



## Direct Characterisation and the Depiction of HIV/Aids Theme in the Zulu Novel, Ngidedele Ngife

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### **Abstract**

This paper aims to explore how E.D.M. Sibiyi uses direct characterisation in presenting the theme of HIV and Aids in his Zulu novel, *Ngidedele Ngife* (2006). Although Sibiyi uses both the direct and indirect methods of character delineation in his novel, the focus of this paper is on the direct method. And, as we intend to argue, his strategy seems to be effective as it enables him to present the intended themes successfully. The HIV/Aids theme is one of the sensitive themes from which writers shy away, but Sibiyi manages to explore it to educate people. A narratology theory is used to examine the effect of characterisation in the presentation of theme, and the focus is on personality traits and physical appearances of characters. This paper reveals that Sibiyi successfully handles direct characterisation to educate people about the HIV and Aids symptoms, how they manifest, and the stereotypes linked to the HIV/Aids pandemic.

**Keywords:** *Direct Characterisation; Narratology Theory; Theme; Characters; HIV/Aids*

### **Introduction**

Characters play a vitally important role in literary works as they bring creative oeuvres to life. Authors create characters with the aim of using them to educate readers about certain social issues. The characters in Sibiyi's novel, *Ngidedele Ngife* (2006), closely resemble humans because they generally possess humanlike qualities. This paper explores the effectiveness of direct characterisation in presenting the theme of HIV and Aids in the abovementioned novel. The purpose of exploring characters and the theme is to investigate how the author educates the nation about the HIV and Aids pandemic, and the stereotypes that were associated with this disease. Theme and characterisation are interlinked in this paper in the sense that, characters are about personalities and behaviours and HIV/Aids education is also about how individuals behave sexually.

## ***Defining Concepts***

Three important concepts will be defined in section of the paper, namely; characters, characterisation, and theme.

### **Characters**

Characters and theme are part of the building blocks of all fictional narratives. Sithole (2019:12) states that “fiction relies on imagined people to make the story meaningful, and those people are called characters”. Sithole is supported by Hadebe (2020:5), who defines characters as “imaginary people that are artistically created by the author”. This definition gives the impression that characters are not real people, rather are fictional human beings that are imagined and created. On a slightly different note, Nyaungwa (2008:88), is of the view that “people in literature may be fictitious or real. They are the result of an author’s imagination”. Nyaungwa’s definition suggests that characters may be real or unreal people, depending on the author’s imagination. Therefore, from what the three scholars have argued, it can be concluded that that characters are real or unreal people that are used in narrative works, to make the story meaningful. Therefore, without credible and live characters, there can never be a good story.

Novelists artistically use characters to present the themes in a story. The portrayal of the characters determines the success of the story. Shezi (2001: 12) is of the view that:

It is through the art of character depiction that the reader can acquire knowledge of what is going on in the minds of the characters by means of what they do, say or the way they respond to situations.

In the sense, the ideas, events, and life experiences that the author explores, are revealed through characters.

### **Characterisation**

Khoza (2006:7) states that: “characterization is necessary to convey the theme and move the plot of the story as both are made possible through characters”. These researchers agree with this view because these narrative elements are intertwined, and one does not exist independently of the other. Khoza’s assertion also tallies well with the subject of this paper because, as we intend to demonstrate, Sibiyá’s novel titled *Ngidedele Ngife* (2006) uses direct characterisation to reveal not only physical appearances and personality traits but also as a strategy to ground the theme. Msimang in Canonici (1996:172) define characterisation as “the techniques employed to portray characters as lifelike individuals endowed with physical, moral, emotional, and dispositional qualities. This definition is further supported by Ntuli (1998:29) as follows:

Characterisation is a sum of techniques used as a mechanism, or vehicle for ‘humanising’ the non-human or non-existent imaginary images or fictitious persons in a Zulu novel. These fictitious person are endowed with human attributes.

After reviewing the above definitions about characterisation, one can deduce that characterisation refers to the totality of techniques used by an author to portray characters. An author can use either direct characterisation, or indirect characterisation, or even both techniques. Direct characterisation is also known as descriptive method. This is a method where the novelist simply tells the readers about the characters (Ntuli, 1998). Dokolwana (2001: 14) gives an explanation about direct characterisation as follows:

In a direct definition, the narrator describes the character as he gives the summary of the character’s traits, his motives, thoughts, and desires. The physical characteristics of the character are also revealed.

