emphasis on fondling (*kusungana*) rather than penetrative sex, suggests that some children may have decided to take issues of their health into their own hands. Paradoxically, in the same song, the male is portrayed as the one who will be “infected”, not the infector. Thus, even if there seems to be a counter discourse on “safe” manhood emerging, there are still indications of the continuity of the intergenerational patriarchal struggles which associates and blames modern women for being the vectors of AIDS.

Gaidzanwa and Cheater (1992) and Schmidt (1991) show that these tensions did are not unique to this current era, the so called “lost generation”, but can be traced back to the colonial struggles for control of women’s mobility and reproductive capacities. Jeater (1993); and Gwanzura-Ottmoller and Kesby(2005) note that, traditionally, the *Shona* society was sex positive and placed importance on the sexual pleasure of both men and women, rather than

chastity issues. The current associations of pleasure with danger, and the sex education against pleasure, are symptoms of the panics associated with the advent of AIDS.

Chitando (2002:40, 125) notes that what Zinyama termed the “paganization” of church music was very common during the liberation struggle for Zimbabwe. Adults often sang songs where Jesus was replaced by Zimbabwe or the ZANU PF ruling party, to song tunes already familiar to the people. It was also a way to “contain” the message by disguising it so that the white officials would not understand, unlike the local people.

In the same way, these children could be transmitting the message of an alternative masculinity in spaces that only they understood so that adult men will not discourage nor “police” them. When adults corrupted church songs it was “serious politics” but when these children applied the same tactics of communication it was perceived by adults as “child’s play” or boys being naughty. Whereas boys were perceived as “just being boys”, the girls attracted more negative comments.

In a study of youth musical performances in Zimbabwe, Mate (2012) demonstrated the importance of understanding performances within specific contexts within which they occur. She contextualizes the increasingly sexually explicit music of youths within the “Third Chimurenga”, the “75 per cent public broadcasters’ policy” and ongoing intergenerational struggles in the country.

The linkages that these intergenerational struggles have with past and contemporary global-local phenomenon, such as “the sexualization of cultures” (Attwood 2006), and the growth of what Williams (2011) called the “sex saturated society”, reveal the complexities and intricacies of issues that nobody talks about, but which these performances illuminate. In view of such studies, I argue that the tensions and intergenerational struggles that characterize the children’s sexualised performances in *Chiweshe*, provide metacommentary and brings out in the open, what both children and adults “cannot talk about”.

### **Appropriation of struggle songs/*Chimurenga***

The musical performances of children in *Chiweshe* are not derived from church music only. The children also appropriate songs that are associated with the national war of liberation that culminated in Zimbabwe’s national independence in 1980. From what I gathered from the

children, they concur with Vambe (2011:1) who notes that there are multiple forms of musical genres that can be classified under the name *chimurenga* or struggle music.

Vambe (2011) argues that it was erroneous of the early critics of *chimurenga* music to think that this genre ended with the coming of Independence in Zimbabwe, as this type of music takes on multiple versions that may overlap and even contradict each other. The malleability of *chimurenga* music made it easy for the children to adopt its various forms. These overlaps and contradictions manifest even in the children's performances presented in this section.

The children indicated they identified with this type of music because it linked very well with the cultural values of the *Shona* people as hunters, brave warriors, themes which manifest largely in the boys' performances. His classification resonates well with the descriptions of traditional war and protest music composed by the *Shona* during tribal wars such as the use of *Jerusarema* as a diversion tactic against the enemy during a war (Asante, 1985)

*Chimurenga* music was largely composed by freedom fighters struggling against colonialism from guerrilla bases in different countries that included Tanzania, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. According to Vambe (2011), before independence in Zimbabwe, this genre developed as a form of protest against the subjugation of both African men and women by both colonisers and other community members. In contemporary times, through famous musicians like Thomas Mapfumo and Oliver Mutukudzi, *chimurenga* music has protested issues such as corruption, bad governance by leaders, and delays in redistributing land to the black masses.

Kahari(1981:81)reveals how the *chimurenga* or *Shona* protest song was used traditionally even by females in seemingly powerless positions, such as a daughter-in-law, to express her unhappiness against an oppressive mother-in-law. So these songs could be used to publicly deal with private issues in public.

