"Daughters of Eve": Portrayal of the female body in selected HIV/AIDS songs in Malawi

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Abstract

This paper examines how the female body is portrayed in selected HIV/AIDS themed songs in Malawi. Generally, the paper reveals how, besides being portrayed negatively as a carrier and transmitter of the HI virus and other sexually transmitted diseases, the female body is implicitly blamed for the spread of HIV and related infections. The paper argues that the songs' purported advocacy is heavily compromised because they are underwritten by negative perceptions of women and their bodies. Some of these songs also propagate messages that are scientifically wrong, which may mislead the general public. The paper draws on Julia Kristeva's idea of the "abject" particularly the way it has been appropriated by a school of thought known as "abject criticism". The paper also employs Josephine Donovan's observation about the objectified images of women who are usually portrayed as men's helpers or detractors.

Keywords: HIV/AIDS; gender; sexuality; abject; diseased.

Introduction

Malawi is one of the countries in Southern Africa hard-hit by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. According to the Malawi AIDS Response Progress Report (2015), by 2010, 10.6% of people in Malawi were living with HIV/AIDS with HIV prevalence higher among women (12.6%) than men (8.1%). The report confirms the well-known fact that women are generally at a higher risk of contracting the virus than men. One reason why this is the case, again as is commonly known, is the subordinate position that women occupy in society. Socio-cultural expectations (entrenched by, as well as reflected in, corresponding images of women as second in status to men) make women more susceptible to contracting the virus and dying from AIDS-related illnesses. These socio-cultural expectations deprive women of their control over their own subjectivity and in turn define their subjectivity in relation to and usually for the benefit of men. As McFadden (2003: n.p.) argues, in comparison to male bodies "women and girls are taught, consistently and often violently, that their bodies are dirty, nasty, smelly, disgusting, corrupting, imperfect, ugly and volatile harbingers of disease and immorality". In Kristeva's (1982) terms, the female body then becomes the "abject". In her book titled *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, ("a theoretical account of the psychic origins and mechanisms of revulsion and disgust" [Tyler, 2009: 79]), Kristeva characterises the abject as, among other things, a "threatening other" (1982: 17); that which "disturbs identity, system, order" (1982: .4). The abject thus encompasses "forces, practices and things which are opposed to and unsettle the conscious ego, the "I". (Tyler, 2009: 79). The casting of female bodies as dirty, nasty, disgusting and so on corresponds to Kristeva's concept of the abject. Following from Kristeva's theory of the abject, a new way of reading the portrayal of the female body in art and culture emerged: "abject criticism" which critically engages "the maternal (and feminine) body as primary site/sight of cultural disgust" (Tyler, 2009: 82). The aim of such critical engagement is "exposing, disrupting and/or transcoding the historical and cultural associations between women's bodies, reproduction and the abject" (Tyler, 2009: 83). Drawing on the theoretical ideas above, I critically analyse the portrayal of the female body as abject in some prominent popular HIV/AIDS songs in Malawi. These songs are "Ukakhala Nazo" (anon.), "Rose Wabwera" (anon), "Upewe" (Soul Chembezi) "Akunenepa Nako" (Albert

Khoza) and "Technology" (Charles Nsaku). I argue that negative images of women in these songs constitute a troubling subtext that undermines important messages that the songs purport to disseminate. Further to that, some of the songs propagate ideas that are scientifically wrong and may therefore mislead the public.

Women, HIV/AIDS and popular imagination in Malawi

Research on women and HIV in Malawi has usually been sociological in nature with particular focus on women's vulnerability in contracting the virus (Ghosh & Kalipeni, 2005; Swidler & Watkins, 2007). In such research, women's susceptibility to contracting HIV is usually tied to social, cultural and economic conditions affecting the women's lives. These factors place women in positions of powerlessness in as far as making decisions that affect their lives is concerned. According to Kathewera-Banda *et al.* (2005: 651), "Malawian women are situated in a socio-legal and political-economic environment that sustains unequal gender power relations that tolerate the perpetuation of violence against women and leave women more vulnerable to HIV infection and the infringement of their sexual and reproductive health rights." Kathewela-Banda *et al.* (2005: 650) also note that "women have no guaranteed protection from HIV transmission, since their sexual and reproductive health choices are overtaken by socio-cultural expectations and their subordinate status in society." Related to the foregoing is the tendency by society to put blame for infection on women, which often comes with degrading images of women and their bodies. In their study "Donkey Work: Women, Religion and HIV/AIDS in Malawi" Rankin *et al.* observe that in Chichewa, Malawi's national language, the "term for sexually transmitted infections [STIs] is "woman's disease" (2005: 11). The term "woman's disease" marks the female body as inseparable from STIs and therefore potentially infectious. Implicit in such labelling also is men's "blaming their wives for the infection" (2005: 11). Such images of the female body as "volatile harbinger of disease" are something that usually goes unnoticed in the HIV/AIDS discourse in Malawi including advocacy songs aimed at sensitising the public about the dangers of HIV/AIDS. In this paper, I pay attention to such troubling undertones in the selected songs.