Dokolwana's explanation gives a clear understanding of what direct characterisation is about. In short, when the author uses the direct characterisation method, the author *directly* tells the reader everything that is crucial about the character. This method has its advantages and disadvantages. Ndebele (2007) mentions that one of the advantages of direct characterisation is that a novelist who is content to tell his readers about his characters can quickly finish the job of characterisation and there after focus on facilitating a particular plot development or other things. The disadvantage of using direct characterisation is that: "it may discourage the reader's imaginative participation. The reader is not encouraged to react directly to the characters so that he may make up his own mind about them" (Ndebele, 2007: 102). Ndebele's view on direct characterisation gives the impression that novelists should use both, the direct and indirect method of characterization, if they have an intention of involving their readers in a story.

### Theme

Selle (2003:24) defines theme using the following words:

Theme is a central message, a unifying thought, a conceptualisation plot, that which justifies the selection of specific material and the order and manner of presentation for a particular work; and which suggest a particular attitude and way into the text or narrative.

There are a few observations that these researchers would like to make. Firstly, theme entails the main message that the author intends to portray in their work. Secondly, it unifies the whole narrative, meaning it knits bits and pieces of the narrative and make it a coherent whole. In other words, theme is the central idea of a story. Finally, theme suggests a particular attitude, i.e. it presents how the author views certain issues in life. Zwane (2020:7) seems to support Selle's assertion by stating that:

Theme is the main idea or main message that the poet or any author, in any literary work, tries to convey through his work. This message can be communicated in different ways. It can be communicated in a simple way, meaning that the reader can understand it even when he has not thoroughly read the piece of writing. Again, it can also be communicated by means of a hidden or deeper meaning that requires one to thoroughly read the text first, before grasping the message.

Therefore, one can conclude that a theme is the essential part of any literary work as it informs the readers about the gist of the story, the writer's attitude towards the subject matter, and the overall message that the writer is conveying to the readers. Ntseki (2002:94) assert that this unifying idea or image is not stated explicitly by the writer, but it is deduced by the readers as they take into consideration the milieu, characters, and plot development in the text. If characters provide meaning to narrative works, as discussed above, then that meaning largely refers to theme, and both these narrative aspects form the core of the discussion for this study.

### **Brief Literature Review**

Literature review is important as it helps the researcher identifies the gaps and avoid repeating what has already been explored. Thwala (2020:26) contends that "the significance of literature review is not only about what works has been written on a particular topic, but also to improve the insight and get more understanding of a particular problem." Although too many scholars have conducted research on characterisation and themes (Sibiya, 2021), there is no published paper or study focusing on characterisation in *Ngidedele Ngife* (2006), at least as far as these researchers know.

Tshabalala's study (2015) focuses on the HIV and Aids theme in E.M Wanda's novel, *Kunjalo-ke* (2008). Tshabalala explores the effect of the setting in characters and themes in Wanda's novel. The study

reveals that poverty has a huge impact in the spread of HIV and Aids, as some people engage in sexual activities with the hope of being taken care of financially.

Mhlongo (2018) conducted a study based on E.M. Wanda's novel, *Kunjalo-ke* (2008). The focus of Mhlongo's is on plot, characters, and themes (HIV and Aids). Some of the objectives of Mhlongo's study is to teach the nation about accepting people who are living with HIV/Aids, and to help the nation have a better understanding of the consequences of being unfaithful in a sexual relationship. Mhlongo does not focus solely on characters, but she also explores different narratological aspects to achieve the objectives of the study, namely, theme, plot, and setting.

Mazibuko (2016) conducted a study, "*Ucwaningo Ngokusoka Nokuqeqesha Abasokile Esizweni SamaZulu*". In this study, Mazibuko (*Op. Cit*) investigates the effectiveness of male circumcision in preventing the spread of HIV and Aids among the Zulu nation. Mazibuko discovers that grooming young men in a right way can prevent unwanted pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV. It was also discovered that encouraging the youth not to engage in sexual activities at an early stage can be a solution to the sexual problems that the nation is facing.

Zulu (2004) conducted research titled, "Post-Apartheid Representations of Youth in the Zulu Novel *Kungasa Ngifile*". His focus is on the youth characters and how the author uses these characters to address social issues that affect the Black African youth in South Africa. Some of the issues that Zulu covers are sexual discipline, cultural practices, youth dropping out of school, peer pressure, and teenage pregnancy. Through characterisation, plot action, and theme, Zulu (*Op cit.*) reveals that the novel advocates for the renewal of traditional African morals and values that should redefine the post-apartheid, liberated South African youth.

