

**A REFLECTIVE PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN NGUNI ORAL POETIC  
FORMS**

by

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### **DECLARATION**

I declare that **A REFLECTIVE PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN NGUNI ORAL POETIC FORMS** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....

**SIGNATURE**

(SR Mdluli)

.....

**DATE**

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## SUMMARY

This thesis utilizes the theory of feminism in all its implied branches in an attempt to critically review the subtle and sometimes deliberate subjugation of women in general and South Africa in particular. This occurs, in spite of the fact that there are laws in place that are meant to discourage women abuse. Juxtaposing this is the perspective conception of women, looking at themselves as subjects of virtue who deserve equal treatment to any other human being. It is through some oral forms that this reflection could be tested. Praise poetry, in the hands of a creative artist opens up a world of human emotions that could not be easily seen or felt, and yet it can simultaneously be used to manipulate situations. Language therefore could be seen as a powerful double-edged instrument. The patriarchal system, in this thesis, is exposed as that holy ideology turned unholy to achieve condescending agendas against women. The thin light of respect demonstrated by the traditionalist thinking is made to disappear into thin air, especially when contaminated by Western ideas.

It is the resoluteness and the fair obstinacy of some both traditional and modern women that determinedly stood up to conscientise the world in terms of respect for human life irrespective. In this research, an exploration of literary elements within four Nguni languages, that is Siswati, isiZulu, isiNdebele, and isiXhosa reveals the singularity of purpose, for these elements to be manipulated to achieve domineering intentions. Be that as it may, *tibongo* (praise poems/ praises) of outstanding women who have served in traditional leadership in these language groups give reason to challenge any idea that women should by virtue be relegated to the back seat. Through these *tibongo* it becomes apparent that because of the women leaders' stubborn fairness and unparalleled foresight, they have become personifications of democratic values and as such, role models and symbolic hope not only for the empowerment of women, but also for their total liberation from all negative perceptions and oppressions.

**Key words:** Feminism; Womanism; Proverbs; Praise Poetry; Culture; Women Leadership; Orature

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my mother Nyase Christina Mdluli, LaNdlela, my three sons Sandile, Sthembiso and Anele.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 GENERAL BACKGROUND**

Gender inequality and women's oppression have in some instances characterised societal groups since time immemorial. It has become part of the socialization of some communities and extends beyond class variances as well as many collective structures. More often than not, it has existed as enshrined in various agents of societal behaviour such as family, religious institutions, educational institutions, government departments, television, economy and many others. Oppression of women is one category of oppression that cuts across cultures, social classes and geographical boundaries of countries. In return it yields members of society who are expected to behave in a particular manner as per the prescripts of the powerful group. Such oppression as an element of culture is often imposed on women who are supposed to accept the behavioural patterns inherited from their elders and never to consider challenging the status quo. This is a concept that has had a bearing on the cultural behaviour that each group of people consider as acceptable since human beings cannot distance themselves from being affected by some form of culture.

It is a matter that has not just affected countries that are considered as so-called third world countries only, but has existed and been sustained even in the first world countries, so termed. Women's oppression manifests itself in different scenarios. The causes for this disturbing issue are vast and different. Lindsey (1997:1) attests that even though social relations are regimented by a variety of ways, gender has remained a key factor of human ordering.

Gender inequality has existed amongst the working class to such an extent that it has generally become difficult for a woman to penetrate the ceiling at her workplace. She has usually been accepted as a provider of certain services like being a caregiver, a cleaner, a secretary and other minor positions. When it comes to women at the workplace it has often been a challenge to promote them to higher positions even if they qualify in all aspects. Even though women have increased in numbers as qualified and employed people, they still struggle to obtain promotions. Lindsay (1997:143) mentions the case of employed women in Japan:

Like women throughout the world, women in the Japanese labour force are constrained by restrictive and stereotyped gender roles. Though they make up almost half of the workforce, they are concentrated in lower jobs and earn much less than the average male. Women are rapidly advancing in educational opportunities, but they are virtually excluded from management in most Japanese firms.

Restrictions and stereotyped gender roles have worked against women. This remains the case, because women are considered to be weak beings that do not have what it takes to be a leader. Even though women have proven themselves beyond any one's doubt by acquiring professional degrees they are still not trusted, not just by male colleagues only but also by their women colleagues who often express such a feeling. Sugisaki quoted by Lindsay (1997:143) considers such inequality an absurdity that, Japanese working women continue to suffer both overt and hidden discrimination when their contributions make possible Japan's viability as a world economic power. This is true for many communities. Women's efforts are undermined and not given the accolades they deserve. Such a practice in a country like Japan gives credence to the view that human beings all over the world have used gender inequality as a strong foundation for their designed benefits especially when it comes to leadership. While women are obliged to overwork as they have to take care of house chores and family responsibilities, over and above their employment they still remain the least rewarded. The situation becomes worse when a woman is promoted to a management position.

In their research Vianello et. al. (1990:60) have this to say about the attitudes towards women in leadership:

Women's access to the labour force has not been followed by an equivalent increase in their participation in power. Although ... careers for women have become more and more acceptable to women themselves and to men, leadership positions, especially the top ones, are still held almost exclusively by men. The prevalent opinion is that this is so because women are not interested in such positions, inasmuch as they focus their attention on family affairs which is *naturally* connected with their roles in society.

This view is in support of what I propose as my hypothetical concept in this research. Women still suffer in the workplace because they have to divide their time and attention between their work and their family matters as well. It is unfortunate that a woman's involvement with family issues disadvantages her instead of portraying her as a person with almost supernatural strength. While people determine and construct their culture, at some stage the culture controls the society in various ways. Such control may at times not be deliberate as gender oppression has always been part of a society's culture.

One other prominent inequality is seen in the veil that most Muslim women wear to signify the different worlds of males and women. Jeffrey as cited by Lindsey (1997:292) labels this segregation of women and men as 'sexual apartheid' that he declares is not because of physical separation of women and men but in his view, is a product of the complexity of arrangements that are responsible for sustaining the social distance. Lindsey (1997:292) further states:

Certainly the most recognized form of concealment of women is found in their distinctive clothing which symbolizes their separation. Whether the clothing takes the form of the *burqa*, consisting of a skull cap attached to mounds of material that drop around the face and all over the way to the ground, or a *chaddar*, an immense shawl used to hide their faces and bodily features, women are in essence made invisible.

I concur with the above citation as some women in these communities are indeed faceless and not known to anyone except their husbands and close

family members. However, it is not likely to find that some of them are very comfortable with such dress code. From the view of a feminist, it may be viewed as a very oppressive custom to women as it removes the woman from the world. In such clothing she only exists as an undefined, faceless and a mysterious figure that no one can approach for any reason. That on its own confines the woman to the level of being a wife and mother, nothing more or higher than that.

Women who are full time wives do not have it any easier as in most cases, due to economic demands their husbands migrate to town for better paying jobs. What makes it worse is that when the men are away from their families for long they succumb to the temptation of girlfriends. At home in the rural areas the wife is expecting to be sent some money for the children and other demands that she would make of him as a 'breadwinner' during his absence. In most cases money that he earns is used by the girlfriend while his children are dependent on their mother. In fact some men end up not returning home. Such a situation puts enormous pressure on this downtrodden woman who may be obliged to take care of the ailing parents of her husband, farm cattle, goats and other domestic animals, see to the ploughing and harvesting of the fields and finally to her children who need to go to school, should be given food and taken to clinics and hospitals if they are ill Dlamini (1995:88). This frequently forces her to engage in some small businesses like selling of vegetables and fruits so as to meet the demands of her family.

In politics there has been a tendency to take the services of women for granted. During the apartheid period in South Africa, the African National Congress Women's League, formed in 1943, organised protest marches against laws that demanded black people carry passes and other restrictions. However, it has not been possible for the ruling party to groom a woman for the presidency in the past hundred years of its existence. The rationale behind this is the stereotypical perceptions of women and patriarchy that exist in all spheres of life. The fact that the women in the ruling party are not confident enough to

nominate one of their sisters to be voted for as a president, means the women themselves suffer from a Cinderella complex which keeps them content with men being presidents.

One significant rationale behind the oppression of women according to Ashton-Jones and Olson (1991:159) is succinctly stated:

The authors of both the Old and New Testaments were men of their times, and it would be naïve to think that they were free of the prejudices of their epochs. Indeed, the Bible contains much to jolt the modern woman, who is accustomed to think of herself, at least to some extent, as an autonomous person. In the writings of the Old Testament, women emerge as subjugated and inferior beings....

Throughout the centuries, Christian authors have placed great importance upon the account of the creation of Eve in the second chapter of Genesis. Combined with the story of the Fall, this seemed to present irrefutable evidence of woman's essentially inferior intellectual and moral stature. Indeed the antifeminine tradition in Christian culture has justified itself to a large extent on the story of origin and activities of the "first mother", which until recently was not understood to be andocentric myth but rather was taken as straight historical fact.

In that way religion confirmed and reinforced what was in the minds of people in the world: that a woman is inferior and does not possess the thinking capacity of a man. Such a myth has remained a key reason for women to be maintained in an inferior position. It may be the case that other cultures evolved with similar myths in mind.

Gender oppression has resulted in women being raped and sexually abused. There have been assertions which alluded to the fact that women invite their rapists by wearing short clothing. It has become a norm to have a rapist released from police cells on bail. This has led to the spread of HIV/AIDS as some of these rapists are infected and has compromised the health of women who are physically weak and perceived as the property of men.

Domestic violence has also been difficult to eradicate for the same reasons. While men are accorded the right to have as many wives and sexual partners as they wish, if a woman is found to have committed adultery she is brutally punished not just by her husband and in-laws but by her family as well, who do it because they feel she has embarrassed them. This punishment may be as severe as having this woman being stoned to death by her family.

Another practice that displays a direct relation with oppression is the genital mutilation that is performed to deprive women of the enjoyment of sex. This practice dates from before the existence of Christianity and other religions. In fact, some religions believe in this custom and continue to encourage its practice even though one would have expected religion to discourage it.

Various ways and means have been used to cause the voice of a woman to be heard. In South Africa there are policies that are intended to combat gender inequality. There are also structures such as the Commission for Gender Equality and a fully fledged government department that are instituted to combat gender oppression and abuse in communities. In other countries there are NGOs that protect women from being abused. For example in Swaziland there is an NGO in the name of "Swaziland Women Action Group Against Abuse", usually referred to as SWAGA. Another strong organisation is "Women and Law in Southern Africa Research Project". This project includes countries such as Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Zambia and others (Dlamini 1995:2).

Global organisations are also making efforts towards uprooting this problematic type of oppression. The United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing, for instance, brought together women from all over the world to exchange information and strategies that could be implemented in dealing with oppression and abuse of women. While this conference was taking place in Beijing there was also an NGO forum in Huairou whose programme was also the eradication of such oppression Lindsey (1997:158-159).

There have been cases taken to court by women who felt discriminated against in as far as succeeding a traditional leader was concerned. A good example is that of Ms Shilubana, a daughter of the deceased Hosi Fofeza Mwanamitwa, who wanted to succeed her father as the Traditional Leadership Act supports women who according to custom and cultural practices are eligible to be traditional leaders. Ms Shilubana fought her case until the highest court in the country accorded her the traditional leadership position that she deserved as the first born of her deceased father. Another strong factor on her side was the view of the community that admitted that it was ready to be led by a woman chief. This can be perceived as a wind of change amongst traditional communities in the country. However, it is still extremely rare to find a community that allows a woman to be its chief, regardless of all the policies that no longer condone gender inequality.