This would serve as a means to sing about and denounce what cannot be spoken about openly, thereby resulting in the creation of spaces where different types of agency under different constraints is played out. I argue that this genre of songs afforded *girlz dzecele* spaces to perform, but because this same genre is associated with rebellion and revolution, it had unintended consequences of stigmatizing the girls, and consequently led to the ban of their performances.

Kahari (1981) also brings out how, within protest music, one could make use of exaggerated praise (*bembera*), as parody or satire to provide indirect commentary. I argue that it is within this cognition that the children adopted the various forms of protest, or *chimurenga* genre, which I perceive to be more radical than the former, to address their needs, and include themselves in spheres from which they would normally be excluded.

Through these protest song performances that celebrate of the male body, virility and the phallus, boys reconstruct themselves as brave hunters and warriors juxtaposed with images of weak female bodies. The boys depict their bodies and reproductive organs as all powerful and all- conquering and emphasis is placed on the ruthlessness of the male and his organ. Metaphors of the male organ conquering the female organ echo enact the tensions between males and females in everyday life in the form of a performance. Below is a song that exemplifies this scene:

**Song 8: Song on male organ conquering female organ**

<b>Shona words</b>	<b>English translation</b>
<i>Chinhu chemwana</i>	That vagina thing of the child
<i>Rova kusvika chadhamba rova!</i>	Thresh it up until it surrenders
<i>Rova nekondomu</i>	Thresh it with a condom on
<i>Rova kusvika chadhamba rova</i>	Thresh it up until it surrenders

The example above is an encouragement to the penis to “beat up” the vagina until it loses its elasticity and resilience. The act of losing elasticity can be equated to surrendering to bad injury in a war situation. The penis is the winner of the war, whilst the female organ receives beatings, passively, without hitting back. The use of the term *chinhu* brings to mind something ugly, dirty. The children also incorporated references to political figures, which was their way of confronting and engaging with their everyday realities.

**Song 9: Shona folk song**

<b>Shona words</b>	<b>English translation</b>
<i>Ndiroore iye,</i>	Marry me you
<i>Samson ndiroore</i>	Samson marry me
<i>Ndaneta kuchaya mapoto</i>	I am tired of living in with you
<i>Samson ndiroore iye</i>	Samson marry me
<i>AIDS yakauya iwe shamwari</i>	AIDS came my friend



The song was originally a funeral song about a woman complaining about a man who was just content to just “live in” with her, instead of marrying her. In this instance the AIDS issue is portrayed as making marriages safer than just living-in arrangements, but at the same time commenting on many other issues and parodying the behaviour of adult politicians. This same song was modified to:

**Song 10: Recomposed folk song incorporating references to political figures**

<b>Shona words</b>	<b>English Translation</b>
Waroora hure	You have married a slut
Tsvangson waroora hure (repeat)	Tsvangirai you have married a slut (repeat)
Uri ngo-ochani iwe Tsvangson	You are a homosexual you Tsvangirai
Tsvangson uri ngo-ochani	Tsvangirai you are a homosexual
AIDS yakauya iwe shamwari (repeat)	AIDS came my friend (repeat)

This translates directly to “Tsvangirai, you married a slut”. Tsvangirai’s name was altered to Tsvangson to keep the original rhymes with Samson.

At a first glance one would think the children were expressing dislike of the opposition party, however, after asking the children what the song meant to them, I got a different meaning. Thus, this song, like the *Beni Ngoma* described by Ranger (1975) was a parody of the actual political situation under the guise of praising it, or simply imitating the activities of the colonial brass bands. Thus these children were not “innocently” imitating adult politicians, or preparing for later adult political roles, but were engaging in their own way with the political forces that were affecting them.

**Singing “L. Pees”: Burying nobodys, outcasts and children**

The last type of performances, which gave its name to *the boyz dzemorefire* was presented in a format the children titled “L .Pees.”, which is derived from the word “Long Player”, which describes the old technology of music storage on long playing recorders, now since been replaced by compact digital recorders. In these “L. Pees”, the children would group together different songs with similar tunes, improvise a chorus, and then keep adding verses from different songs into a single compilation. Their creativity prompted me to ask them who had come up with that idea and why. One of the younger boys in the group, Tawanda, indicated that

they learnt the “L. Pee” style from church youth’s singing competitions they had been forced to attend. The children reply astonished me even more and displayed their ability to deal with inequalities and exclusions in very creative ways. Brian informed me:

“You know how adults are like. If it is at a funeral of an important political figure, they don’t give us a chance to also show what we can do because those who give the best performance will be invited to the next funeral, and be given lots of food portions to take home after the funeral. The men will force everyone to sing liberation struggle songs the whole night until people are tired and do not want to sing anymore! Then the women come in and just sing church songs as if they do not know any other songs! So we decided that once they give us a chance to sing, we sing the first stanzas of all our compilations so that everyone gets a feel of all our songs! Adults get surprised but at least they don’t chase us away, some even start dancing and ask us to repeat the “L. Pee”.