Hadebe (2018) conducted a study, "The Dramatic Method of Characterization in EDM Sibiya's *Ngiyolibala Ngifile*". The study is based on the indirect method of characterisation as Hadebe focuses on actions, thoughts, and speech and interactions. Rape, identity crisis, corruption, and patriarchy are seen to be issues that are affecting women in Sibiya's novel. Her analysis reveals that the society forces women to shy away from addressing the abovementioned issues and end up being emotionally and psychologically affected due to their silence. In short, Hadebe's study addresses how the society forces women to accept violation of their rights and how men in power create an unsafe space for women.

Ndebele (2007) presented a dissertation titled, "A Narratological Analysis of Two Zulu Novels". The novels he discusses are "*Kungasa Ngifile*" (2002) by EDM Sibiya and "*Kuxolelwa Abanjani*" (2002) by NG Sibiya. Ndebele's study touches on characterisation, types of characters, sequence of events, themes, and setting. On characterisation, Ndebele (*Op cit.*) discovers that both authors use both methods of characterisation, namely; the expository and the dramatic method. The findings reveal that both novelists artistically present characters to the readers, and that characters assist novelists to educate the nation about different issues.

Subsequent to the brief literature review above, no scholar seems to have published a paper on Sibiya's novel, *Ngidedele Ngife* (2006), focusing on direct characterisation and theme of this novel. Therefore, this paper aims to close this existing lacuna in literary scholarship done on this specific novelist. However, the knowledge reviewed will be used to support the ideas presented in this study.

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology. Methodology provides a step-by-step guidance to the researcher as to where and how to look for information, how to find sources, and who to talk to for further information (Sibiya 2021). This paper employs qualitative method because it renders a

text-based analysis. According to Mason (2002), as cited by Dlamini (2019: 6): “qualitative research generally includes interviews, observations, surveys, content analysis of visual and written materials, and oral history”. Sibiyi (2021: 16) states that qualitative research method creates significant meanings of different phenomena or discourses as it “celebrates richness, depth, nuance, context, multi-dimensionality and complexity”. Therefore, this study will adopt a qualitative research method as it aims to explore how Sibiyi’s novel, titled *Ngidedele Ngife* (2006) uses characters to educate the nation about HIV and Aids. This study uses a text-based approach as the researchers read the novel, interpret, and analyse the information by applying the appropriate aspects of narratology.

### Summary of the Novel

*Ngidedele Ngife* (2006) revolves around a 24-year-old man named Ndabayakhe who comes from a village called Mphazima, situated in Nquthu in the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal. In the opening chapter, the character is introduced as someone who is trying to commit suicide. He has been having a running tummy for almost a week. He drastically loses appetite and weight and therefore concludes that he has Aids. He goes to his friend, Mtshingothi, whom he, ironically, finds singing a newly composed song about HIV/Aids. Mtshingothi tells Ndabayakhe that he has just composed the song because he wants to advise the nation about the HIV/Aids pandemic, and he intends encouraging people to have their blood tested for HIV. He then tells Ndabayakhe that he composed the song after he tested positive. During the conversation, Mtshingothi tells Ndabayakhe that he should also get tested because he is not getting better from the diarrhoea. The very conversation depresses Ndabayakhe and has many thoughts running through his mind as he realises that he is personally not ready to be part of those who advise people about HIV/Aids. Ndabayakhe does not want to tell anyone that he suspects that he is HIV positive too.

The next morning, Ndabayakhe is woken up by his mother, MaSibiyi, who wants him to go to the doctor for a check-up, as he is not getting better. Due to the fear of getting tested for HIV, Ndabayakhe tells his mother that he has an appointment with his friends, Mtshingothi and Majongosi, who are also his partners in the Maskandi music group. He promises that he will go and consult a doctor only if he does not get better. Ndabayakhe later goes to Mtshingothi’s household, where he finds the latter and Majongosi singing and dancing to their maskandi songs. He joins them, although he is feeling weak. Ndabayakhe did not want his friends to be more suspicious of his sickness. During their break, Majongosi encourages Ndabayakhe to go for HIV testing while it is still early. Ndabayakhe goes outside to get some fresh air, but quickly goes to the pit lavatory as his diarrhoea is not getting any better. He falls unconscious while he was still in the toilet.