The first two songs, "Ukakhala Nazo" (When You Have Money) and "Rose Wabwera" (Rose is Back), used to be some of the most popular jingles from the late 90s to early 2000s. "Ukakhala Nazo" was usually sung by (young) men on their way to, but especially returning from, drinking sprees. Once in a while you could hear the song from children's playgrounds which attests to how popular the song was at that time. The song advises men to be careful with HIV/AIDS because it is more vicious than syphilis and gonorrhoea, two of the most feared sexually transmitted diseases before the advent of HIV/AIDS. The jingle goes:

Ukakhala nazo ndalama izo,
uzimwele mowa;
akaziwa ngoopsa
akupatsa edzi.

Edzi ndimatenda
Bomu likulenga
Akaziwa ngoopsa
Akupatsa edzi.

[If you have money
Spend it on beer
Women are dangerous
They will infect you with AIDS.

AIDS is a disease
More vicious than gonorrhoea
Women are dangerous
They will infect you with AIDS].

The song sends out a vital message, that men should check their promiscuous behaviour because HIV/AIDS cannot be treated the same way as syphilis and gonorrhoea. Earliest reactions to HIV/AIDS in Malawi were that it was syphilis's and gonorrhoea's kin which could easily be treated with a dosage of antibiotics and therefore did not elicit a lot of fear in men. The song, therefore, warns men not to compare AIDS with mere STIs. However, there are two clear problems in this song. In the first place, the song seems to target men

only which is a common problem in many HIV/AIDS advocacy messages in Malawi. In doing so, the song somehow shifts the blame to women by casting them as the source of the virus. The song does not address the question about where the women got the virus from. It is as if the virus originates from the female body. The question of men as possible carriers of the virus does not arise at all in the song. Men are cast as clean and therefore the need for them to keep themselves away from women whose bodies are portrayed as "naturally" infected. Evident here is the "abjection" of the female body; an Other that the male self must protect itself from. HIV/AIDS is associated with women because being a disease that is commonly transmitted through sexual intercourse, it has also become a "woman's disease" just like syphilis and gonorrhoea. Secondly, the song commodifies the female body which can easily be substituted with another commodity, beer; and which, like beer, can be had by men as they please.

"Rose Wabwera" could be analysed in the same vain as "Ukakhala Nazo". The song goes:

> *Rose wabwera kuchokera ku Zimbabwe*
> *(Ku Zimbabwe)*
> *Watenga Edzi anyamata muchenjere*
> *(Muchenjere).*
>
> [Rose is back from Zimbabwe
> She has come with AIDS, boys beware]

Thriving on call-and-response pattern, the song warns young men not to be lured by Rose who has just returned from Zimbabwe because she has come back infected with HIV/AIDS. Like the song analysed above, this one too carries an important message. Often times people in local communities in Malawi tend to value things from other countries, *zakunja* as it is put in Chichewa. As such anybody who has been abroad and then returns home, is looked at with admiration. So the fact that Rose returns from Zimbabwe, she is likely to attract a lot of attention from young men who would want to date a woman from abroad (*wakunja).* The song therefore warns young men to be careful and not rush into dating Rose. The problem with the song, like the one above, is the abjection of Rose as a woman: she is infected and a source of

infection and young men must keep away from her. Implicitly, she is also blamed for bringing AIDS from abroad into the society which in the end casts women who engage in transnational migration as potential vectors of cross-border spread of HIV/AIDS. This is despite the fact that statistics indicate that men are more involved in cross-border migration than women.