(Casual conversation with Brian 2007)

Dadirayi’s comments to Brian’s explanation indicated complexity of the performance scenario and how the performance is a “tip of the iceberg” where unspoken tensions and struggles are played out, right there in front of the thatched hut where the body of the deceased will be lying awaiting burial. Both the children’s performances and the funeral setting become an arena for the public enactment of struggles and settling of scores, with the front of the thatched hut as the stage, where the boundaries between the performer and audience , performance and reality become increasingly blurred.

“These days where we have funerals almost every day, the church women end up losing their voices from singing from one funeral to the other. This is when we get our chance .We often sing the most during those long funerals where the importance of the deceased is shown by the number of days people spend singing and dancing in front of the traditional kitchen where the body will be. The more important the deceased is , the more days people will spend singing and dancing before the burial, and the greater the number of cows slaughtered to feed the people gathered to mourn the deceased. With so many deaths these days, adults get tired of singing night after night, and end up choosing which funerals to attend. At funerals of foreigners, atheists, prostitutes, witches and children, nobody wants to sing, so we also sing for them, and make sure they also get a decent burial like everyone else.”

(Casual conversation with Dadirayi, 12 year old performer from the *girlz dzecele* )

The children could make an L. Pee compilation with up to ten songs, where one song would be repeated and used as a chorus to join the other songs, which would then become stanzas of a continuing song. The following is an L. Pee compilation with two songs, where the children used the second song as a chorus to join two different songs:

**Song 11: First song from an L. Pee**

<b>Shona words</b>	<b>English translation</b>
<i>Mo faya</i> (repeat 2 times)	More fire (repeat 2 times)
<i>Mo faya, Mai Mwana</i> (repeat 3 times)	More fire, Mother of the children (3 times)
<i>Ndiri kuvayiwa</i> (repeat 2 times)	I have an itch (repeat 2 times)
<i>Ndiri kuvayiwa, Mai Mwana</i> (repeat 3 times)	I have an itch, Mother of the children (3 times)
<i>Ndikwenyeiwo</i> (repeat 2 times)	Please scratch me (repeat 2 times)
<i>Ndikwenyeiwo, Mai Mwana</i> (repeat 3 times)	Please scratch me, Mother of the children (repeat 3 times)
<i>Mo faya</i> (repeat 2 times)	More fire (repeat 2 times)
<i>Mo faya, Mai Mwana</i> (repeat 3 times, then chorus, then back to song again)	More fire, Mother of the children (3 times, then chorus, then back to song again)

Song 2, which would then be used a chorus:

**Song 12: Second song from the L. Pee**

<b>Shona words</b>	<b>English translation</b>
<i>Kabhasikoro</i>	A little bicycle
<i>Bata mwana/ bhebhi adonha</i>	Hold that baby / babe who has fallen
<i>Bata, Bata Mwana/ bhebhi</i>	Hold, Hold the baby/ babe
<i>Sunga, sunga mwana/bhebhi / bhebhi</i>	Fondle, fondle the baby / babe
<i>Sunga mwana/ bhebhi adonha</i>	Fondle, fondle the baby / babe
<i>Kitsa, kitsa mwana / bhebhi</i>	Kiss, kiss the baby/ babe
<i>Kitsa mwana / bhebhi adonha</i> (then back to main song stanza)	Kiss the baby /babe who has fallen (back to main song stanza)

These “L. Pee” compilations were made up and drawn from all kinds of songs, the children stated that they liked the “L. Pee” style because they would not tire quickly because anybody could come in and start a song whenever the lead singer was exhausted. The lyrics for the “more fire” song come from popular songs that were sung on the radio, but with different meanings for the children. The children revealed to me that the fire being referred to in the song represented

both sexual passion, and a call to dance passionately within the performance of the song. In the song about the bicycle, the sexual cycle was likened to riding a bicycle.