Ndabayakhe is later rushed to the hospital, but the doctor is not available and there are no beds for new patients. Most beds are occupied by patients who are suffering from HIV and Aids. He goes back to hospital the following day, but the doctor tells him that he sees nothing wrong with him, but he will take blood tests to be sure. Ndabayakhe is initially sceptical of the idea of testing blood but later accepted it. Ndabayakhe decides that, before he gets results for his blood tests, he will commit suicide. He attempts suicide by hanging himself inside a thick forest, but he is saved by John and Khona. It is later discovered that Ndabayakhe is HIV negative. His diarrhoea was due to the lack of iron and other nutrients in his body.

### Analysis of Direct Characterisation in the Novel

It seems to these researchers that the author of this novel wants to educate the nation about HIV and Aids. This paper discusses direct characterisation that reveals personalities, physical appearance, and stereotypes. It should be noted that the novel is presented in a third person omniscient narrator. This means that the narrator can see everything and everywhere in the novel, including the thoughts of characters. Ndebele (2007:20) defines a third person narrator as follows:



This is a narrator who knows everything that needs to be known about the agents and events; that he is free to move as he will in time and place, and to shift from one character to character, reporting (or concealing) what he chooses of their speeches and actions; and also that he has privileged access to a character's thoughts, feelings and motives, as well as to his overt speech and actions.

Therefore, the analysis will reveal that the novel is written in a third-person narrative, as the narrator will be able to have access to the thoughts of characters, their views, and know their beliefs, values, and attitudes. And the narrator tells the readers directly about different aspects of characterisation.

### Characterisation that Reveals Physical Appearance

Sithole (2019) defines physical appearance as one's outlook. This means that physical appearance is the outside look of human beings. Ndabayakhe is presented as someone who once had a big body but has since lost weight due to ill health. This is revealed in the following manner:

*Sekuyizinsukwana impela uNdabayakhe simgeqa isisu. Simshaya simqede amandla aphele nya. Kuze kube sengathi sekubuhlungu wonke umzimba. Isiqethevu sesigemfunga kaNxumalo madoda sesivele sawwabheka ngezinsukwana nje.*

(Sibiya, 2006:11)

[It has been days since Ndabayakhe has been suffering from diarrhoea. It has affected him badly that all his body hurts. A well-built big Nxumalo boy has just lost weight within a couple of days.]

The narrator describes Ndabayakhe as a big, well-built young man. By saying “*isiqethevu sesigemfunga kaNxumalo sesivele sawwabheka ngezinsukwana nje*”, he means that Ndabayakhe has a big body and is well-built but has suddenly lost weight within a few days of being sick. Ndabayakhe's sudden loss of weight makes the reader wonder what the cause of Ndabayakhe's diarrhoea is. The author is making readers think about this as they read the novel. The author's choice of words helps paint in the reader's mind a vivid picture of how Ndabayakhe looked like before he got sick. The author's intention is to grab the readers' attention to a story, as they would want to know what is wrong with Ndabayakhe. The narrator quickly grabs the readers' attention by mentioning what Ndabayakhe has in mind. The narrator depicts the character's thoughts while highlighting the main theme of the novel as he narrates thus:

*Uze waqala emuva kwezinsuku ezintathu ukushintsha ukucabanga. Munye vo umqondo oye wamfikela: uphethwe yingculazi.*

(Sibiya, 2006:11)

[He started to think differently after three days. Only one thought came to his mind: he has Aids.]

The narrator introduces the HIV and Aids theme by telling readers that Ndabayakhe has one thought after suffering from diarrhoea for a long time, and that thought was, he is infected by HIV/Aids. Ndabayakhe's immediate thought of having Aids contributes to the growth of the story and the HIV and Aids theme. Most of the incidents that occur in a novel revolve around Ndabayakhe's thoughts of having contracted HIV/Aids. To make the readers believe that Ndabayakhe had Aids, the author used some minor characters who are already infected with HIV. The narrator reveals their physical appearances as follows:

*Kodwa okuyikhona okumesabisa kakhulu, yilaba bantu abaguliswa yingculazi. Kusengabantu yini bona labaya lokhu izingane zabantu sezifana nje namathambo agoqwe ngesikhumba. Kwakuze kube ngcono le ntokazi yesitshako eyayikubeka ngokusobala nayo ukuthi isinalo igciwane, noma ilithole ngokudlwengulwa emuva kokuziphatha kahle ebuntombini bayo. ....*

*Yona yayibukeka iphila impela intokazi, ingafani nalaba abanye asebengangezinti zokuvungula.*

(Sibiya, 2006:12)

[What scared Ndabayakhe the most, was those people who already have Aids. They look like a collection of bones wrapped in a skin. The gapped-tooth lady, who reveals that she has the virus, was better than others, even though she got infected through rape after keeping her virginity for the better part of her youth. ....]