The popular jingles analysed above set the tone for other musical interventions which wallow in the same pitfalls of negative and uncritical portrayal of female bodies. Saul Chimbezi's "Upewe" (Abstain), is one such song. Foregrounded in the title of the song is a message that is usually emphasised as one of the most effective ways of preventing the spread of the virus: abstinence. However, one's expectations raised by the title of the song dissipate into disappointment a few lines into the song. The song begins like many songs done by male Malawian artists about women: the appreciation of a woman's beauty which usually means the face, the breasts and the buttocks. In Chembezi's song the face and buttocks are given prominence:

Kankhope kako ndi malesa
Nawo ma hip booster *ali thithithi*
Mtima wangu uli gu! gu! gu!
Waumbidwa bwino
Vuto ndiwe mkazi oyendayenda
[…]

Poona mbuyo ili pikupiku
Nayo body structure *ili ndendundengu*
Movement *yako kutekesa moyo*
Mafana tonse mutu zwe! Mutu zwe! Mutu zwe!

[Your face is appetising
Your hips shake provocatively
My heart goes thump! thump! thump!
You are well moulded
The problem is that you are a prostitute

When they see your behind
And your whole body shaking
Your movement stirs their lives
All fellas lose their heads.]

Portrayed above is the image of a woman's body that almost sends men drooling yet it is suspected of carrying "something" inside. In the song the woman is clearly identified as a prostitute or promiscuous, hence men are quickly warned in the chorus of the song: *"Uvale, upewe, umuleke chonde* [use protection, abstain, or just leave her]/'cause you don't know what is inside". Clearly, the song's intended message is that looks are deceiving, that one should be careful not to fall for anyone just because of their looks and that one must abstain or use protection. However, the song's obvious focus on a male audience seems to suggest that female bodies are the only carriers of the virus and therefore the only bodies that men must protect themselves from.

The portrayal of the female body as source and carrier of the virus is also evident in Albert Khoza's "Akunenepa Nako" (They are Getting Fat with the Virus). Khoza's song is a piece of advice from father to son about how "dangerous" women are in these days of the pandemic. In the song Kristeva's idea of the abject as a "threatening other" comes alive especially in portraying the female body as "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady" (1982: 4). The son is told to take care and not to be lured by women's good looks because most of them carry the virus. In the opening lines of the song, it is alleged that most of these women are young girls. Says father to son:

Mwana wanga iwe
Bwela kuno ndikutsineko khutu
Bwela kuno ndikupatse mwambo
Undimvere.

Tima sweet sixteen *nditomwe tikuyambitsa*
Nditomwe tikuchimwitsa
Ukapanda kusamala mwana wanga iwe
Tikakuyika.

[My son
Come here, let me advise you
Let me give you morals.
Listen to me.
These sweet sixteens start it all
They are the ones leading us into sin
If you are not careful, my child,
(You will die and we will bury you.]

In the lines cited above, the father makes an outrageous claim that the HIV problem begins with young girls. Even more outrageous is the claim that these nubile girls drag men into sin, thereby shifting the blame for men's moral turpitude (sleeping with young girls) to women. The young girls are thus cast as "little Eves" who like Eve in the Garden of Eden represent "the most sinister of evil physicality" (Donovan, 1988: 266) that led Adam to his fall. In her reading of images of women in canonical western literature, Donovan arrives at a conclusion which is quite befitting in our present discussion. In Western literature, Donovan contends, a woman is defined "insofar as she relates to, serves, or thwarts the interests of men." She further notes that these negative images fall into the Manichean dualistic pattern where women "symbolise either the spiritual or the material, good or evil" (1988: 266). While the former is represented by figures such as Mary the mother of Jesus (the epitome of spiritual goodness), the latter is symbolised by Eve, evil personified. With their dirty, contaminated and infectious bodies, the young girls in Khoza's song hinder male protagonists in their quest for (sexual) glory. The father's projection of men's moral weakness onto the girls is typical of Adam's blaming of Eve after they had eaten from the forbidden tree. Thus, from the outset, the song's purported message of raising awareness about the deadly virus is compromised by casting the world into a Manichean dualism of good males vs. bad females. In the next lines of the song, the father clearly highlights the female body as defective and infectious:

Usatengeke ndi kunenepako
Usatengeke ndi dibwilidibwiliyo
Akaziwa akunenepa koma mkati adavulala

[Don't be lured by their healthy looking bodies
Don't be enticed by their nice, 'appetising' bodies
These ladies look healthy but they are diseased].