However, in the same song, children interchangeably used the word baby and babe (*bhebhi*). This, according to them, enabled them to communicate with hidden messages of sex positions and knowledge of the sexual cycle without adults getting the hidden meanings. The children did not always and indiscriminately sing the sexual lyrics openly but sometimes used double lyrics, or lyrics with double meanings, to suit the occasion and audience.

### **Sexualised performances as performative agency in contexts of constraints**

As Maxwell and Aggleton (2010) advocate, in my quest to theorise children's performances, I take the children's interpretations of their own actions as my starting point. However, unlike Maxwell and Aggleton (2010), where the children claimed to have taken back total power, I argue that these performances are not to be equated with children taking authority over adults, but as a form of performative agency under constraint. Even if this is a context with economic and political instability captured by Jones(2010) as the chaotic, "*kukiya-kiya* economy" contexts where "nothing is straight", my work does not support the decontextualised 'sexual permissiveness' accounts associated with the Caldwells and the Mead- Freeman controversies which exoticized African sexualities (Alberg, 1995; Arnfred, 2004). Rather, I suggest that the children's performances be taken as a reflection of how local and the global contexts affect and are affected by childhoods in Zimbabwe. In the next paragraphs, I argue that this evidence points out that the responses of these children are not unique, but resonate with responses of other groups of people both locally and globally.

At the local level, Dover (2005) found that the use of sexually suggestive dances and lyrics was common amongst the Tonga who reside in both Zimbabwe and Zambia. In the form of a rain dance ritual, postmenopausal elderly women used sexually suggestive dances as a way to deal with problems such as droughts and deaths. It was believed that the sexual dances of the women would attract the "semen of the ancestors" in the form of raindrops. Elsewhere within the African continent, Saunders (2000) notes that Tanzanian women of the Ihanzu clan took advantage of the licence in performance to performatively rebel and express their gender and sexual grievances to patriarchal elders.

Mate (2012) also noted similar behaviour amongst the “urban groovers”, young musicians in Zimbabwe, but argues for the importance of locating the sexualised lyrics of these musicians within local, national and global sexualised cultures.

Similarly, but at global level, Munoz- Laboy et al (2007:615) found that young people from poorer communities in the United States employed sexualised hip-hop performances as a social medium through which they construct, constitute and negotiate gender and sexuality. Girls contested the “hypermasculinity” of boys and set the stage for the ensuing sexual interactions on the club dance floor. Baker (2004) also observed that Australian pre-teen girls in institutionalised after-school care utilised pop music as a mode of “serious play” to contest Western cultural beliefs regarding asexual childhood. Thus I argue that what the children in *Chiweshe* were not “unAfrican”, nor as uncultural as adults made out, but rather reflecting the complexity of issues beneath the surface of the iceberg about which no-one wants to speak openly.

Echoing similar findings on young female sexual agency through music, Mate (2012) warns against the simplistic interpretations of all forms of female participation in sexualised performances as instances of the universal objectification of females. In concurrence, I also argue that this study has shown the complexity and diversity of performance scenarios as female children occupied the roles of both victim and agent both within and outside their performances.

To clarify this point, I argue that the contradictory roles of girls reveal their contradictory existence in everyday life where they are exposed to a highly sexualised, neoliberal, unequal, and abusive world, sometimes sexually abused, have children of their own, are already sexually active, and have sexual desires but, paradoxically, are expected to remain asexual. In the context of children in *Chiweshe* there is a double standard where boys are allowed the freedom of sexual exploration, but girls are heavily policed and expected to be virgins at marriage. Here again lies the paradox, the boys are allowed the freedom for sexual experimentation, and they experiment with the virgins, but at the same time, these girls are expected to remain virgins. This point also raises complex issues for HIV prevention and health promotion for young people.

## **8.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have attempted to show the complexity, diversity and multiplicity of meanings of the musical performances of children in *Chiweshe* in the contexts of AIDS and political economic change. Close attention to both the meanings of these performances to the participant

children, as well as the specific contexts within which these performances occur, revealed that performances are indeed just a “tip of the iceberg” of the total experiences of being a child in contemporary rural Zimbabwe where tensions and contradictions enacted enable the children to “sing what they cannot talk about” (McNeill 2007).