The lady truly looks healthy, unlike the other ones who are as thin as toothpicks.]

In this instance the author is conveying the message to the readers that people will never know that they are sick, or others are sick unless they get tested, or the sick tells them. By saying, “*Yayibukeka iphila impela, ingafani nalaba abanye asebengangezinti zokuvula*” [The lady truly looks healthy, unlike the other ones who are as thin as toothpicks], the author is emphasising the importance of getting tested for HIV as some people, when compared to others, may look healthy even when they are already infected with the virus. A person can never be sure that they are HIV positive by just looking at them. *Asebengangezinti zokuvungula* [who are as thin as toothpicks] is a simile used by the author to make it clear how thin people who had full blown Aids look like. This simile is vivid in that many people are familiar with toothpicks and know how thin they are that they can get in-between one’s teeth. According to Msomi (2015:88), simile can be defined as follows:

*Lapha kusuke kuqhathaniswa into nenye into. Lezi zinto zisuke zehlukene kodwa zinokufana okuthile. Into okusuke kufaniswa nayo ivame ukuba ngcono kunale efaniswa nayo.*

[Here, one thing is compared to another. These things are different but have some similar qualities. What is being compared to is usually better than what is being compared with.]

Drawing from Msomi’s definition, one can say that toothpicks look better than people who had full-blown Aids. The author uses this simile successfully as it gives people a better understanding of how people with Aids look like. Ndabayakhe’s loss of weight is also emphasised to make the reader more interested in a story and believe that Ndabayakhe has Aids, as he is displaying HIV symptoms. This loss of weight is also an allusion to his deteriorating physical appearance mentioned earlier. According to Holzemer and others (2007:260), “people living with HIV/Aids encounter many physiological, psychological, and cognitive symptoms such as pain, diarrhoea, fatigue, depression, memory loss, and balance and walking problems”. The author manages to reveal that a person can still physically look healthy even after being infected with HIV. He uses Mtshingothi to help people understand the importance of testing for HIV. Mtshingothi looks normal even after testing positive for HIV. This is revealed directly by the narrator in the following lengthy passage:

*Yahleka imakwabo yaze yabamba isisu lokhu uzimukile umuntu lona. Nesigingci lesi uma esibambile sivele sibe sincanyana ngaphansi kwezingalokazi zakhe. Isisu lesi sasibhakuza wena owabona ingungu yebhola igqoma phansi ngenkathi inkosi lena ihleka ngokujabula.*

(Sibiya, 2006:19)

[He laughed until he held his stomach as he has a big body structure. Even the guitar becomes tiny under his big arms when he is holding it. His stomach kept bouncing like a soccer ball hitting the ground when he laughs happily.]

The author uses several figures of speech to describe Mtshingothi’s physical appearance. He compares his big stomach to the roundness of a soccer ball. This was done to emphasise how big and round-structured it is. He also uses hyperbole to describe his arms. According to Mtumane (2000:254):

Hyperbole is a figure of speech that expresses exaggeration. In its use, the attributes or capabilities of people or objects are described far beyond their actual state. This is mainly done for emphasis, to satirise or humourize.

Sibiya uses this hyperbole to emphasise the size of Mtshingothi's arms. It is impossible to have a guitar that will look tiny when it is held under someone's arms. The author just wants to emphasise that Mtshingothi has a big body structure, even after being infected with HIV, thus alluding that he is still healthy, despite the infection. Mtshingothi has most of the HIV/Aids symptoms at a later stage. This was because there were no ARVS to help control this disease back then. The author reveals how affected Mtshingothi was when he had full-blown Aids as follows:

*Athi uma efika ekhaya uMtshingothi aziphonse embhedeni. Kuthi makalale. Umzimba ubuhlungu. Aphenduke nje embhedeni bungafiki ubuthongo. Isizungu somuntu wesifazane kube sengathi siqala phansi. Phela selokhu ahlaselwa yiziqubu zokugula izintombi zakhe zavele zamhlelela. Kanti naye usephihlike izilonda ebunsizweni bakhe nasemathangeni.*

(Sibiya, 2006:147)

[When he got home, he threw himself in his bed. He felt sleepy. His body was painful. He tossed and turned in his bed, but he could not sleep. His sexual lust for a woman seems to grow stronger again. His girlfriends have since distanced themselves from him when he started to be sick. He has developed sores in his manhood and thighs.]