In the lines above, the female body is represented as defective, infected and particularly deceptive: a sinister and scheming abject, to borrow Kristeva's words cited earlier. Much as the women look beautiful and healthy, says the father, they are actually diseased; rotten inside. There is an important message that the father communicates to the son here: looks are deceiving, that you cannot tell a person's status by their looks. However, this important message is subsumed in the negativity with which the father regards the female body. An element of disgust and revulsion towards the female body unmistakably underlies the father's sentiments. In the words of Zygmnut Bauman (1988: 47) in a different context, the female body becomes the other who "is not a sinner who can still repent and mend [her] ways" but "a diseased organism, both ill and infectious, both damaged and damaging." Women are also accused of working to entice men by, the song alleges, use of contraceptives to disguise their sickness – as is clear in the chorus:

Akunenepa nako kachilombo akaziwa
Plus *ma* injection *akulera*
Dibwilidibwiliyo usatenge naye, samala m'bale.

[Women are looking healthy with the virus
They also use birth control injections
Take care, friend; don't be lured by their healthy looking bodies.]

Two misguided allegations need to be highlighted here. In the first place, the song alleges that women look "healthier" with the virus. This may be reference to gaining weight by some people when they start taking anti-retroviral medication. The father in the song wrongly interprets this as women getting healthier with the virus. Suggested here is a misguided idea of a symbiotic relationship between women's bodies and the virus: that women's

bodies host the virus which they later pass on to men. The song further alleges that women also use contraceptive injections to conceal symptoms of AIDS. This point is scientifically misplaced and therefore grossly misleading. There is no connection between contraceptive injections and HIV/AIDS treatment. One potential harm resulting from this misguided idea is that it may lead to shunning of contraceptives by some women who may not want to be thought of as attempting to hide their cero-status. Further on in the song, the female body's destructiveness is hyperbolically compared to that of a nuclear bomb when the father advises the son: *"Usayelekeze kuponda* nuclear" (Don't dare step on a nuclear bomb). The female body's potential to contaminate and kill is thus tantamount to the nuclear bomb's power to destroy and annihilate.

In the final analysis, while Khoza's song purports to aid the fight against HIV/AIDS, it falls short especially through its misrepresentation of certain scientific facts and its failure to recognise gender as an integral part of the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic. As Kathewera-Banda *et al.* (2005: 649) have observed, gender remains "a key variable in the high transmission rate of HIV and other sexual and reproductive health risks for women" and therefore any effective attempt to arrest the pandemic must recognise the impact of gender and its power implications on the evolution of the pandemic (Türmen, 2003: 411).

The portrayal of women as the abject other threatening men is extensively explored in Charles Nsaku's "Technology". Nsaku's concern is how "technology" helps women conceal seropositivity. Nsaku's use of the term technology does not celebrate the importance of technology in modern life but rather it insinuates the qualities of artificiality and deceptiveness that women's bodies achieve through grooming and make-up. Implicit in Nsaku's sentiments are attitudes in certain sections of the Malawian public towards women's use of cosmetics. Use of cosmetics such as make-up and artificial hair are usually frowned upon and deemed foreign by certain quarters of the public in Malawi. Often times such a perception is reflected in popular arts like songs where the desirable woman is one who is content with her natural beauty and does not use any artificial means to enhance her looks. Such an image of the ideal marriageable Malawian lady is often tied to adherence to

traditional customs and ways of life, themselves often circumscribed by Christian or Islamic mores which, interestingly, are not indigenous to Malawi.

Granted, Nsaku's song targets both men and women. However, the song puts more emphasis on the female body as a carrier of HIV than it does on the male body. In fact the images and vocal intensity with which the artist sings about the female body are sharper and more hard-hitting than those he uses to describe male figures. The song is primarily a warning to young men not to be deceived by women who are using "technology" to enhance their beauty while in fact they are infected. The song opens in the following way:

Ngati anyamata sitichenjera tonse tipita
Padzana paja tinkayenda m'mbali
Podziwa za edzi
Tikangoona tsitsi peyupeyu tinkati imeneyo
Tikangoona chithupi phwaa ndi edzi imeneyo.

[Boys if we are not careful, all of us will die
We were deceived in the past regarding AIDS
When we saw shrinking hair, we knew it was AIDS
When we saw shrinking bodies, we knew it was AIDS].

The lines above could be summed up in one crucial question: how do we identify an HIV positive person? In the early days of HIV/AIDS in Malawi, shrivelled hair and sudden loss of body weight were among "the" signs of a person carrying the HI virus, a perception that is still prevalent in certain parts of Malawi today. In his song Nsaku goes on to warn young men that withered hair and weight loss are no longer reliable symptoms for the "diagnosis" of a person's serostatus because women nowadays use technology to groom their infected bodies. The chorus of the song is revealing in that regard:

Lero edziyi ndi technology
(*Ma* ARVs)
Sikudziwika
(Body booster)
Kaya mbinayo ikule bwanji
Usasilire (*ndi* technology)
(Body booster)

Kaya bele liyime bwanji
Jakisoni wa technology
(Body booster)
Kaya siketi abewule bwanji
Usacheuka
Nawo a telala kukokomeza.