Through this analysis of the children`s songs and dances, I demonstrated how at times children use performances creatively to deal with and provide metacommentary on their daily struggles to survive in the context of AIDS and political-economic change. It is through these performances that children enact the contradictions of their daily existence, and in trying to survive, the children display a “performative” agency, even in the face of multiple constraints. Even if the children did not compose any original songs of theirs, their ability to appropriate those they already knew, and change the lyrics to suit their different audiences reveal undeniable agency.

The children tactfully employed performances to deal with the ways adults, the AIDS contexts, and the neoliberal economy with its false promises of freedom and inclusion, all formed syndemics to exclude, deny, and silence them on issues of sexuality, gender and AIDS. Adults responded with anger, shock and even banned the activities of the girls’ group, claiming that their performances were uncultural and unAfrican. My analysis contests this view as an indication of childhood issues intertwined with generational, gender, sexuality and power struggles. Analysis of children’s performances does not divert us from serious research, but can be a critical starting point in doing complex, potentially life-saving, and ethically sensitive research with children in contexts of AIDS and political-economic change.

## CHAPTER 9

### RECONSTRUCTING CHILDHOODS: RECONCEPTUALISING AND RECONTEXTUALISING THE PARADOXICAL NOTIONS OF CHILDHOOD AGENCY

#### 9.1 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to explore the complexities of growing up in the contemporary era of HIV and AIDS in *Chiweshe* Communal lands, Zimbabwe. Through an ambitious ethnographic account, I attempted to unpack the complexity of childhoods and agency, in the context of the HIV and AIDS epidemic and political economic changes in Zimbabwe. As an anthropological study, the overall aims here were guided by the classic concerns in anthropology of the need to gain a deeper, holistic, nuanced and more contextualised understanding of the business of being human (Lavender and Schultz 2010:2). Therefore, my intention was to gain a holistic, nuanced and deep understanding of childhoods in the context of the AIDS pandemic. In an effort to get broader and contextualised picture childhoods in *Chiweshe* Communal Lands, I applied an ecologies and syndemics lens as discussed in Chapter 3. My aim here was not only to contribute to theory and knowledge, but also to inform health, child rights, development experts, and policy makers working on HIV and AIDS in contexts similar to Zimbabwe.

My main argument was that children in *Chiweshe* are competent social actors who exercise considerable personal agency within contexts of multiple constraints. I also argued that, despite their contributions and demographic significance, children in Zimbabwe, are to a large extent, still misunderstood, stereotyped and underrepresented in policy dialogues. Thus gaining an insight into their own perspectives is the first crucial step in engaging them, and taking them more seriously, an urgent agenda in the current contexts of the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

In considering practical implications of an understanding of childhoods that focuses on the multiple ecologies and syndemics, the importance of cognisance of the impact of neoliberal processes, discussed in Chapter 3, are revealing. Debates about the effects of global political economic changes that have accompanied the neoliberal context or late capitalism on children and childhoods often portray children as either children with stolen childhoods, children whose childhood have disappeared, or children at risk. More attention is paid there to issues such as that

street children are innocent victims, and have childhoods that are increasingly under assault by global changes. These accounts serve as the justification for special interventions and programmes to protect and recover “stolen childhoods” (Stephens 1995; Njabulo 1995).

Paradoxically, within the same new millennial capitalist context, the street children who are portrayed as “children at risk”, come to be identified as “children as risk” who have the potential to threaten the security of the state. Hence aims to institutionalise and control unruly children, resulting in moves such as firing squads sent against street children in Brazil and South African youths who were peacefully protesting against the injustices apartheid (Hecht, 2008; Stephens, 1995) As shown in various chapters, children`s experiences cannot be captured by these two simple categories. There is need to go beyond these categorizations and appreciate the diversity and complexity of their experiences of growing up in the context of AIDS and political-economic change.

Ansell (2005) argues that political economic policies and processes that accompany their implementation have had both negative and positive effects on the lives of Third World children. While the advent of AIDS and neoliberalism seems largely to have increased vulnerability of children, my thesis reveals that a large portion children in Zimbabwe still found ways to survive under extreme conditions. They work and earn incomes to contribute towards household and national economies. In addition, they also use their earnings to pay for health services and education. This resonates with earlier findings by Bourdillon (2000) that children in Zimbabwe have always worked to “earn a life”. This resonates with new ways of conceptualising childhood agency which questions classical ideas from trauma theory (Parsons 2012 and Leifesen 2011). Increasingly, well known psychologists such as Erica Burman are coming up with interpretations of childhood agency that depart from the traditional trauma theory. Contemporary research now focuses on the greater ability of children to cope with uncertainty and stressful situations in comparison to adults. Children have been shown to have greater resilience, creativity and flexibility when coping with adverse living conditions.