In the traditional scenarios, folk songs have been utilised by women in voicing their perceptions in order to be heard. Critical studies and scientific investigations have been undertaken by scholars who are keen on making the voice of a woman audible. For instance, Dlamini (1995) wrote her dissertation on folk songs composed by traditional women whose intention is to inform the world of how they feel about their status. While Dlamini wrote about songs in Siswati culture, Ntshinga (1993) investigated some in the isiXhosa culture. Nkumane (1999) is another scholar who wrote her doctoral thesis on forced marriages and forbidden love. These are all scholarly works that invite the world to become aware of how women are portrayed in a stereotypical manner in literature as well as how they feel. Such literature declares war against oppression of women and their abuse, as literature is very powerful in sending a message. It also assists women to be aware of how the modern literature writer perceives them as women in the current democratic era. Even though the study referred to only one selected genre, other indigenous languages in South Africa possess modern works of literature that show and confirm the negative perception of women.



One can, in summary, acknowledge that such abuse and oppression have been neglected for far too long and are a scourge in many societies. It is a subject spoken about everyday but no one takes it seriously. A study such as this one is yet another attempt to make the voice of a woman heard until someone listens. The current research constitutes another voice against gender inequality both in the traditional and modern contexts.

## **1.2 CONTEXT OF STUDY**

The birth of democracy in South Africa in April 1994 marked the beginning of freedom for all citizens of the country, but it regrettably excluded some domains of life. It is noted that democracy did not arrive in a vacuum, but it came to replace structures and profiles that had existed as products of apartheid and other forms of discrimination. It therefore became necessary to design ways and means of correcting the injustices of the past that had kept the people of South Africa dominated, especially women. The equality intended would be in line with some of the provisions of S 9 (3) in the Bill of Rights as pronounced in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996:7) which entrenches the right to equality:

- (3) The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.

While male citizens of South Africa gained freedom from apartheid, women on the other hand still remained under some forms of discrimination that are deeply rooted in, the unwritten laws and practices of society. This is a very complex form of oppression. The most disconcerting issue is that while it has its nucleus in the family it extends to the outside world, which more often than not leads to the exclusion of women from certain activities. Patriarchal perceptions are firm roots of this form of discrimination. This type of discrimination is implemented, in

a most subtle manner, such that it is difficult to identify its presence let alone the means of eradicating it.

The thrust and focus of this study is captured very succinctly in the following quotation by Schipper in Jones and Palmer(1987:5):

In any given cultural context, male and female behaviour patterns are fixed by norms, and anyone who tries to break the rules can expect to meet with serious problems in a community in which the ruling group produces images and conceptions of the others to legitimise the status quo.

The above citation gives substance to the existence of gender inequality in many communities. After reading the quotation above, one cannot help but have the following questions in mind: Does this mean such fixed behavioural patterns are practiced by communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Can this be assumed to prevail in all societies of our continent and the world at large? What will happen to such behaviours as the move towards globalisation is becoming a reality? As I was busy with identifying the method to be used in exploring the validity of the citation given above I came across more claims that supported the existence of male domination.

There are four sister languages which fall under the Nguni group. The research is reflecting on all four, i.e. isiNdebele, Siswati, isiZulu and isiXhosa, for the purposes of comparison. The focus of this study is the manner in which a woman is perceived both in a traditional set-up as well as in modern contexts. Now and again there will be a reflection on culture to bounce views that emanate from the analysis of the poetic forms. Another reason for bringing culture into this research is the fact that in most instances those in power use culture as a pretext to justify prejudicial judgement. It is envisaged that this research will assist in understanding the effect of folklore as an aspect of culture in the shaping of such views, both in the past as well as in the empirical situation.

In isiNdebele for instance there is a proverb that says '*Yadonswa yinsikazi iyokhalakathela*'. The nearest English translation of this saying would be: 'Once the leader is female she will lead all the cattle into disaster.' The proverb actually means that if the leader is a woman no progress or success can take place, but the entire institution or department will be led into destruction. Even though the proverb has a symbolic reference, there is a human truism that it questions the authenticity and trustworthiness of women's leadership. This is indeed a serious allegation, since cattle are so precious to African men, amaNdebele included.

In an attempt to challenge this idea I felt such a study would reveal some of the prohibiting factors that the present generation must deal with if it is serious about women being able to live as equals to men in their different environments. This research will assist in improving the conditions of gender inequality in various domains of life as well as enable the woman discriminated against to respond to whatever confrontation she finds herself facing. One significant sphere of life that will benefit from reading this study is the institution of traditional leadership in South Africa and in the continent at large. The rigid and unshakable attitude of both the royal families and traditional communities does call for intervention. In most Nguni speaking communities when there is a need for succession, if the relevant child happens to be a girl she is not considered at all. In some instances one finds that the girl is actually more empowered to develop the area and uplift the lifestyle of the community; nevertheless by virtue of being born female she is disqualified. This is regardless of the fact that the supreme law in this country, i.e. The Constitution of The Republic of South Africa, (1996:3) pronounces unequivocally in Chapter 1 S2 that:

- (2) This Constitution is the Supreme law of the Republic; law or conduct inconsistent with it is invalid, and the obligations imposed by it must be fulfilled.

It was from amongst other motivations to understand the effects of the section cited above from the Constitution that I developed the desire to empower

African women about their rights and how protected the latter are. I needed to share with my African sisters how good it feels to be educated and empowered about both traditional and modern laws that protect one as a woman. The targeted beneficiaries are not only women who are illiterate and based in rural areas but also include the learned women in the urban areas. More often than not, such women are victims of abuse by a culture that they do not know well. It becomes disturbing that now and again these women are warned against doing certain things because it is blamed on culture. The supreme law of the country is designed to protect citizens from discrimination of any nature. Certain traditional communities claim to be practicing customary law, which in some cases is contrary to the pronouncements of the Constitution. In such cases the Constitution ought to supersede this law and be in favour of the woman who is an ordinary citizen of the country. It is unfortunate that women do not fight back but accept whatever they are told as culture. However, it remains a serious matter of controversy that customary law cannot be altered so as to accommodate the women. Traditionalists and those who are beneficiaries of gender inequality would resist this as a way and means of maintaining the status quo. If the Constitution is declared the supreme law of the country yet at times it is superseded by laws like the customary law of succession, it has failed in its purpose of protecting the citizens of this country. Expressed differently, the Constitution should not display weaknesses in its purpose and objectives.

A leader amongst Nguni speaking societies is an important figure. He or she is accorded great respect by all members of society. He/she may be young or old but will always be given special respect by all his subjects. This brings in the custom of and need for *tibongo*, as they serve as a yardstick for respect towards the leader in these Nguni cultural contexts. A leader makes use of *imbongi* who composes and recites praises whenever he/she is to appear in public gatherings or occasions. Praises or heroic poems, known as *izibongo* in isiZulu; *tibongo* in Siswati; *iimbongo* in iSindebele, comprise a large portion of this study. Nguni speaking societies are so fond of *kubonga* that in everyday life they frequently host a function or occasion where it becomes befitting to

perform praise poetry. In this attempt I have referred to some few women's praises composed for leaders of societies as well as those that are composed for ordinary people. Turner (2003) disputes the view that praises are only composed and performed in traditional environments. She compiled a vast collection of *izibongo/izihasho* composed by Zulu women and men that she argues are, used as a way of settling conflict in both rural and modern environments. The themes that are covered by this type of *izibongo* in her study are in most cases disputing or reprimanding an act that is not acceptable in the community or township.

It is notable that important figures of a traditional society like the king, the chief, the Queen Mother and many others have formal praises that are composed by a known *imbongi*, the official expert whose duty is to compose and perform praises for a leader whenever he or she appears on public occasions. These are often sung in ceremonies and events where this particular figure is addressed or will address people. They eventually become known by most people of his or her society and become part and parcel of his or her leadership. *Tibongo* play a vital role in the identity and self confidence of the individual praised. They also establish harmony between the leader and the community led, which is often dependent on the skills and the wisdom of the *imbongi* (praise singer). It is in view of their nature and function of *tibongo* that their analysis is expected to, bring clarity about the individuals praised, thus probing into the culture of the said person. It must be noted that praise poetry does not just describe the subject of praise, but also includes the views of other people about the individual leader.

In the case of outstanding individuals and leaders of communities, it is indeed an obligation to shower them with praises each time they appear before their communities. The *tibongo* of selected women leaders in Nguni communities will be discussed with the intention of enabling women from all spheres of life to be convinced that the use of culture is not always correct. Expressed differently, this research aims to allow most women who do not know their cultures to

become familiar with the trends and patriarchal tricks often used in causing them to be fearful of leadership; in fact they are meant to inculcate the belief that as women they are not good enough. A detailed analysis of these praises will be discussed at length in chapter 5 of this study.

### **1.3 MOTIVATION**

#### **1.3.1 Personal Motivation**

Some years ago I used to be a translator and presenter of news for the SABC. While working on my translations, next to me was a Ndebele presenter also busy with the same task. He uttered the statement that has become the premise of this research. It was on that day that I heard such a proverb for the first time. He made the following statement '*Yadonswa insikazi iyokhalakathela*' which can be loosely translated to signify that if the head of an institution or workplace is a woman one can definitely not expect any success or progress. In other words, women do not have what it takes to be in leadership. I was intrigued and wanted to undertake a study that would either, prove this wrong or right. This Ndebele statement expresses a very strong sexist outlook: a view that displays patriarchy and gender inequality at their worst. What made me intrigued was the fact that this Ndebele male colleague had attained a degree in communication, which made me presume he was a transformed man. If such a statement could be made in a newsroom by an educated middle aged man what more would one expect to encounter in a typical traditional community?

Another personal experience that partly instigated a quest for me to share my findings with the world of scholarship is that I grew up under the hand of a strong mother who never accepted misconduct amongst us. It is common cause that many people are, raised by their mothers or grandmothers. My mother was able to produce a set of children who are not just stable-minded, but are also far above average in terms of life skills. Raising us became her responsibility alone, as she had been widowed at a very young age. One question that may be

raised subsequent to the Ndebele proverb given above is: how could a woman who was neither literate nor employed succeed in managing and running her family and produce balanced members of society? The answer to that question becomes clearer when one compares my mother's progeny to those of children raised in a so called 'balanced family', meaning that both parents were involved. It is worth noting that even though children are minors they are as challenging as adults while they are growing into different stages of life. My mother contributed in making me realise that there is nothing wrong with a family being headed by a woman. In fact, I have no doubt that if my mother had been educated and given a chance to manage a company, it would have flourished, achieving greater strengths. In view of this personal experience the Ndebele proverb is hypothetically perceived as a typical means of control over women exercised by a patriarchal voice.

### **1.3.2 Political Motivation**

On conducting this research I was also motivated by the fact that South Africa is one of those countries that have taken great strides towards the implementation of human rights, as witnessed by some of the rights stipulated in the Constitution. Many policy documents and other legislative documents of the democratic government take into cognisance the existence of women and also consider them as equals to men. Another striking achievement is that of creating policies like the equity policy that promulgates the requirement to employ women in management positions both in the government and in the private sectors. These are all attempts to modify the gender inequality that has existed since time immemorial between men and women of South Africa. These are all commendable efforts in promoting gender equality in the country. However, they still constitute the tip of an iceberg as many incidents of abuse and unfair gender discrimination still affect women. Objectionable actions like rape, brutal killing, and abuse of any kind still dominate our news in the various types of media, affording an indication of how gender discrimination is still prevalent.