[These days with technology
(…)
You can't tell who has AIDS.
(…)
No matter how round the buttocks look
Do not salivate after that (that's just technology)
No matter how firm the breasts look
It is probably because of injections
No matter how short the skirt is
Do not stare.
The tailor, too, exaggerates women's clothes too much!]

With "technology" these days, so claims Nsaku, you cannot tell who is carrying the virus. Ordinarily, you would expect an HIV/AIDS advocacy song like Nsaku's to encourage the use of antiretroviral medication by those who are HIV positive. To the contrary, Nsaku claims that women use ARVs not because they want to prolong their lives, but because they want to conceal their status in order to trick men. Health enhancing drugs are thus portrayed in a bad light which may influence the masses' attitude towards such lifesaving medication. The artificiality of these female bodies, achieved through the use of ARVs as Nsaku bizarrely claims, is complemented by their dressing. Here, Nsaku taps from the general perception among Malawians of what has been termed "strange" dressing by women. Apparently this strange dressing is often attributed to the coming of democracy. During Hastings Kamuzu Banda's reign (1964 – 1994), women were banned from wearing miniskirts (or any so-called revealing clothes) and pants. Wearing such clothes amounted to indecency. Such a perception as entrenched by Kamuzu Banda still remains

deep rooted in the Malawian public psyche today.[1] When the HIV pandemic came onto the scene, women dressed in the "so-called" indecent clothes were immediately associated with the spread of the virus. They were called "*mahule*" (prostitutes) and their dressing referred to as "*kuvala kwa mahule*" (dressing like prostitutes to attract clients). The word "*hule*" (prostitute) comes with its baggage of connotations: indecent, immoral, corrupt, infected, diseased, and therefore, abject. In Nsaku's song, young men are advised that no matter how revealing a woman's clothes are they should never be attracted because that is mere technology. Dressing thus becomes another way through which women conceal or enhance/"photoshop" their bodies in order to attract men. The tailor is attacked as an accomplice to the women's trickery for exaggerating the body hugging clothes s/he makes for them.

The song warns those who travel to be careful not to get involved with women in the places they go to before they find out more about such women. Nsaku turns to Malawian orature for appropriate metaphor and expression. He appropriates the saying *"gwafa wapachimbudzi amadya ndiobwela"* literally translating "guava fruit that grows on human faeces is eaten only by strangers" (because they do not know it is growing on excreta). Simply, when you go to a new place and you find something good or someone nice-looking and yet the locals seem to show no interest in that thing or person, then you need to ask yourself why that is the case. There might be something that keeps the locals away which, in the context of the song, would be the woman's real status carefully concealed by *"*technology*"*. So if you find a nice woman who seems to attract no attention from the locals in the area, that could be guava fruit growing on human excreta. The idea or image of "*gwafa wa pachimbudzi*" enhances the image of the female body as dirty and rotten and a carrier of the virus. A guava fruit growing on human faeces is not tampered with by the people and therefore it is left for itself to thrive. But the fruit of such a tree is usually considered contaminated by virtue of growing on human waste. In the same way, the reason why a beautiful lady attracts no attention from men in

[1]There are numerous recent newspaper reports of vendors harassing women in trousers and miniskirts in Malawi's major urban areas. See for example (among other news reports) "Lilongwe Vendors Strip Women in Trousers". *Nation Online*, Web. 18 January 2012.

her area may be because she has "something" that keeps the men away. It may be argued that the song offers vital advice regarding the need to know and be sure of someone before getting involved with them. However, relating the female body to a guava fruit growing on human faeces is troubling. The relationship between excreta and the infected female body draws us back to the idea of the abject as something repulsive that must be expelled. Casting the female body as fruit also reduces that body to a commodity to be had by man as he wishes: a fruit which men can enjoy if they so wish.