The above excerpt emphasises that Mtshingothi is seriously ill. His sickness is affecting most of his internal and external organs, thus affecting his physical appearance. Most of his symptoms are due to his immune system's inability to resist diseases. This means that he has reached the full-blown Aids stage. As Shah (2008) states that deficiency (in acquired immunodeficiency disease) refers to the fact that the body's immune system has been weakened so that it can no longer defend itself against passing infections. Other symptoms that indicate that Mtshingothi has full-blown Aids are found in the following passage:

*Nenhliziyo isihlala ivalekile nje kungavumi afake utho oluya ethunjini. Kuthi bembabaza ukuzaca aphinde ehle kakhulu emzimbeni. Usengangabasemehlweni. Ngolunye usuku aphuthunyiswe esibhedlela sekwembulwa kwembeswa. Abamgibeza emotweni kamfundisi ababazanga ukuba lula kwakhe kuphela kodwa babezitshela ukuthi usedlule emhlabeni.*

(Sibiya, 2006:148)

[He has lost appetite in such a way that he cannot take anything in. He loses more weight as people become more exclaiming by his loss of weight. He is the same size as the reflection of people in the eyes. On another day, he was rushed to the hospital in a bad condition. Those who helped him get in the priest's car were not only shocked by the lightness of his body, but they also thought he had passed on.]

The author uses two idioms to emphasise the bad state of Mtshingothi's health. Mtumane (2000:258) defines idioms as "expressions whose meaning is obscured, as it may not be found in the words used in them". In other words, for a person to understand idioms, he/she must use his/her critical thinking skills. The first idiom is "usengangabasemehlweni" [He is the same size as the reflection of people in the eyes.], which is taken from "ukuba ngangabasemehlweni" idiom. This idiom consists of a comparative particle word, *nganga-*. This means that it is mostly used to compare two things. In this context, Mtshingothi's body structure is compared to the body size of people seen as reflections when someone looks at another person's eyes. The author used this idiom to politely state that Mtshingothi is



extremely thin during his late stages of being sick with Aids. The second idiom used is “*sekwembulwa kwembeswa*” derived from “*ukumbula kwembesa*”. This idiom is used when a person is extremely sick and cannot do anything by himself. His family members constantly open (*ukwembula*) his blankets to check if he is still alive. The idioms are successfully used as they fit in this context of Mtshingothi being extremely sick, as he is also unable to do anything, and he is extremely thin. This also confirms that he had no energy to do anything.

### Characterisation That Reveals Personality Traits

Bobelo and Mtumane (2008:117) define personality as “an umbrella word for traits that determine one’s character. These traits manifest themselves in one’s stable and consistent behaviour in different situations and circumstances”. Allport (1927:5) defines traits as “a dynamic trend of behaviour which results from the integration of numerous specific habits of adjustment, and which expresses a characteristic mode of the individual’s reaction to his surroundings”. Therefore, personality traits reflect people’s characteristic patterns, thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. According to these definitions, personality traits are different characteristic features that build a human being. They include beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviour. Someone’s personality traits can change as the person grows. It has been mentioned above that Ndabayakhe has one thought, and that is, his sickness is caused by HIV/Aids. This reveals him as someone who has little or no knowledge about this pandemic, *ingculazi*, even though he thought he knew enough. *Ingculazi* is a Zulu term for Aids. Anajole and Danjin (2009:1) define Aids as follows:

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (Aids) is a fatal illness caused by a retrovirus known as the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) which breaks down the body’s immune system, leaving the victim vulnerable to a host life threatening opportunistic infections, neurological disorders, or unusual malignancies. The term Aids refers to the last stage of HIV infection.