Recently, The ANC was preparing for the Mangaung conference that was held in December 2012 in which the executive of the party was elected. In preparation for the conference, different structures of the party nominated those that they felt should be considered as candidates for election. It was disappointing to hear the ANC Women's League saying that they were not ready to nominate a woman president. This structure has disappointed many in the country as it should have come up with a name of a woman for the presidency. There are quite a number of capable individuals in the ANC Women's League. One could blame such cowardice on the upbringing that the women received while growing up. In other words, women themselves are conditioned not to aspire to leadership as they feel their capability is lower than that of men. This is regardless of the fact that in 100 years the ANC has not considered having a woman president. Does it mean the party does not practise what it preaches as propagated in the Constitution? This is typical of patriarchal behaviour towards women.

Even though women are looking forward to the Gender Framework Bill that is said to be ready to be debated in parliament this does not make sense as policies cannot liberate the women from this bondage but need to be supported by actions.

### **1.3.3 Academic Motivation**

In the Ndebele proverb indicated as the premise of the research, there is an interesting choice of reference, to domestic animals usually regarded as wealth in an African traditional community. The wealth of an African household is, measured by the number of cattle that the head (man) of the family possesses. More often than not, in African communities cattle give the man who owns them an economic status. It is needless to mention the importance of a cow in the herd as a whole, as each time a calf is born the size of the herd becomes bigger. It is also interesting to note that a cow does not just produce milk



consumed by its own calf only, but its milk provides food for most human beings as *amasi* (curdled milk), cheese, powdered milk, and in many other forms.

It was precisely this ironic ambience that, caused proverbs to become the core of this study. Considering how influential a proverb can be to the philosophy of people the researcher therefore found it befitting to take this particular Ndebele proverb seriously and use it for purposes of visiting the underlying factors of the attitudes that society holds regarding women in leadership roles. A proverb is defined as a saying that is full of wisdom believed to have been observed and composed by one's fore-bearers and has been passed on through generations to the current age group. There is also emphasis in the fact that it carries truth, morals and traditional views that a society embraces (Nyembezi 1990:*xii*).

#### **1.4 LITERATURE OVERVIEW**

It is necessary for this research to look at other studies that are related to it either by theory or by the two poetic forms, i.e. the proverbs and praise poems. The significance of this section is considerable as it enables me to establish how the current study will contribute towards the topic of gender inequality, folk lore and cultural practices.

Nkumane in her doctoral study (1999) entitled "Themes of Forbidden Love: Cross Cultural Trends in Language Literatures with Special Reference to Zulu Novels" made a detailed investigation into the themes of forced and forbidden love in four isiZulu novels. Her main objective was to situate gender studies in the foreground. She demonstrates in her analysis that gender stereotyping and oppression of women are more often than not, perpetuated by modern literature writers. The main reason being used for this marginalisation is culture. She strongly argues that culture plays a major role in the marginalisation and subordination of women in Zulu life. This is a view that I refute in the current study. My argument is that it is not true that gender stereotyping of women is all due to traditional cultures. Some were brought by the white people who always regarded their women as inferior

and convinced our black brothers to do the same. All these are critiqued by the use of womanist theory that enables the scholar to identify and perceive the oppression of women that she alleges is based in culture. In the current study, I am also using feminist perspectives that will be discussed later in this study. We share the desire to encourage debates on gender oppression and abuse. While Nkumane focuses on girls and women, she also touches on how young men are affected by the forced marriages and forbidden love, in the novels she considers, as well as in real isiZulu life.

Mtuze (1990) compares the female stereotypes used by male authors and those that are used by female writers. He further looks at the stereotypes and other symbolic images of women in the selected publications. He is able to take note of the fact that stereotypes are not particular to any singular group of people but cut across social classes and national barriers and can be considered to be a universal practice. He discovered that in the first twenty years of written prose, female characters play inferior roles, which confine them to the male stereotypes of men. His other observation was that even the female writers did not refute this depiction but confirm these stereotypical roles. Mtuze acknowledges that women have made great strides in terms of moving away from the expected stereotypes of the past but still struggle to present themselves in literature as assertive people.

Ntshinga (1998) wrote extensively on Xhosa proverbs, in her thesis discussing how Xhosa proverbs derive their meaning from their contexts. She also attests to their adaptation to the fast changing world. Her main objective is to advance the view that proverbs have survived over years due to the manipulation carried out to make them suit a continually evolving world. In her exploration of the Xhosa proverb she gives some attention to gender and the Xhosa proverb which brings her close to my current research. While the proverb is one of the core elements of my study, Xhosa proverbs and gender become a common factor between the two studies. However, she does not dwell long on this subtopic of her study. She further explores the development of culture and the interplay of tradition and

innovation which she suggests emerges as a result of experiencing new situations in life.

Turner (2003) researches oral poetry that is used as a strategy amongst Zulu speaking people. She uses *izibongo* and naming practices, as data that present the amaZulu community's frustrations and discontent in both rural and urban social settings. In this study, Turner makes an in-depth analysis of *izibongo* (praises) that hail women commoners as well as of those that are composed and performed for royal women of the amaZulu nation. The connection of Turner's study with the current research is to be found in the discussion of *izibongo* especially those of royal women. The latter are discussed in my current study so as to support the view that culture has always allowed women to display their assertiveness and leadership skills. This is in negation of the common belief that indigenous cultural practices are oppressive to women. Turner's argument is that these strategies are about resentment, fury and frustration that are expressed either as a way of seeking for relief, or rectification. She concludes that amaZulu use oral poetry in their expression of conflict and in criticising socially unacceptable behaviour while in avoidance of confrontation.

Maake (1994) investigates the universality of certain language features that he supposes provide a chance for the use of syncretism in reading, analysing and interpreting African literature, in particular what he refers to as African oral poetry. He refers to some western schools of approach i.e. Formalist-Structuralism and New Criticism with the intention of testing their effectiveness if used in the analysis of African oral poetry. His intention is to determine if there is a Western theory or a conglomeration of approaches that could successfully assist in the analysis of African literature, particularly praise poetry. He goes on to refer to some case studies of oral poetry texts, analysing them by using his Afrocentric approach. The fact that he uses praise poetry for his exploration causes his research to relate to my current study. However, I was able to pick up the fact that his selection concerned only praises for men which is in line with the view that women may not be associated with heroism. In one chapter he specifically weighs up dominant

well known oral poetry analysts such as Cope, Nyembezi, Schapera, Jordan, Opland, Kunene and other renowned oral poetry specialists. Finally, Maake arrives at the finding that the previous critiques displayed some shortcomings.

Groenewald (1998) puts together a discussion on Ndebele praises as part of the bigger umbrella of oral culture. He dwells on the contexts which he describes as socio-political and certain other situations. He utilises the performance theory in his analysis of *iimbongo* as they are known in isiNdebele. His argument is that his study intends to restore the significance of performance and context as witnessed during the 1988 political campaigns. Groenewald's study is related to my current research owing to the fact that he is analysing the praises that I am also referring to. The biggest difference is that he focuses on *iimbongo* for male amaNdebele. In his lengthy discussion, women are included minimally, although he also discusses the feminist view amongst the many theories that he considers. *limbongo*, according to this scholar, are compositions that he has witnessed being used effectively in different contexts such as political settings. I would agree with him in that praises could benefit our leaders in the modern environment, for instance becoming a mayor, whether male or female. African leaders gain much support when praises are directed to them. He strongly supports the view that the *iimbongo* are determined and influenced by the context in which they are performed. He refers to *iimbongo* performed in traditional ceremonies as well as their being performed in such modern contexts as political gatherings and political campaigns. In this investigation, this scholar concludes that praise poems are not just for the amusement of the crowd or audience, but are meant to say something about the speaker or subject of praise, expressing how legitimate he is in what he is doing as well as to accord authority to what he says in those gatherings.

Masuku (2005) delves into the perceived gender inequality of women in Zulu folklore using a feminist theory. In her analysis she focuses on folktales, proverbs and praises so as to highlight how women and girls are to conduct themselves in order to be accepted by the Zulu community. Her argument is based on the Zulu culture and its expectations of women. She argues that the unfairness is located

in the culture that puts so much pressure on women as daughters, mothers and old women. In my analysis, I refute that view as my observation is that some of the oppressive practices arrived with the white people. My use of praises and proverbs intends to allow an in-depth discussion. In her detailed analysis, she focuses on gender as revealed in folktales, praises, and proverbs. Praises or *izibongo* for women commoners and royal women are discussed in terms of how they reveal women and the pressure put on them by culture. *Izangelo*, a genre of poetry composed by women for their babies, is also discussed as to what messages they send. In my study, *izangelo* are briefly touched on as part of the poetic grooming that a baby receives from his/her mother. In all these aspects of traditional lore, Masuku attempts to reveal how women are depicted as well as expected to behave so as to be accepted by the Zulu nation. Feminism and womanism are the core theories of her study and I concur with her approach, using these theories in discussing issues that pertain to women, and have done likewise.

Gunner (1984) gives a very detailed analysis of the functions of Zulu *izibongo* in the current social and political context. She strongly believes that *izibongo* are utilised to present and express identity. She places emphasis on how royal praises and praises for ordinary people could be adapted to be used in the current political and nationalistic tradition. *Izibongo* created for royal people assist in promoting the vision of the past as well as bringing inspiration to the contemporary listeners. She further says that praises create a unifying consciousness in people. The current study is in agreement with this argument. In as far as praises for ordinary people are concerned she emphatically advocates that they represent identity in a pulsating and immediate way. Gunner further provides clarity on the fact that performance in royal praises reinforces the significance of *imbongi*/the praise singer in his community. One view that is of concern in the current study is the naming of poets who compose and perform for individuals as non-specialists. That may not sit well with poets who are in that practice and is also discouraging as some of the bards often move from praising ordinary people to the royal leaders. They may have been identified while praising an ordinary member of

society and been promoted. I am comfortable with calling them bards/*timbongi/izimbongi* which refers to praise singers without qualifying the term. In fact Gunner uses the word bard for those who sing praises to leaders and royal family members. She also discusses the role played by women in the development of a bard. I fully concur with her in this regard as I also feel the spadework of the development of an *imbongi* is done by the mothers and grandmothers. She focused on Zulu folklore for this investigation while the current study considers all Nguni cultural communities.

A Ndebele scholar, Ntuli (1999), investigates proverbs with the intention of determining whether proverbs amongst Southern Ndebele are static or flexible. Ntuli pays close attention to the form and structure of proverbs that he explains are flexible and functionally open to new circumstances. The current study focuses more on the themes of the proverbs. It also includes all four Nguni communities. Such an investigation affords me an opportunity to make observations on aspects that are of significance to these four Nguni language speakers. Besides, this researcher argues that the Ndebele proverbs are affected by literacy, modernisation and technology that have disturbed the oral nature of the proverbs. According to his research this genre has been innovative regarding the change of context and is presently used in modern literature i.e. novels, drama, poetry and short stories.

The unique nature of the current study is that it focuses on four Nguni languages in its intention to decolonise the mind of any African woman as far as the participation of women in leadership of any nature is concerned. It intends alerting them to the fact that while some patriarchal practices are allegedly embedded in our cultures, certain structures are actually products of the colonialists who used the divide and rule strategy. In the current study I am looking at how these two genres of orature depict women as well as at their influence in depriving women of leadership opportunities both in modern and traditional contexts.