I indicated above that Nsaku's song does not exclusively target young men. It also offers advice to young women not to get involved with sugar daddies. But as noted above, Nsaku's rendition of the advice to the young girl lacks conviction and sincerity. In fact, the advice to the young girl takes only 8 seconds of the whole 4 minutes 58 seconds long song. Again, his depiction of the male body is not as castigating and degrading as the way he portrays the female body. The man is described as "*wamkulu mimba*" (big- or potbellied man) which may be a sign of wealth, for it symbolises "*anamadyabwino*" – those who eat well. It may thus be a sign of success, the protruding belly becoming a "success curve", as a potbelly is popularly known among young men in Malawi these days. In the song, however, the image of a protruding belly emphasises age difference between the young girl and the man she is dating who is old enough to be her own father. The only thing that Nsaku says to the young girl is that there might be something dangerous in the protruding belly without elaborating what that danger could be. The male body is thus not explicitly marked as HIV infected the way the female body is. This goes back to what has been said above, that it is primarily the female body that is considered the source and carrier of the virus. Notice that the man's behaviour of dating young girls is also not commented on or criticised in the song.

After his very brief and superficial advice to the young woman, Nsaku switches to talk about his neighbour, a woman. His attention goes to what he thinks to be the woman's "strange body": big breasts and small buttocks. It is implied in the song that such a "disproportionate" growth of the woman's body organs is due to her use of "technology". It is far from a coincidence that Nsaku singles out only those two parts of the female body. As noted earlier, women's breasts and buttocks seem the most fancied parts by men, as is

evident also in the fact that these are the only parts mentioned in the chorus. Nsaku then laments: "Technology *utipweteketsa/ nanga chilombo tichidziwa bwa*?" (Technology you will hurt us/ how are we going to recognised the marauding beast?"). The infected and defective female body now becomes a vicious monster which must be marked so that men can easily identify it and therefore protect themselves from it. But the beast cannot be identified easily because technology helps conceal its character. The song ends on a rather worrisome note. Part of the concluding section goes:

> *Chenjera, chenjera, adzakuseke ndi a neba*
> *Chimutucho chitaphwela*
> *Chenjera, chenjera, adzakuseke and a neba*
> *Mimbayo itaphwela.*
>
> [Be careful, your neighbours may laugh at you
> When you finally grow thin (because of the virus)].

What is worrisome here is that people are told to be careful not because contracting the HI virus may affect their wellbeing but because their neighbours may laugh at them once they begin to show signs of infection. Thus the motivation for protecting oneself, Nsaku seems to say, should be fear of public ridicule. Clearly, stigma is not an issue to Nsaku in this particular song as far as containing the HIV/AIDS pandemic is concerned. People living with the virus are thus cast as objects of public ridicule and shame. The song portrays contracting the virus as a laughing matter – a disgraceful thing that attracts public ridicule in the form of laughter. This ties in well with the perception of infected people as immoral and disgraced. Nsaku's song, like the others above is a problematic piece of advocacy that is likely to promote certain perceptions that may hamper the struggle against the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Conclusion

I have shown in the discussion above that all five songs analysed (and many like them that are likely circulating in Malawi's popular culture at present) have troubling subtexts which undermine their intended meaning and purpose. Two major subtexts stand out as per the discussion above. Firstly, all songs cast women's bodies negatively; as evil, dirty and a potential threat to male

bodies. To borrow Jungar's and Oinas's words in their discussion of women in male circumcision discourses, women in the songs analysed above are "totally marginalised rendering them to nothing other than sources of infection and objects of male heterosexuality" (2004: 105). The blame cast on these bodies by men alludes to Adam's blame of Eve for his fall from grace. The women thus become daughters of Eve in some way. Such blame also confirms Craddock's point that "the HIV/AIDS body in Malawi has been produced largely as female" (2000: 161). As McFadden (2003: page).also asserts elsewhere, "the public debates, campaigns and health care responses generated by [the HIV/AIDS] crisis have been underwritten by a long legacy of patriarchal and heterosexist policing of women's freedoms and rights." By perpetuating negative perception of female bodies, the songs compromise the fight against the AIDS problem. HIV/AIDS campaigns such as the songs analysed here "fail because the messages are othering and stigmatising" and end up producing "an image of the infected Other" (Zenebe cited in Jungar and Oinas, 2008: 183). Such campaigns increasingly put women at risk because they "completely ignore the needs of women and […] recasts them as objects" (Jungar and Oinas, 2004: 107). Secondly, the songs advocate, albeit indirectly, certain ideas and beliefs that may be detrimental to the fight against the pandemic. Misrepresentation of scientific facts and condoning of stigma against AIDS treatment (and also against people living with the virus) compromise the otherwise good intentions in the songs. The fact that such songs continue to circulate in public should be cause for worry because, while one problem is being dealt with, other problems are encouraged to thrive. And since issues like gender and power are closely linked to the HIV/AIDS problem, there might be minimal or no desirable progress at all being made to contain the pandemic if such songs are left to circulate and flourish.

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