Looking at the above definition, it can be deduced that the author wants readers to have different views. As much as Ndabayakhe’s thoughts reveal him as an ignorant person, one can say that the author intentionally presents him this way. He does this to develop the plot of the story. Hadebe (2018) reveals that one can have an inside view of characters through their thoughts. This means that the reader can discover how the characters feel through their thoughts, as thoughts result in emotions. This is evident in Sibiyi’s novel. Ndabayakhe is presented as a round character. He is first presented as a faithful man, but it is later discovered that he is not as faithful as he seems to be. The narrator states that he was faithful to his partner, Zodwa, and always used a condom, if it happens that he engages in sexual activities with a different person. If Ndabayakhe were truly faithful, he would not have thought he has Aids. The narrator also mentions that after Ndabayakhe attended an HIV/Aids workshop, he never stopped using a condom. The narrator reveals Ndabayakhe’s personality traits through direct narration as follows:

*Ukusukela ngalelo langa, uNdabayakhe akaphindanga waya ocansini engaligqokile ijazi lomkhwenyana, kanti nejazi lelo bekuyinto ebuye ingamgulisi ukuyisebenzisa. Yayimnukela kabi, uma esho.*

(Sibiyi, 2006:12)

[From that day, Ndabayakhe never had sex without a condom, even though he did not like it because he did not get the satisfaction he wanted when using it. It smells badly, so he says.]

The way Ndabayakhe is portrayed gives the impression that he believes HIV is only contracted through sexual activities. This is also revealed passage below:

*Bheka-ke ngoba noma kuhlale kufika amaxusa oMnyango wezeMpilo nabazinikele ekuqwashiseni bezoxwayisa umphakathi waseMphazima, eMhlangeni, eSilonjana, eThelezini, eNdatshana, nezinye izigodi eziseduze ngengozi yalesi sifo sengculazi, uNdabayakhe ubengaze angagqiza qakala ngalokho. Uye athi asikho isidingo sokuya lapho ngoba kade yayishunyayelwa indaba yejazi. Yena vele uyalisebenzisa, ayikho into entsha abheke ukuyifunda manje.*

(Sibiya, 2006:11-12)

[Just look, even though the Department of Health ambassadors and those who are committed in spreading awareness about the danger of HIV and Aids usually come in areas around Mphazima, Mhlangeni, Silonjana, Thelezini, Ndatshana, Ndabayakhe never paid attention to that. He normally sees no need to attend the campaigns because the message about the use of condoms has been conveyed for years. He uses condoms, so there is nothing new that he will learn from the campaigns now.]

In the following text, the narrator emphasises that Ndabayakhe is not interested in attending workshops because he always used a condom:

*Yize noma ukwexwayiswa komphakathi ngendaba yesifo esingumashayabhuqe kwase kuyinsakavukela umchilo wesidwaba, uNdabayakhe wakhwela kanye wayidilika le nqola.*

(Sibiya, 2006:12)

[Even though the awareness of the pandemic in communities was a common thing, Ndabayakhe only attended once and stopped.]

The author's choice of words confirms that most people believed that HIV is only contracted through sex. According to Shah (2008), HIV infection is transmitted primarily through sexual intercourse, when HIV infected blood is passed directly into the body of another person, or when a mother infects her baby during pregnancy, childbirth, or because of breastfeeding. It is transmitted through intravenous drug use with contaminated needles. However, Danjin and Onajole (2009:1-2) reveal that "globally, unprotected heterosexual activity is the predominant route of HIV transmission". For people to believe that they will never be infected with HIV if they always use condoms when engaging in sexual activities, shows how people have little knowledge about the disease. The author manages to educate readers about the importance of attending HIV and Aids workshops. Attending workshops was not going to help them only, but it was going to also help the society at large to reduce the transmission rates.

Through the narrator, the author further depicts how people view the HIV and Aids issue. He uses Ndabayakhe and Mtshingothi to reveal people's thoughts. It attracts stigma and discrimination in that it gives the impression that one is promiscuous and not sexually well behaved. After Mtshingothi composes a song about HIV and Aids and tells Ndabayakhe that he has tested twice for HIV, the latter would have a sleepless night. Mtshingothi wants his Maskandi groupmates to sing his newly composed song and to encourage people to take care of themselves and enlighten them about the HIV/Aids pandemic. This does not sit well with Ndabayakhe, and it is revealed in the words below:

*Usezocula ngayo futhi agqugquzele abantu ngokuthi baziphathe kahle! Uzothini khona bembuza ukuthi usenayo yini? Angithi uMtshingothi yena uzozisholo bengambuzanga abantu? Uzokwala ngaliphi uNdabayakhe kumuntu asebecule naye isikhathi eside kangaka uma ethi kuye mabacule ingoma? Uyocina emtshelile yini ukuthi naye lokhu kufa kumhaqile?*

(Sibiya, 2006:25)

[He will now sing about it and encourage people to take care of themselves! What will he say when they ask him if he is infected by the virus? And Mtshingothi tells them without them asking! How will Ndabayakhe refuse to sing the song since Mtshingothi and he have sung together for a very long time? Will he tell him that he too has been infected with the disease?]