## **1.5 THE CURRENT STUDY**

The above scholars have all touched on some of the major aspects of my study. Some have analysed praise poetry *tibongo/izibongo/iimbongo* and proverbs in their studies which are linked to the topic of the current study in that the two genres of folklore have provided data for my analysis. Some of the scholars referred to above influence the current study in that they employ the feminist and womanist theories, which I will discuss in detail in chapter 2. The most outstanding difference of the current study is that it is on comparing the four Nguni cultures. While in some aspects of the discussion I refer to all four Nguni folklore and cultures, my main intent in this study is the comparison of emaSwati and amaZulu folklore and cultures. The study intends to decolonise the mind of any woman regarding the negative perception of women in society and in leadership roles. It intends alerting them to the reality that while some patriarchal practices are embedded, in our Nguni cultures, certain structures are products of the colonialists who demonised our cultures in order to win the trust of African people particularly towards their religion. In the current study, I am looking at what these aspects of folklore contribute towards the deprivation of leadership opportunities for women both in modern and traditional contexts.

## **1.6 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The main intention of this research is described above. Its fundamental aim is to establish how much influence folklore exerts in the way women are perceived by other people, as well as by themselves, in the Nguni cultures. It is envisaged that this will bring about a better understanding of the degree of this effect. Proverbs and praise poetry in this research will be useful as a window that will enable the researcher to make findings on how the speakers of these languages perceive women especially in their involvement in leadership roles. This will be done with the purpose of affirming claims by feminists and or womanists that women are capable human beings whose skills are not properly utilised due to the gender inequality that prevails in both traditional and modern

communities. Women can perform with excellence if they are trusted and given an opportunity to lead their respective communities. Such transformation of South African society can only be achieved by bringing a revolutionary and innovative perspective to the mindset of both women and men in societies regarding gender inequality.

One other significant objective is to decolonise the mind of the present generation that has remained fixated on Western perceptions. The crucial observation is that such a study will educate the current generation about Nguni culture and customary practices so as, to educate this strongly westernised generation. This could be a good way of sustaining the cultures about the influence of their perception of this valuable culture and give it its appropriate value. It is presumed that reading this research will empower both men and women and allow them to realise that some of the dominating practices were, brought to Africans by the Western people. The investigation aims to analyse the poetic oral lore so that it can be determined whether women are indeed not fit to be included in supervisory roles. It is anticipated that this study will assist women and improve their self-confidence and assertiveness as regards leadership.

Amongst other objectives, there is a concern that many African people experience minimal exposure to traditional or cultural practices. This may be as a result of modernity that has obliged Africans to move to towns and cities for better living conditions. These so-called places of civilisation and greener pastures are also to blame in that most people are away from the traditional places that are fountains of traditional practices. Living in the present environment that is characterised, amongst many other characteristics, by multilingualism and multiculturalism it became necessary to provide such an investigation as it will enrich not amaNguni only but many other indigenous groups who should be interested in cultural matters. It will also serve researchers by providing material that should broaden their thinking; Dlamini (1995:4) points out that:



It is also a general observation that the modern generation of Swazis is gradually being drawn away from its roots by change. This gap is made wider by factors such as Christian religion, lack of time for traditional activities, and their distance from rural areas where traditional activities are practised. Other factors may be the negative attitude, lack of motivation or ignorance in the individuals of modern generation.

Even though this scholar is referring to emaSwati these factors are common to most cultures in this country. This study therefore is an endeavour to bring knowledge to those who are part of those depicted in the citation above.

Lastly, this study aims at revealing the role played by women in grooming boys who later become professional praise singers (*timbongi*). The intention is to highlight how women contribute towards the upbringing and development of a professional bard who at adulthood becomes an asset of the community without the latter acknowledging the mother's input. One issue of interest in this research is that of highlighting the fact that bards who compose and perform praises for traditional leaders and royal people are products of women. It is disturbing when the person praised is a woman; yet she still employs a male *imbongi*. The hypothesis is that this bears a relation to the domination that women suffer in their societies. In this study, I highlight these various aspects so as to enable the present and future generations to be assertive and argue against such unfair discriminatory practices.

## **1.7 METHODOLOGY**

The research will on the one hand scrutinise various proverbs that pertain to women and their perception. The other significant poetic form that will receive attention is that of observing the baby boy from birth to adulthood. The mother almost instinctively without realization, actually shapes the future of her son by exposing the infant to lullabies, rhymes, clan praises and other forms of rhythmic recitations. These rhythmic recitations create a concrete foundation for the type of *imbongi* that her son becomes at adulthood.

Praises composed and recited for ordinary women as members of society and women leaders of society will serve as data for the investigation. With the advent of Western civilisation the different forms of orature have been collected and books compiled. Now that they have been reduced to writing, it was straightforward for me to use the recorded data for this analysis.

## 1.8 PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the research conducted it, became evident that there are various women, whose history contradicts the content, of the Ndebele proverb. Most of the Nguni people do record the history of women who have functioned as leaders in a variety of spheres of life, even in the most traditional settings. In effect, I was puzzled by the fact that amaNdebele make such a statement yet their colourful traditional regalia are always displayed by women who proudly dress in them it. When the world admires Ndebele regalia, they are referring to the traditional *women's* attire. It is not common to find a Ndebele man dressed in his regalia unless he is attending a function which dictates that he dresses in his traditional attire.

To illustrate this view let us refer to Swazi kings who according to culture never reign without the Queen Mother at their side. The Queen Mother is called *Indlovukazi* denoting the female elephant. Grotpeter (1975:114) elucidates the significance of the Swazi Queen Mother by saying:

...upon death of the Ngwenyama the heir is designated on the basis of the position of the mother to the deceased Ngwenyama and the other wives...She rules the Royal village, the capital, while the Ngwenyama sets up a secondary Royal village some distance away. She presides over the second highest court in the nation, she and her counsellors are important advisors to the Ngwenyama...

This citation highlights the notion that women participate in leadership of some Nguni nations. It also disputes the allegation that culture is naturally

discriminatory towards women. It must be borne in mind that, in most cases the *Indlovukazi* of emaSwati is not, appointed according to any excellence. She is accorded this position, as per the choice of the late king's son who is designated to succeed his deceased father. The royal council is responsible for making this choice according to certain principles. Amongst these principles the surname of the mother and her behaviour at the royal house are taken into consideration. In effect, it is not the heir-apparent who is chosen but his mother, as she will reign through her son. She becomes *Indlovukazi* of the country during the reign of her son.

One Queen Mother part of whose success story I am proud to share is Queen Mother Labotsibeni who became Indlovukazi when her son, King Bhunu, was installed as king of emaSwati. She became the Queen Regent after the death of her son, Bhunu. Both historians and anthropologists share the same view that Labotsibeni was indeed an outstanding Queen Regent. We will delve into her successes in chapter 5 of this thesis.

If there is a Queen Mother who reigned with such great success in the years when there was very little influence of Western education, why then should there be doubt about women being given leadership roles as the Ndebele proverb attests? In most instances, such claims are said to be cultural and not to be interfered with as anyone who questions them must be aware that he/she will receive serious punishment from the ancestors. And this is the conundrum.

AmaNdebele, like emaSwati, boast two phenomenal women who have displayed outstanding characters. The first is Esther Nostokana Mahlangu who has travelled the world attending art exhibitions of world class, displaying Ndebele products and her paintings. She has indeed been involved in projects of high magnitude in the world at large. According to what is stated in her biographical account from the following website:

[www.africansuccess.org/visuFiche.php?id=219&lang=en](http://www.africansuccess.org/visuFiche.php?id=219&lang=en) (2010/06/21)

Though grounded in tradition, in the course of work Mahlangu began to evolve, elaborate and innovate on the traditional designs and techniques. She engaged with the economics of the art industry, both to develop and reinforce her roots. She began to transpose these on canvas and other material to appeal to a wider audience. In this process she broke new ground, popularised her work and in turn, was challenged by artistic counter influences.

It is clear that Mahlangu has demonstrated her leadership in the arts and craft that are embedded in her Ndebele culture. She has promoted her culture not just to other cultures in the country, but to many countries of the world. It is also worth noting that she did not proceed far with formal schooling. The skills that she uses were passed on to her by her grandmother (another woman). I keep wondering how the Ndebele ancestors could have left her to make such great strides in her career without punishing her.

One other outstanding figure amongst amaNdebele is the maskandi musician Peki Emmelinah Nothembi Mkhwebana, who is famously, known as the 'African Queen of Ndebele Music'. Nothembi has displayed progress, diligence, excellence and sound leadership in the industry. She has composed songs that are nation building and preserving *ubuntu* in humanity. Amongst her long list of awards, she was also honoured by, the presidency of South Africa under the leadership of President Jacob Zuma. Nothembi received this presidential award on 27 April 2010 in recognition of her outstanding work in Ndebele *maskandi* music. Besides performing in significant events in the country, she has also travelled widely to render her performances as stated in this website:

<http://nothembi.blogspot.com/2006/04/ndebele-queen-of-music.html>  
(2012/06/15)

In addition she employs skills that were passed onto her by her grandmother. Again, we have a good example of a woman succeeding in life through the teachings of another woman. Who then would have doubts about leadership by women when they excel in this manner as discussed above? In effect, the two Ndebele women have confirmed the maxim that indeed if you educate a man

you have empowered an individual but if you educate a woman you shall have empowered the whole community if not the nation.

The hypothesis of this research, as mentioned, is that the African culture and customary practices do not prohibit women from being allowed to participate in roles in the leadership echelon. It further states that while there are some cultural exceptions that enforce gender inequality, there are cultural practices that assert the Nguni woman. Some practices prove beyond doubt that women are capable individuals just like men. It therefore becomes clear that, culture is used as a scapegoat, which enables men to control the women in their communities, thus maintaining the status quo.

AmaZulu also boast great women like Mkabayi whose orders were, followed by everyone in the royal family. Besides finding her father a wife, she became regent several times if the successor was still a minor. She was known as, a kingmaker because during her time all the kings who ruled amaZulu were reigning because Mkabayi allowed them to. Her love for the amaZulu nation caused her to be a strong woman who even refused to be married. Under her orders many people were killed if she felt like removing them.

Nandi is another woman who illustrated her personality by refusing to conform to the expectations of her Zulu community. If she were not treated in an acceptable manner in her marriage, she would quit, regardless of the fact that it was taboo to move out of a marriage especially during those years.

In chapter 5 the research will delve into the historical perceptions that will be based on the history and praise poetry of these women. It is important to state the fact that all the women mentioned above were not exposed long enough to the formal education that came with the Western ideology. Nevertheless, some left a legacy while some are still in the process of building their legacy that should benefit women of the present and future eras, regardless of their environments that could comprise modern or traditional contexts. The study is

meant to benefit a woman who may be in leadership or not, whether of Nguni culture or of other cultures.

This study is undertaken in response to the belief that when power relationships are so glaringly unjust, there is a tendency for those in power to use deception by keeping the powerless group out of power. They steadfastly confuse, suggest frightening punitive possibilities and manipulate those who are powerless and marginalised. In that way, they are able to maintain the status quo.

It is therefore, envisaged that this endeavour will open the minds of those who are culturally naive. It is also anticipated, that this research will play a role in the process of combating gender inequalities amongst indigenous communities in Africa and the diaspora. This study, in a way will be eye opening to those in senior positions, emphasising that women possess great talent which will bring about better service delivery at local, provincial and national levels of governance. It is a study that also advocates for the inclusion of women in traditional leadership. Such a move towards transforming communities would bring the much awaited developmental benefits that will in turn bring the betterment of peoples' lives.

## **1.9 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS**

It is essential that before the discussion goes further the meaning of key words in the topic of this research be examined.

### **1.9.1 Feminism**

Broadly speaking, feminism refers to an approach where women demand from society the advocacy of women's rights notwithstanding sexual inequalities. Feminism as a theoretical framework will be used as a tool for critiquing the data in this research. Feminism can be considered to mean a movement that

serves as an emancipator of women from the bondage of gender inequality, oppression and abuse and has its goal as to transform gender relationships in communities. Feminism as described by Nkumane (1999:19) is:

...a revolutionary movement that aims to eradicate the inequality between sexes. It seeks to bring about social change in men's lives by advocating a change in the way in which society views women. It advocates that society should accept and accommodate femaleness as an equal and not as the other. Feminism is a critical and a theoretical practice that is committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism and is not simply a concern to gender in literature.