While these are remarkable strides in terms of theoretical development it is not enough to end at the theoretical development. Academics and policy makers are increasingly aware of the gap between academic research and policy implementation, particularly in Southern Africa (Gaidzanwa 2001). Hence the urgent need for academic researchers not to just produce long research reports, but to go a step further by translating their research works into more



simplified formats for everyone to access more easily. This will go a long way in ensuring that children themselves and even non academic politicians and policy makers access and utilize evidence- based information on childhoods in their particular contexts.

Leifsen(2011) notes that it has also been shown to be increasingly problematic to just come up with research that demonstrates the positive agency of children, whilst excluding what maybe called negative agency. Research which tries to give an understanding of unconventional, illegal and negative agency is still a critical gap that needs urgent attention particularly in coming up with context specific policies that address the need of children from contexts with extreme deprivation and epidemics. As my thesis has shown, in some instances children end up engaging in negative forms of agency out of desperation, the lack of exposure to accurate information on services available for children, and also the lack of alternative means, or support system to enable them just to survive.

In the current context of what “globalised childhoods”, (Kesbey et al, 2006) where children`s rights and child participation are taken more seriously, questions are raised on the universal utility of the UNCRC and ACRWC. In Chapter 2, I pointed out that definition of who can be classified as a child vary, and cannot be limited to chronological age, which makes it more difficult to come up with universally applicable rights for children (Ansell, 2005). Further research that explicitly asks children what rights mean to them, and how they want them defined, may lead to contextually relevant information and effective interventions.

The African Movement of Working Children and Youth (AMWCY) programme for working children that is led by street children in Senegal provides an example of successful efforts towards this aim. Senegalese street children came up with their own 12 points on what rights meant to them and what should be involved in defining their rights. The MAEJIT initiative resulted in a charter of rights differing from both UNCRC and ACRWC charters, such as “the right to stay in the village”. This right pointed out the specific problems encountered by Senegalese working children that had forced them to migrate from their villages into the towns. In advocating for the right to stay in their own villages, they were indicating that they migrated to towns to escape the poverty of village life. In view of this, a possible solution for them would be for the government initiatives on alleviating poverty and development initiatives for children in rural areas. In such scenarios, banning child labour would not be ‘in the best interest’ of these street children. (Enda Tiers-Mondes Jeunesse Action 2008,Liebel 2012)

In Chapters I and 3, I argued in favour of contextualised understandings of childhood agency. A more contextualised understanding of agency is critical in neoliberal contexts where the implications of the retraction of the state and the increased emphasis on individual responsibility need to be critically assessed. Gershon (2011) uses a case study of an organisation for women's micro-credit to show how, at times, a neoliberal conception of agency may work against the poor rural populations it claims to be empowering. This organisation claimed to have the welfare of the women at heart, but was used as an instrument to introduce a form of "financial discipline" that favoured the lender. Such examples raise important questions concerning the agency of children and the responsibilities of the state towards children.

In support of this critique, contemporary scholars (Nhenga, 2008; Boudillon, 2006) have applied this critical gaze not only to question the agendas of local governments, but also international legislative instruments and organisations. As I illustrate throughout this thesis, definitions of the best interests of the child are even more problematic under neoliberal and AIDS ecologies that support inequalities. Taking, for instance, my findings in Chapter 8 on the problematic and highly contested terrain of children's reproductive rights, I have shown how interventions that do not include children's views may actually work against them. Rather than placing the concerns and needs of the children at the center of definitions of what rights are for them, the state, the church and other stakeholders may actually introduce new modes of governance to control and discipline children. This resonates well with the observations of Kingfisher and Maskovsky (2008) who concur with Hilgers (2011) on how, under neoliberal contexts, the state takes on a more "penal" and "securitarian" mode of governance.