Ndabayakhe is portrayed as someone who fears people the most because of the stigmatisation associated with HIV and Aids. This line, “*Uzothini khona bembuza ukuthi usenayo yini*” [What will he say when they ask him if he is already infected with HIV/Aids?], illustrates that he was not ready to let the world know that he has been infected with HIV. He is wondering what he will tell the people if they ask him if he has the disease. This was because of the discrimination people living with HIV/Aids encountered within their communities. This type of discrimination is called HIVism. Francis (2004:70) defines HIVism as follows:

HIVism is a pervasive system of discrimination and exclusion that oppresses people living with HIV/Aids. Like racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression, people living with HIV/AIDS constitute an oppressed group and experience oppression at the individual, institutional, and societal level. The manifestation of HIVism creates a climate of harassment, and discrimination that forces many living HIV/Aids to live their lives as second-class citizens.

The definition illustrates how people living with HIV/Aids are viewed a disgrace within the society, a condition that affects their self-confidence and amounts to depression and self-hatred. People see no value in them. Ndabayakhe swears that he would rather than die than to tell people that he has HIV/Aids. This is revealed in the following text:

*Akubone kungakuhle ukuthi avele afe kungakaziwa ukuthi uphethwe yini. Ukuba kuyenzeka bekungasa nje esethule, noma-ke ashayiswe imoto nje khona kusasa lokhu okusayo, kuvele kuphele kanjalo ngaye. Ukufa ngengculazi kwenza abantu basale bekhuluma ngawe, baphuze ngawe amatiye, nabafundisi bashumaye ngawe ezinkonzweni. Lokhu ukubona kungaba yihlazo nokululazeka kwegama lakhe nelomuzi wakubo.*

(Sibiya, 2006:26)

[He thought that it was better for him to die before the cause of his sickness is revealed. How he wished he could not see the following day or be hit by a car and die on the spot. Dying because of Aids makes people talk about you after you die, drink tea in your name, and preachers to preach about you in church. He views this as a shame as it would tarnish his name and his family name.]

The above excerpt illustrates the reaction of the society when it comes to people with HIV/Aids. The author enlightens the world about the stigmatisation associated with HIV/Aids. Ndabayakhe sees dying because of HIV/Aids as something that would ruin his reputation, and that of his household. He does not want to bring shame to his family, as he is viewed as someone who has no self-worth, and engaged in sexual activities with different people, since people did not have enough knowledge about the disease. He would rather die and keep his reputation intact than to reveal his status and save others; he is therefore revealed as someone selfish. The narrator later reveals that Ndabayakhe does not have Aids nor contracted HIV, as he has initially thought, but he is sick because of the deficiency of certain nutrients such as iron, which emanates from unbalanced diet. This reveals Ndabayakhe as a person who fears the unknown and quickly reaches conclusions without proof. He almost dies from thinking that he has Aids. This is a warning to people to always get tested before they attempt to commit suicide. Having symptoms that resemble those of HIV/Aids does not mean one is HIV positive.

## Conclusion

This article examined how direct characterisation was used to depict the theme of HIV and Aids in the isiZulu novel, *Ngidedele Ngife* (2006). A qualitative text-based approach was adopted for the study. The researchers used aspects of narratology, namely, characters and theme, as backdrop against which they discussed how the novelist explores the HIV/Aids theme. It was discovered that there is a correlation between theme and character. One cannot be functional without the other. Sibiyi's skills of using characters to educate the nation about a sensitive issue like HIV/Aids proves that novels can be used to educate and build people and equip them with knowledge about this pandemic. The author manages to convey to people message that the importance of HIV testing as one would never know that they are infected, until they get tested. People may have symptoms of HIV, but only to find out that they test negative. So, it is of importance to never assume that someone is infected, until the status is confirmed scientifically by laboratory tests.

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