This citation makes a very clear comment on feminism. It does not just end by giving a definition for feminism but further expresses its intentions as it strives to transform the community. Through feminism society is put under pressure to accept femaleness as equal to maleness. The emphasis is on this change to be practically brought about in real life situations. Feminism will be given more attention in chapter 2.

### **1.9.2 Womanism**

Womanism is generally defined as an approach that is embraced by black women as a form of feminism that acknowledges women's natural contribution to society. This is a theory that emanated from feminism as explained above. African women did not want to associate themselves with feminism which was, simplistically defined, a movement that would reduce them to lesbian love and hatred of men. Alice Walker was the founder of womanism in response to the Western movement that could not cater for the diverse needs of an African woman. This is the type of theory that defines my stance in this study. It is important to state the fact that there are many womanisms that all operate as a struggle to emancipate black women. In this theory African women still embrace the family, heterogenic relations and the existence of men. Chapter 2 will furnish elaborate information on this concept as it is the prime theoretical perspective that will be used in this research.

### **1.9.3 Orality**

The most significant characteristic of the poetic forms of orature under discussion is that they are transmitted by word of mouth from one person to the other and from one generation to the next. In their original form, the praises and proverbs were not recorded, but lived in the minds of the performers. In fact, this is a feature underpinning these different forms of verbal art. In keeping with this, Finnegan (1970:2) advocates that oral literature is by definition dependent on a performer who uses his/her skills to formulate it in words on a specific occasion. She further explains that there is no other way in which an oral text could be realised as a literary product. In fact, she further discusses some differences between a written literary text and an oral one. Noteworthy, is that when it comes to the use of proverbs, the relationship of the performer and the audience is not that significant. Proverbs are used in giving speeches and in contexts that befit their use such as if there is a death, one is faced with a rude, uncontrollable child and many other situations.

One other feature that characterises oral lore/orature is that these works are communal. There is no individual who may claim their copyright. Oral texts can be altered to suit the context as well as the audience of that time and place. It is through these oral texts that culture is spread and innovated as time goes by. Variation is very common in this type of literary form. In this way this form of art can be easily altered to suit the intended purposes. Finnegan (1970:16) supports the notion in these words, “Oral poetry essentially circulates by oral rather than written...., its distribution, composition or performance are by word of mouth and not through reliance on written or printed word.”

### **1.9.4 Culture**

Culture as an entity, can be described as a vehicle that conveys amongst other factors the customs, traditional practices, ethos, ethnicity and way of life of that cultural group. Culture is one aspect that easily becomes manipulated, more so



because in most cases it is dictated by those in power in the contexts. As Taylor in Herskovits (1948:17) argues, culture is known as a complex whole that comprises knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits that are accomplished by human beings as members of society. Herskovits (1948:17) advocates that:

*Culture is the man-made part of the environment.* Implicit in this is the recognition that man's life is lived in a dual setting, the natural habitat and his social "environment". The definition also implies that culture is more than a biological phenomenon. It includes all elements in man's mature endowment that he has acquired from his group by conscious learning or, on a somewhat different level, by a conditioning process – techniques of various kinds, social and other institutions, beliefs and patterned modes of conduct. ... Resources presented by the natural world are shaped so as to meet existing needs; while inborn traits are so moulded as to derive out of inherent endowment the reflexes which are preponderant in the overt manifestation of behavior.

There is a common understanding that culture is a product of human beings. It is a part of the living environment for human beings that they construct for their own needs. It forms part of the man made environment. Because of its nature, it may differ from one community to another, as well as from one family to another. Herskovits (1948:18) further contends that no two cultures can be the same. This idea is well captured in the line that he gives as paradox 1 when he succinctly writes, "Culture is universal in man's experience, yet each local or regional manifestation of it is unique." According to this scholar, the universals in culture provide a framework within which experiences of a group of people are expressed, that also brings in the idea of change in culture which is unavoidable even though the culture of a society might be considered to be stable.

As Lindsey (1997:53) argues:

A **culture** involves the total way of life of a given society. It includes both material aspects, such as buildings and books, as well as nonmaterial aspects such as religion and roles. Our culture defines which behaviour patterns are considered appropriate. Indeed, culture encompasses all

that we have developed and acquired as human beings, with each generation transmitting essential cultural elements of the next generation through socialization.

In this paragraph we are made to understand that culture moves from one generation to the other through socialisation. What is of concern here is the fact that the people who control and prescribe what good culture is and what is bad are always men because they are in power. Certainly, at times some of these cultural practices and socialisation are carried out by women who do so as the result of an instruction from men. In other words the governing group sends women to execute a particular cultural practice on their behalf. Herskovits (1948:20) concludes that:

...permanence and change in a given culture are dependent to a very considerable extent on the stress laid by the particular observer of that culture on its conservatism or its flexibility.

I agree and accept these as features that qualify what could be considered as culture in this research. Culture with its significant features, that of being man-made and that of being a changing phenomenon, opens itself to vulnerability and misuse because those in power end up blaming most matters on it. Amongst those factors that are blamed on culture there is gender inequality. This became a significant observable factor for this study as culture, more often than not, is blamed for gender inequality. One hears statements like “my culture dictates that ...”, “my ancestors say...”. It is for that reason that gender stereotypical practices become sustained through years as it becomes difficult to challenge them. No member of a family or community would like to experience the punishment that the ancestors might send if a member of a family or community behaves differently from what is considered to be “the culture” of the group.

### **1.9.5 Poetic Forms**

Poetic forms in this research will be used as a synonym for traditional lore or oral lore or orature that exhibits poetic features. It is a common understanding

that the definition of oral has to do with being spoken rather than written; relating to the mouth; done or taken by the mouth. Poetics as a concept concerns the basic principles of poetry. It may be understood to refer to literary or philosophical analysis of the basic principles, forms and techniques of poetic genres.

In this research oral poetics will refer to the oral genres that are performed or have poetic features. They include amongst others proverbs and praise poetry that both serve as the core of this research. Another important type that falls under this group consists of the traditional songs to which this study does not pay much attention.

#### **1.9.6 Praise Poetry**

Praise poetry is a form of folklore that expresses warm approval or admiration of an individual's deeds. In this context, it will be used as poetry that is composed and recited to shower an individual with praises. It must be noted that in the case of royal praises the poem expresses both admiration as well as disapproval of whatever the ruler is found not to be doing well and is unacceptable to the ruled.

#### **1.9.7 Proverb**

Considering what a proverb is, Mieder (1993:6) attempts to define it as a sentence that is short and widely known in the community which by its nature contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical manner. She further explains that it is a fixed and memorisable form that is handed down from one generation to another.

Krappe (1965:147) examines a proverb from its functional perspective:

A proverb strives for no high ideal, difficult of attainment, but merely voices the sum total of everyday experience which has become the

common property of a social group and which is after all at the basis of the group morality in a work-a-day world no matter what high religious or ethical system may be preached from the pulpit on Sundays.

It is always challenging to come up with a straight definition of a proverb. The citations above put emphasis on communities' daily experiences as common property. Besides being traditional and devoted to expressing expected morals they are also allegorical in nature, and meant for adult minds. Due to skilful linguistic patterns and their brevity, they tend to be easy to memorise. This study aims at investigating this complex oral genre in particular, to discover how far these items contribute to gender relations.

### **1.9.8 Women's Leadership**

Leadership is, commonly accepted as a practice by a person who leads or commands a group, organisation, or country. In this discussion it, will refer to any woman who is put into leadership, be it in modern contexts or in traditional setups. Previous and current women leaders will enable me to gain a better understanding of the gender inequality that women endure in their different contexts, particularly regarding leadership.

## **1.10 SCOPE OF STUDY**

### **1.10.1 Chapter 1**

The thesis sets out from the hypothetical position that women can be trusted with leadership and they can perform well just like men. This chapter describes the objectives and motivation that led to the existence of this investigation. It also provides background information for this research project. Relevant terms are defined for better understanding of their use in the chapters that are to follow. The content of each chapter in this study is provided, as is an overview of literature that is relevant to this research.

### **1.10.2 Chapter 2**

I give a detailed outline of the theoretical framework that will be utilised in this discussion. The feminist and or womanist approach will be used in the analysis of both proverbs and praise poetry. Orality as a theory will also be utilised in this research as both proverbs and praise poetry are oral forms of literature. Mention is also made of a performance theory: this is vital as praise poetry is dependent on performance.

### **1.10.3 Chapter 3**

This chapter will focus on proverbs and idiomatic expressions as the first core element of this research. Since these forms of orature are considered to be expressions of views of a particular society it is envisaged that their use will serve as a window that will enable me to find out how women are perceived in Nguni communities, particularly when it comes to leadership roles. This investigation will be carried out into the Siswati culture as well as the other Nguni sister languages. The investigation will shed light as to the extent of the effect of Nguni proverbs and idiomatic expressions in blocking or enabling women from participating in leadership both at community level as well as at formal institutions.

### **1.10.4 Chapter 4**

The theory on praise songs/*tibongo/izibongo/iimbongo* also known as heroic poems will be explored in this chapter. In this section of my research a detailed discussion of *tibongo* and their nature will be undertaken to pave the way for the analysis that will follow in chapter 5. In this chapter *tibongo* are examined as a form of folklore, and their role in the politics of different communities considered.

The praise singer also becomes important in this chapter. I describe what it entails to develop an *imbongi* who becomes a specialist in praising. What needs to be stated is that from birth up to around 6/7 years these boys stay very close to their mothers who nurture the talent of praising by using different forms of folklore amongst which are the lullabies, simple songs, *izangelo*, clan praises and others.

#### **1.10.5 Chapter 5**

*Tibongo*/praise songs/praises will be the main focus in this chapter. *Tibongo* for various outstanding women in the history of the Nguni group will be analysed with the purpose of determining the message which *imbongi* conveys about women leaders. These aspects will be instrumental in identifying the manner in which Nguni communities perceive women in leadership in their societies. The role and function of praise poetry will bring about a better understanding regarding the effect of this form of orature.

This view will be debated in relation to the fact that in the present South Africa affirmative action is an issue of great concern to female employees at the work place. The driving force in this process emanates from the Constitution of the country which pronounces in no uncertain terms that women are equal to men and are to be protected from abuse of any nature. One other observation made was that in some cases even if a woman is placed in a leadership post it is done with some reservations.

This however, is contrary to the practical life known to be led by typical South African black women, particularly in the rural areas. In most cases South African men migrate to the cities with the hope of earning more money in the form of salaries. The main issue of concern in such situations is that the women are left alone in the rural areas, faced by serious responsibilities. The tasks of caring for the children and the old and frail members of the family remain in the hands of the woman, who is also expected to keep an eye on the cattle, goats, sheep

and chicken. Research has proved that the flame is kept burning even if the husband is away for many months in a year, not to mention the fact that some of those migrant men end up not returning home until they are frail, sick and poor. The point of debate here is that, if women succeed in bringing up their children without help from men, who then are the leaders of these families during those moments of their absence? Why then should, such a proverb as the one above be taken as a correct reflection of women in society?

### **1.10.6 Chapter 6**

This is a chapter in which I will reflect on the debates aired in, the various chapters of this thesis. The intended vision is that of alerting African women who find themselves in leadership roles and those who are deprived of participating in these. The main focus is the dire need for debating issues around the transformation of both modern and traditional communities in terms of gender inequality. The multi-skilled women of the era have so much to offer to their communities in as far as development and taking the community to greater heights are concerned. Recommendations for further studies will be made in this concluding chapter.