In Chapter 6, I located children's tactical use of metaphors in a context of silence and pervasive HIV and AIDS stigma in contemporary Zimbabwe. I suggested that these concepts at the local level are related to what Parsons (2005) termed a "culture of silence and fear" instilled by the state in the political sphere through heavy surveillance and the extension of the power of the army and police. This also resonates with the increasing "securitarian" stance that the state and often takes against groups that have been defined as deviant "risk groups" such as homosexuals, street children, "prostitutes" and sexually active children. Therefore, in coming up with metaphors as ways to talk indirectly about what they cannot openly about, the children display some form of agency within contextual constraints. However, as Chapter 4 on adults' memories of childhood illustrated, adults often blame children for change and stigmatise them

for agency, citing the need to protect national cultures and sovereignty. The conceptualisation of childhood agency as deviance has implications for policy and interventions in the era of HIV and AIDS by making them invisible and voiceless. This scenario often results in ineffective interventions, that are not attuned to the realities and contexts of the children concerned.

In HIV and AIDS Programmes and health promotion, initiatives informed by ethnographies can reduce the suffering and incidents of the untimely deaths of children. Hence the urgent need of ethnographies of childhood that pay attention to both children's views and appreciate the complexity and diversity of contexts where they grow up. Hence scholars like Leifsen (2011) and Salo (2007) have called for the developed ideas on how notions of equality within difference from feminist studies can be further developed to extend the debate on agency in contexts of rapid change, an approach which I concur with and adopt to further account for and reconceptualise agency in childhood studies and hence support the right to be heard in section 84 of the new national constitution of Zimbabwe. As most research is increasingly showing, it is not enough to just listen to children as the Zimbabwean new national constitution states. There is need to go a step further and take the children's voices and views seriously through for example implementing interventions that are based on empirical research on the contextual realities of those particular children.

To sum up, I would like to quote Grier (2006:7), and I argue that although she was writing on child labour in colonial Zimbabwe, her early observations are very relevant in exploring contemporary childhoods, contexts and agency. The contexts may be more complex than the colonial to modern late capitalism or the neoliberal eras, with the onset of AIDS but it is true that:

When we conceive of children as dependent and passive, we obscure or foreclose questions about intergenerational tensions and conflicts in precolonial and precapitalist Africa that might have influenced directly or indirectly, the broader social structure. We also foreclose research into the impact of new circumstances, modes of production, and dynamics such as settler colonialism, on pre-existing tensions and conflicts and research into the possibility that such tensions and conflicts took on new forms, meanings and modes of expression.

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## APPENDIX

### **Semi-structured guide for both interviews and a household survey (with Children in CHIWESHE)**

Please note that these questions were just a guide that I used and adjusted depending on my personal judgement on the suitability of the instrument. For the most part I conducted conversational interviews and paid attention to the non-verbal communication from the children to judge whether the children were comfortable or not due to the highly sensitive nature of doing research on AIDS with children.

#### **Semi- structured Question Guide for interviews and survey**

- How old are you?
- Where do you live?
- Who stays with you?
- How many people stay at your house?
- How many are male?
- How many are female?
- How old is the eldest and youngest in your house?
- Whom do you consider as close family?
- Who is the head of the family?
- Do you stay in the same house with all your family members?
- Do you stay with any extended family members?
- Are you currently staying with any visiting relation in your house?
- Have there been any recent births in your family?
- How many people in your house can read and write?
- What language do you use at home?
- Do people in your house have a specific religion?
- If so, which religion(s) do they belong to?
- Is there anybody who is formally employed in your house?
- What activities do people in your house do to get money ,food etc
- Do you do any work?
- What kind of activities do you do?
- Do you get any payment for the work?
- When do you do the work?
- Where do you do the work?
- Do you do the work alone?
- How much work do you do in a day and the hours?

- Is the work easy or difficult?
- What makes it easy or difficult?
- Do you work for the whole year or in certain seasons?
- Are there different tasks in different seasons?
- Do you find time to play?
- What activities do you consider as play?
- Whom do you play with?
- Do you attend school?
- Where?
- How long does it take you to go to school/ How far is it?
- Which grade/ form are you in?
- How often? Length of time in school?
- Do you have any government assistance that you get for school/ health or any other?
- If not who pays your fees?
- Who buys stationary for your schooling?
- Do you like school?
- What do you like/dislike about school?
- What are your likes and dislikes about the work you do at school?
- What do you like or dislike about your life?
- Have you experienced any recent illness?
- Where do you go when you're sick?
- Who pays for your health care?
- Have you been vaccinated?
- Does your family own land?
- Do you get access to the land?
- What activities do you do on the land?
- If farming is one of them what did you farm last season?
- Did you have a good harvest?
- Have you ever travelled out of this village?
- Where did you go? For what purpose?
- Anything else you would want to talk to me about?