### **1.11 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This opening chapter has created the context on which this study is firmly based. It was necessary to touch on what motivated such an investigation. It was evident that there were personal, political and academic motivations that led to this study. This chapter has also discussed the aims and objectives for engaging in such an endeavour. Proverbs that pertain to women were introduced as one of the poetic forms that will be given prime attention in the analysis that will follow. Terminology that is relevant to this exploration was explained with the intention of creating an understanding of how such terminology will be used in the context of this research. The scope of what is contained in each chapter was outlined as it was essential to offer a summary of the comprehensive layout of the whole thesis. Praise poetry composed for

women in leadership was introduced, as the second core genre in this study. Previously completed studies were visited so as to establish the need for and relevance of this particular investigation.



## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this chapter is to provide a framework for the theories and approaches that will be employed in the critical analysis of the two folklore genres *i.e.* proverbs and praises. It stands to reason that an appropriate theory or theories are a significant instrument that should assist in bringing about a better understanding of the subject under discussion. It is precisely for that reason that a theoretical framework becomes an intrinsic part of a study of this nature. In dealing with a topic of this nature, it may not be wise to simply focus one's attention on the poetic texts as if they are mere products of composition. In fact, these compositions emanate from members of society who cannot avoid being affected by various factors that include amongst others their perceptions of life, cultural beliefs and norms, religious beliefs, political beliefs, gender relations, the genre as well as the function they are intended to serve. In most cases an oral text is composed for a particular function and the artist has specific intentions in mind when creating the text. Society consists of a combination of different aspects that affect artists at times intentionally but also without their making a choice. It therefore becomes necessary to consider the existing factors when addressing creations that are products of members of society. It would consequently be an error of judgement to employ a single theory as a tool for the interrogation of a complex perspective such as the case in point *i.e.* A Reflective Perspective of Women Leadership in Nguni Oral Poetic Forms.

It is important to bear in mind that the scenario under examination consists of proverbs and praises as folklore creations. This on its own highlights the need to draw from various theories when attempting to analyse these important genres of orature. From the combination of selected theories a framework

derived out of this group should yield a deeper insight. The significance of utilising theories in analysing literary works is echoed by Nkumane (1999:24) when she asserts that literary theories are not just fashionable ways of analysing literature, but also strongly feels theories broaden and develop the literary knowledge and the thinking ability of literary critics. The theories will be discreetly applied in the sense that only where it is relevant will a particular theory will be utilised, while should there be an overlap this will also be noted.

## **2.2 THE FEMINIST THEORY**

A subject or topic that is concerned with women suggests an obvious association with feminism. This is a group of theories that came into existence with the objective of removing gender inequality, of all kinds, which subjects women to oppression in their day to day life. It is worth mentioning that feminism initially came into being as a political movement established to liberate women from the patriarchal social spheres, and later became an approach that could be used to analyse literary works. This is when it may be defined as a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism, not simply a concern for gender in literature (Jefferson and Robey 1986:204). A comprehensive definition is the one given by Mannathoko in Meena (1992:71) who claims:

Feminists question and challenge the origins of oppressive gender relations and attempt to develop a variety of strategies that might change these relations for the better. All feminism pivots round the recognition of existing women's oppression and addresses the prevailing unjust and discriminatory gender relations. Feminism does not just deal with the issues of justice and equality but also offers a critique of male-dominated institutions, values, and social practices that are oppressive and destructive.

It therefore becomes clear that feminism is a struggle against all forms of gender inequality and sexism as they manifest themselves in the various structures of society. Such a theory will enable us to interrogate the reasons behind the absence of women in top management positions in many institutions

of whatever nature, as this gap is mainly based on the perception of a woman in various communities. Feminism does not just identify the oppressive situations that emphasise inequality between men and women in society, but it also suggests ways and means of eradicating such unjust inequalities in the various spheres of life. A good example to refer to is the inclusion of gender equality in legislation that governs the country. The major instance is the Constitution which contains clauses that promote equality and protect the victims of gender inequality. One other instance that we could refer to is when certain organisations are put in place so as to monitor the implementation of such legislation that is promulgated to protect women in the gender insensitive communities. In some cases workshops are organised with the intention of encouraging women to be aware of their rights as citizens of South Africa. In South Africa the documenting of culture has also reduced the misuse of the latter, particularly in marriage situations.

It is also vital to mention the fact that being a female does not necessarily mean being a feminist. Being one is to embrace the feminist ideas based on the war against domination by men in society. This also includes assisting with creating greater consciousness about discriminatory and distractive practices found to exist in different spheres of life. After raising the consciousness of both men and women about male domination one would expect members of society to start resisting it. This raises the issue of women oppressing other women. Such scenarios are frequently prominent between a married woman and her sisters-in-law and/or her mother-in-law. Such oppression cannot be excluded during the fight against domination of women regardless of where it comes from. There is dire need to bring awareness to both men and women of how much talent is left untapped when women are not given a chance of showcasing their talent, intelligence, ability and skills. Such negligence compromises both the quantity and quality of service delivery to communities who are in need of improving their lives in their areas of residence. In this regard, the research on women as portrayed by proverbs and praise poems will gradually unfold as the discussion goes further.

It also becomes essential to mention the fact that feminism makes use of two terms that are central in its discussion: gender and sex. On the one hand, there is sex, which is the biological creation of every individual in society. Sex is neither based on societal beliefs nor strengthened by any religion, custom and developmental policies. Lindsey (1997:3) alludes to the fact that “**sex** is considered in light of the biological aspects of a person, involving characteristics which differentiate females from males by chromosomal, anatomical, reproductive, hormonal and other physiological aspects and characteristics.”

This does not in any way, mean that women do not enjoy being born female. Most women are very comfortable with being born as females and they make it their priority to embrace their femininity. They are aware of their role in complementing men in sharing life as men and women. However, there are those women who feel uncomfortable with living in a female body. These comprise exceptional cases of women, who even go to the extent of practicing lesbianism out of resisting the fact that they were born female.

The general outlook is that individuals who are born possessing a male anatomical feature stand to enjoy the set principles that all men enjoy by being male. An individual born with female anatomical features will, in most instances suffer from the principles that discriminate against most people who are born female.

Lindsey (1997:2) further concurs that:

The categories of male and female are stereotyped such that members of the category are assumed to possess certain characteristics by virtue of their biological categories. This results in **sexism**, the belief that one category, female, is inferior to the other, male. While males are not immune to the negative consequences of sexism, females experience it firsthand since it permeates all levels of our social institutions.

Discrimination that is based on the biological sex that a girl finds herself in, becomes a punishment of her, who in the long run is obliged to face the consequences of being female, not out of choice but through the biological features that categorise her as female. Lindsey (1997:3) attests that sexism is aggravated by the existence of patriarchal systems in societies. She further elaborates that the oppression of women is encouraged by male-dominated structures within which both women and men interact. Lindsey (1997:2) further confirms that:

Patriarchy almost by definition also exhibits androcentrism, meaning male-centered. In consort with patriarchy androcentrism assumes that male norms operate throughout all social institutions and become the standard to which all persons adhere.

The norms, cultural behaviour and behavioural patterns are crafted by men and are expected to be accepted as normal especially by women. There could be men who would be aware of the discrimination and would be willing to join in the battle, but because of societal pressure it becomes very difficult for such men to openly declare their stance regarding change and transformation. If a man dares to express his concern over the existing status quo, other men will call him names and consider him to be acting like a girl or a woman. In the Nguni cultures that are being discussed in this study such a man is also believed to have been given a love potion by his wife; hence his sympathetic behaviour. Out of fearing for their ego they succumb to androcentrism.

Gender on the other hand is a term that refers to the socially constructed and culturally variable roles played by women and men in their lives. Gender discrimination refers to structural relationships of inequality that are found to exist between men and women in various environments of life that may include job markets, religious environments, as well as in households. (Meena 1992:1) observes that it is usually reinforced by custom, law, tradition and other specific policies. This is in accord with the statement which pronounces that gender differences, however, display a cultural aspect; they are the differences between men and women which society has constructed. Society has created

certain beliefs about what femininity and masculinity are, and how women and men should dress for example, as well as how they must behave. Since this is a social construct it therefore becomes possible that it may be changed to bring equality to men and women in their dual existence in life.

It is an anti-patriarchal front which combats the oppression that women experience in a male-dominated system. Patriarchy, may be viewed as, the power of the fathers, as alluded to above. It may be social, ideological, political and in which men, by force, direct pressure, or through tradition, religion, law and customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play and in which the female is subsumed under the male. It comprises the gender practices that need to be transformed in societies of the world if there is to be equality in the true sense of the word. Feminism resists these gender differences as they are man-made and constructed usually by those in power to protect the status quo. The discussion of the different aspects of gender inequality highlights and emphasises the relevance of this theory in the analysis to be undertaken. As regards proverbs, some of them portray an African woman as powerful and able to function on her own, particularly in the situation where her husband has died. *'Intsandzane lenhle ngumakhofwa ngunina.'* Loosely translated, 'A good orphan is the one who gets licked by the mother.' The proverb generally means that a fortunate orphan is one who remains in the hands of a mother figure. In the same Nguni societies there are other proverbs that consider a woman as evil and untrustworthy; this concept will be further dealt with in chapter 3 of this research.

The analysis of proverbs intends to determine the effect of such oral expressions in creating perceptions that end up tarnishing women. Such influence frequently creates conflict between groups that are campaigning for the betterment of gender relations in society and those who accept the stereotypical perception of women deemed to be weaker and inferior.

### 2.2.1 Feminism and Diversity

Feminism is not a monolithic theory as it offers a wide range of perceptions within it. In the interests of this study I shall take a glimpse into a few types of feminism so as to indicate how these perceptions differ. The multiplicity of feminism is confirmed by Tong (1989:1):

... the feminist theory is not one, but many, theories or perspectives and that each feminist theory or perspective attempts to describe women's oppression, to explain its causes and consequences to prescribe strategies for women's liberation.

The fact that it exhibits a broad variety in terms of perceptions enables many people to associate with this theory in terms of different paradigms. Much as the list may be difficult to exhaust, we will cite a few perceptions that feminists are able to identify themselves with. These include amongst others liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist and postmodern views, that all converge in one common objective which is the struggle to free women from patriarchal oppression. Each of these perspectives serves as partial or provisional answer to women's questions on oppression. This is well summed up by Tong (1989:1-2):

What continues to fascinate me, however is the way in which these partial and provisional answers intersect, joining together both to lament the ways in which women have been oppressed, repressed, and suppressed and to celebrate the ways in which so many women have "beaten the system," taken charge of their own destinies, and encouraged each other to live, laugh, and be happy as *women*.

In a way women and men are made aware of the existence of women's oppression and also provided with ways and means of combating it. In fact, the various perspectives allow and give space for people with different feminist needs, to identify with a perspective that they find to be appropriate amongst the many feminisms. Let us look at a few of these perspectives and see how they differ.

### 2.2.2.1 The Liberal Feminist

The liberal view is considered as the first perspective that is labelled as the traditional perspective of feminism. It is a way of thought that came into being through Mary Wollstonecraft. Another prominent name behind the origin of this perspective is John Stuart Mill. Tong (1989:2) declares that the Liberal perspective is:

...rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that block women's entrance and/or success in the so called public world. Because society has the false belief that women are by nature, less intellectually and/or physically capable than men, it excludes women from the academy, the forum and the marketplace. As a result of this exclusion the true potential of many women goes unfulfilled.

According to liberals women are purposely removed from participating in the public sphere by gender inequality. Since a large number of men perceive women as less intelligent they consequently exclude them from contributing in community development, thus depriving them of fulfilment as human beings. In liberalism there is a strong belief that women can be liberated by making rules that will cater for all humans in a fair way. The other major requirement expressed by the liberals is that no one should be disadvantaged by any system. In life members of society should not be limited by certain rules that in the end may affect their confidence and potential in general. This perception is not related to the current study, but is briefly discussed to give a broader picture of the various feminisms.

### 2.2.2.2 Marxist Feminism

Such feminism is adamant that it is not possible for women to gain equal opportunities with men as long as the wealth that is produced by the many who are powerless in society ends up in the hands of the few members who are in power. According to Tong (1989:2) Marxists claim that:



...women's oppression originated in the introduction of private property, an institution that obliterated whatever equality the human community had previously enjoyed. Private ownership of the means of production by relatively few persons, originally all male, inaugurated a class system whose contemporary manifestations are corporate capitalism and imperialism. Reflection on this state of affairs suggests that capitalism itself, not just the larger social rules under which men are privileged over women, is the cause of women's oppression.

Marxist feminists believe that if all women are to be liberated the capitalist system must be removed and replaced by a socialist economy in which the means of production belong to one and all. In this way no one will be economically dependent on anyone else, in which case women are economically free and thus equal to men in society. It is a fact that economic freedom would create better confidence amongst women who can then decide on how and when to use the economy. This type of feminism is linked to this study in that there are instances of women tolerating abuse because they do not possess resources. Their lives are dependent on the male breadwinner who does as he wishes since he is providing for his wife and family. The *lobola* question, for instance, should be used to mirror various instances of the economic dependency syndrome perspective of feminism.

#### 2.2.2.3 Radical Feminism

Radical feminists also brought another dimension to the feminist struggle. They undermined their sisters in the liberal and Marxist ideologies, placing emphasis on patriarchy as the core cause of women's oppression in society. Tong (1989:2) succinctly states:

They argue that it is the patriarchal system that oppresses women, a system characterized by power, dominance, hierarchy and competition, a system that cannot be reformed but only ripped out roots and branches. It is not just patriarchy's legal and political structures that must be overturned; but its social and cultural institutions (especially the family, the church and the academy) must also go.

Radicals blame social and cultural institutions as being responsible for the subjugation of women. In fact, they censure the female biology as responsible for the way women perceive themselves, their status and their function in the public domain. Radicals challenge and oppose the preservation of the “manliness” and “womanliness” or so called “natural order” used by conservatives. They argue against the biological status quo that eventually subordinates women to men in society. Their main objective is to overcome whatever negative effects biology has on women and men. Tong (1989:2) sums up the nature of this perspective by stating that:

What is oppressive is *not the female biology per se*, but rather that men have controlled women as child-bearers and childrears. Thus if women are to be liberated each woman must determine for herself when to use or not reproduction-controlling technologies (for example, contraception, sterilization, abortion) and reproduction aided technologies (for example artificial insemination by donor, in vitro fertilization, contracted motherhood); and each woman must determine for herself how and how not to rear the children she bears.

In other words, radicals put great pressure on the how and when of motherhood that they feel men and society use as a tool to keep women in the private domain. Androgyny is defined by Lindsey (1997:18) as an integration of characteristics that define what is feminine as well as those that are defined as masculine. Hence, while men should be permitted to explore their masculine dimension, women too must be permitted to exhibit their feminine dimension. Radicals claim that, for women to be liberated, they must give new meaning to femininity. In other words, femininity should not be perceived as those traits that are opposite to masculinity. In this theory sexuality is the issue of main concern as radicals argue that women must escape the confines of heterosexuality and create an exclusively female sexuality through celibacy, autoeroticism, or lesbianism (Tong 1989:5). They also insist that no specific kind of sexual experience should be prescribed for a woman. Instead, the woman must be motivated to experiment sexually with herself and other women.

Although in this study freedom for women is advocated, I find such principles working towards the detriment of procreation. If all women were to decide to say no to heterosexual relations the population would shrink to an alarmingly small size. This particular perception may not be useful in the analysis of the oral genres selected for this study as the African women who are being discussed in this study are very fond of childbearing, not necessarily being forced into it. It would therefore be difficult to align radicalism with ideas regarding oppressive attitudes towards women because it goes beyond the norm. To African women child bearing and child rearing is a responsibility in the same way as there are responsibilities for men; hence the expression that it takes the whole village to raise a child. Radicals do not seem to realise that oppression is a male construct and should be viewed as such. In any case, radicalism will not be used in analysing issues in this research but reference to it was necessary to demonstrate how far feminism might go in its struggle against domination of women by men.

#### 2.2.2.4 Psychoanalytic Feminism

This theory emphasises the fact that oppression of women is embedded in their psyche (Tong 1989:5). This is said to be a product of the Freudian theory regarding the pre-Oedipal and Oedipus complex. In the pre-Oedipal stage all infants are naturally attached to their mothers. It is very likely that the first adult person that an infant encounters is the mother. This stage ends up in the oedipal complex, the process when a boy gives up his first love object, being his mother. This according to Tong is to escape castration at the hands of the father. During this process the boy becomes integrated with the dominant group in society. The girl takes longer to separate from her mother. Together with her, she ends up being the ruled, and both also fear their own power. This could be confirmed by the fact that the girl often remains to help her mother in the home longer than the boy does. She ends up inheriting her mother's position as regards the chores that her mother does from day to day. This in a way

prepares her for her future role as a mother to be. Tong (1989:6) concurs with the idea in these words:

Others object that unless we are prepared to pull the string that unravels society, we must accept some version of the Oedipus complex as the experience that integrates the individual into society. In accepting *some* version of the complex..., we need not also accept Freudian version according to which authority, autonomy, and universalism labelled “male” and love, dependence and particularism are labelled “female”. These labels, which attach more value to being male than to being female, are not essential to the Oedipus complex. Rather they are simply the consequences of a child’s actual experience with men and women.

The argument is advanced that dual parenting as well as dual participation in the outside workplace would change the gender prescription of the Oedipus complex. This concept may well be confirmed as women become used to the challenges of the outside world and thus improve in their performance. This is an important perspective as it has a strong effect on shaping the psyche of the woman which later positions her to be subordinate to men in life. Such a perspective is relevant in the section that discusses the role of the mother in contributing towards the development of an *imbongi* or praise singer. The mother orientates the boy to rhymes and other oral poetry but the boy disengages as he leaves his mother to be closer to his father who will teach him the “manly” world.

#### 2.2.2.5 Socialist Feminism

Socialists emerged with the idea of weaving together these several strands of feminism. Their success was the result of considering the various precepts found in the different feminist paradigms that were already in existence. Juliet Mitchell according to Tong (1989:6) argues that:

...women’s condition is *over determined* by the structures of production (from Marxist feminism), reproduction and sexuality (from radical feminism), and the socialization of children (from liberal feminism)...woman’s interior world (her psyche) must also be transformed (as emphasized by psychoanalytic feminists) for without

such change, improvements in her exterior world will liberate her from the kind of patriarchal thoughts that undermine her confidence (as emphasized by existentialist feminists).

In short, the socialist feminist view takes into consideration the main ideas behind the existence of the different feminist beliefs. This is an excellent combination as it allows anyone who believes in the liberation of women to relate to any tenet of socialist feminism because the latter caters for all the aspects of women's subjugation. Another prominent name behind the integration of the different feminist thoughts is Alison Jagger, who insists on the uniqueness of socialist feminism as it undertook a careful attempt at bringing together the divergent forms of the oppression under which women live. A remarkable number of scholars amongst whom there is Arndt (2002) concur with this idea and associate it with aspects that would add value to the existence of women as human beings.

Masuku (1994:13) is one such:

They (socialist feminists) attest that the family must be understood both as an economic unit and as a site for the production of individuals who are gendered and classed. These structures of life are integrally related to women's absence from other areas, such as public life.

For socialist feminists the family also serves as an institution for the physical maintenance of society as well as for the reproduction of citizens who are moulded to accept certain beliefs and expectations. This is where the women function as wives and mothers and are thus deprived of the great fulfilment of contributing in the public sphere. Those women who are not willing to conform to societal expectations as regards family life, with all the aspects that pertain to it, are portrayed as selfish, pitiable misfits in their societies.

Motherhood is one other characterising feature of the family. Compulsory motherhood is a natural destination for girls and women who are also biologically suited to domesticity. Ryan and Van Zyl (1988:65) explain:

Institutionalised motherhood demands of women maternal 'instinct' rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self.

The above comment relevantly conveys the fact that motherhood could either be institutionalised or be an experience of joyful creativity. From the observation above it is clear that motherhood as an obligation and an institution may be unacceptable to some women who are keen to enter and participate in the public spheres of life. In this way power is retained in the hands of men. This consequently brings about the need to propound freedom of choice, which women as human beings should enjoy.

It is precisely for this reason that Jagger in Tong (1989:8) purports:

...there are only complex explanations for female subordination. Once again, the emphasis of socialist feminism is on unity and integration, both in the sense of integrating all aspects of women's lives and in the sense of producing a unified feminist theory.

One would expect the socialist feminist approach to embrace almost all the aspects of women's lives. In that way, it offers a chance to anyone who believes in the liberation of women to relate with socialists philosophically without fear of misinterpretation.

It has clearly emerged that socialist feminism has the potential of identifying all forms of oppression in the different spheres of society to address them accordingly. In this study such a presumption will assist in the analysis of proverbs and praise poems as they are composed in different contexts. These genres of orature are meant to serve diverse communities and individuals, with respect to keeping women content with being minor actors, both in the family and in the public domain. Women who get into leadership are often despised, while wrong reasons are used to justify their being able to ride up into leadership.

### **2.2.3 Feminism in the African Context**

The diverse nature of women's oppression often presupposes the need for a theoretical framework that will be able to reach deeply, and attack from various angles the patriarchy that is hidden within societal structures. Feminism is a theory that has become very unpopular in societies worldwide where patriarchy is strongly embedded in their way of life. In fact, this is a concept that was stigmatised owing to the fact that its core objective was to liberate women from the forces of patriarchy and oppression. It met strong opposition from some African members of society, especially those who have always been beneficiaries of the patriarchal system.

In other words, feminism in the African continent has been perceived with hostility. It was considered by most African scholars such as Arndt (2002:29) as a foreign import which had no relevance to the African situation. It was taken to be a way of looking at life that has been copied from Western countries and did not fit in the African context. Such a belief stemmed from the group that strongly believes in maintaining the existing status quo created by patriarchy in African societies, individuals who are not prepared to accept any suggestions of transforming African society to give effect to equality between men and women. It was this hostility against feminism that succeeded in intimidating some scholars and gender activists involved in gender issues in Africa. In Africa, culture has mainly been used by the beneficiaries of patriarchy as an element that could not be challenged: an excuse to conceal existing oppressive gender relations and legitimise the perpetuation of these oppressive relations. Arndt (2002:30) argues that feminism was rejected and made to appear irrelevant to the African society.

Conservative members of African societies comprised those who regularly claimed that there is no need for feminism in their countries. An example one could use is an article cited in Dlamini (1995:66) that states explicitly the denial of gender inequality by the beneficiaries of patriarchy. Addressing people while

opening a clinic at Zombodze in 1995 Prince Gabheni vehemently denied that there was any gender inequality in his country, i.e. Swaziland. A prominent newspaper, the *Times of Swaziland* of April 1995 published an article with the title 'Suppression of women nonexistent'. This was a statement meant to discourage those who consider fighting for equality. It must be stated that there was already a wave of feminist complaints, from the class of working women in particular. Here is a quotation from the newspaper:

Manzini Regional Administrator Prince Gabheni said since time immemorial, women have always been cherished and have occupied an important position in the country.

A good number of women responded to this article by writing back to the same newspaper in total opposition to the Prince, accusing him of blinding the public to the real situation of women in his country. A clear example of such letters is one that was published by the same paper on the 9th of May 1995. The title reads: 'Who said there's no discrimination against women in Swaziland?' Here are a few lines from it:

Whoever said or says that (women have always been cherished and occupied important positions) should start doing research on gender issues. The scale of equality is out of balance especially in our imbalanced Swaziland. The side marked 'woman' is weighed down with responsibility while the side marked 'man' rides high with power.

From the above quotation it is evident that Swati women are living under severe gender oppression. For this woman to have challenged the Prince who is obviously a beneficiary of patriarchy it may be observed that Swazi women are losing their patience regarding gender inequality. From the research carried out by Dlamini (1995:86) it is evident that abuse of Swati women cuts across ages and social classes. The fact is that all systems are in the hands of men who are not prepared to allow change to take place. It is for that reason that they deny the presence of any oppression as the Prince did.



In most instances the accusation towards feminism was based on what Arndt (2002:30) describes as insinuations that those who believe in feminist ideas deny their African identity. The thinking was that they have forgotten their history and specific problems, and are seen to be victims of a colonisation of thought and consciousness. This might not be regarded as strange as it is known that both men and women have been influenced by patriarchy and therefore cannot easily accept a different view. Kolawole as cited in Arndt (2002:30) challenges this view by saying:

Although many African languages have no synonym for feminism as it is defined in the West, the concept of group action by women, based on common welfare in social, cultural, economic, religious and political matters is indigenous and familiar to a majority of these women.

What is advocated by Kolawole's finds expression in many experiences of African rural women. Arndt (2002:31) however, expresses reservations and argues that not all traditional associations were feminist in nature. She asserts:

A feminist organization is more than a mere assembly of women, a feminist organization questions and challenges gender inequalities that oppress and discriminate against women. Not all women's organizations in Africa pursued and defended women's rights. Moreover, these organizations did not have the program of transforming gender relationships. Hence, it can be argued that women's movements have a long tradition in Africa and that some of these organizations pursued aims one could label feminist. Thus African feminism is partly rooted in traditional African societies; but when looking for roots of African feminism one has to take a more complex approach.

Arndt here responds to Kolawole's argument which states that indigenous women had their own feminisms in their traditional settings. Indeed, not all social groups may be striving for the emancipation of women but some of them used to send, and are still sending, strong messages that are demanding changes in gender relations. Scholars are to bear in mind the fact that the type of feminism found in groups of traditional women would not be very close to what the modern woman considers being a feminist movement. Actually, it is of great interest that for a long time the oppressed women were not silent but were

indeed communicating their feelings about the oppression they endured. In fact, the voices of the women based in rural areas are even louder than those of the middle class women.

EmaSwati women will be used as references in support of the view that feminist groupings and activities have existed in the traditional communities. Indeed they believed in orality that has been shown to be an effective instrument of expressing oneself about matters that are not acceptable. Their great trust in their compositions, that change would come about in response to their concerns without them being confrontational, is exemplified in the following song.

### ***Indvodza yelijazi***

*Leader: Indvodza yelijazi:*  
*Chorus: Iyagula nayiyolala kami, iyagula.*  
*Leader: Kuyical' ekuseni.*  
*Chorus: Iyagula nayiyolala kami, iyagula.*

### **The man who wears an overcoat**

(The man wearing an overcoat:  
He becomes ill when he has to spend a night in my hut,  
he becomes ill.  
The illness starts in the morning.  
He becomes ill when he has to spend a night in my hut,  
he pretends to be ill.)

The above song is significant in that it presents the complaints of an individual amongst a group of acquaintances. As implied even if the woman is in a polygamous context she still regards herself as deserving to be visited by her husband. When this man is to visit this complaining woman, he pretends to be ill; as such he puts on an overcoat to convince her of this. This might be interpreted as a song that addresses an issue of concern for most women especially those in polygamous marriages. Such songs do not just send messages to those who are in power, but they also serve as therapy for the woman who may be so frustrated by this unjust treatment. The following song is yet another typical example of a message being conveyed.

### ***Mine ngendza ngimncane***

*Leader: Mine ngendza ngimncane,  
Hha, aphelile emandla, aphelile emandla.*

*Chorus: Hha, aphelile emandla ami.*

*Leader: Ngagana ngimncane,  
Hha, aphelile emandla ami, aphelile emandla.*

*Chorus: Hha, aphelile emandla ami.*

*Leader: Hamba gabekile,  
Hha, aphelile emandla, aphelile emandla.*

*Chorus: Hha, aphelile emandla ami.*

*Leader: Nenkhonto ingehlulile,  
Hha, aphelile emandla ami, aphelile emandla.*

*Chorus: Hha, aphelile emandla ami.*

### **I was married young**

(I got married at a young age,  
Oh, my strength is finished, my strength is finished.  
Oh, my strength is finished.

I started dating at a young age,  
Oh, my strength is finished, my strength is finished.  
Oh, my strength is finished.

Oh, I was a failure,  
Oh, my strength is finished, my strength is finished.  
Oh, my strength is finished.

Marriage has defeated me,  
Oh, my strength is finished, my strength is finished.  
Oh, my strength is finished.)

The two examples of songs support the argument that feminist views have always existed within traditional contexts. Both are voicing complaints in marriage. There are many other songs that attack the Swati men for failing to execute their responsibilities. Dlamini (1995) makes thought-provoking reading material as she analyses a broad spectrum of traditional songs of Swati women. Ntshinga (1993) also conducted research on women's songs from amaXhosa communities. In the songs the texts are composed and performed as voices that seek for attention.

What must be borne in mind is that a majority of these complaints about oppression were stated and resolved orally. For that reason I firmly believe that some of these movements were striving for a woman's rights within their contexts, although the word "rights" could not necessarily be taken to mean those understood by the modern woman. Unfortunately, the forms of communication that were used were not documented; hence conveniently ignored by the patriarchal society.

#### **2.2.4 Womanism in the African Context**

Much as there are African scholars who are committed to gender they tend to experience a serious difficulty with being labelled feminists. It has been observed that a majority of African feminists refuse to be called feminists because they do not want to be part of a movement that originates from Western countries. This however does not mean they are not convinced that the situation of women has to be improved drastically and that gender relations in African societies need radical transformation; they are themselves committed to making these changes happen. For this reason, African scholars dealing with women's issues came up with different names for the movement that they were committed to. I find it appropriate to mention a few of the different names that were given to feminism as a movement in the African context.

*Womanism* was a term employed by Walker (Masuku 2005:32), *Africana womanism* by Hudson-Weems, whilst Nnaemeka brought the term *negofeminism* into use. She explains that her name for the movement is based on the give and take philosophy that she claims is practiced amongst Igbo communities. *Stiwanism* stemmed from Ogundipe-Leslie whereas *Motherism* was suggested by Acholonu. Much as these names are based on precepts that are vital in the African context, it would be advisable for the African gender scholars and activists to agree on a name that would be all embracing in terms of precepts, which can be presumed as making sense of all the aversions identified and also as relevant to African needs. Each name given above is said

to differ from the others in some way, but at the end of the day they are all referring to the struggle in fighting oppression of women. I personally argue that it does not help in any case for the African women scholars, writers and activists to give so much attention to the issue of the name as this is to the detriment of progress in driving the agenda of the core business of the movement, i.e. the emancipation of the African women from all spheres of oppression.

It is clear that there is considerable awareness about the need to effect changes to the present state of gender relations in African societies. African scholars agree that gender relationships have to be tackled in the contexts of political, economic, cultural, and social forms or mechanisms of oppression such as racism, neocolonialism, cultural, imperialism, capitalism, religious fundamentalism, and dictatorial and corrupt systems. In this comprehensive manner the process of transformation of societies will be pursued with greater success.

It is true that it is the person in power who needs to arrive at an understanding of how significant this struggle is for the African community to engage in discussions for the proposed change. The African woman knows her problems, understands her society and knows what kind of change is necessary. It is also the African woman who knows the African situation in her society; she can only win in this struggle if she uses an approach that will not just be acceptable to African men but one that will also not scare them away. The name indeed becomes an issue of concern in such a struggle, as it is a sum total of what is contained by this ideology envisaged to bring about transformation.

It is necessary to furnish brief explanations of some of the African womanisms so as to understand the African women who ended up coining so many names. It was around 1983 when Alice Walker devised an alternative concept of womanism, against feminism. She as a writer felt this would be a specific approach that focuses on black women's identity and commitment to gender issues. Masuku (2005:30) defines womanism as:

A black feminist or feminist of colour.... Who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture... sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female...Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender (xi, xii).

According to this definition, womanism is the same as black feminism. In fact Walker uses the two terms interchangeably. Black feminism is at times referred to as womanism because both are concerned with the struggle against sexism and racism by black women who themselves constitute part of the black community's effort to achieve equity and liberty. Some scholars may argue that if the name is womanism, it means men are not welcome to participate in this movement even if they are keen to participate in the struggle against women oppression. Another disadvantage of the term womanism or Africana womanism is that its users could be criticised for repelling men who would be embarrassed to associate themselves with such a name lest they are despised by fellow males.

Walker's definition is rooted in black women's concrete history in racial and gender oppression. The name womanism is clearly defined by Collins (2001:13) who asserts:

Taking the term from the Southern Black folk expression of mothers to female children "you are acting womanish", Walker suggests that black women's concrete history fosters a worldview accessible primarily and perhaps exclusively to black women. "Womanish" girls acted in outrageous, courageous and wilful ways, attributes that freed them from the conventions long limiting white women.

In other words, African women had always acted in a way that freed them from the oppressions that the white women encountered long before the establishment of feminism. In effect, womanish is defined as the opposite of the "frivolous, irresponsible, not serious girlish" which makes it different from and rated higher than feminism. Nkumane (1999:25) concurs with this view:

... a womanist is not just a determined woman, but she also appreciates women's culture and strength. Black women as women of colour are distinct from other women because of the common African cultures they believe in. The appreciation of women's culture suggests that womanist is culturally coded. Its nature reflects African women's historical, cultural and spiritual experience, especially when it refers uniqueness of and the struggle involved in being black and female in a society that is hostile to womanhood.

Such a statement refers to the fact that a womanist is aware of the pressures exerted by the different cultures in compelling her to be content with being placed in the back seat in life. It is of vital importance though to warn African women about the "culture" that is at times used by the men to oppress them. It is of cardinal significance that women should know their culture so well that they can tell when it is used as a scapegoat in the process of oppressing them.

It was around 1996 that Ogunyemi independently of Walker also conceptualised the concept of womanism (Ogunyemi 1996:101). When she first used this concept, she used it without qualifying it. She later modified it to be African Womanism. Ogunyemi aimed at conceptualising an ideology that clearly differentiates and unshackles African womanism from both white feminism and African-American womanism. In her book Ogunyemi (1996:114) emphasises her concern that since feminism and African-American womanism fail to notice African peculiarities, consequently she asserts there is a need to define African womanism. She strongly argues that only African women may be African womanists. In her book Ogunyemi (1996:133) further points out that, African feminists have a firm belief in bearing children. The other major difference between Ogunyemi and Walker's view is that of holding a strong negative attitude towards lesbianism. Ogunyemi (1996:133) sums up her standpoint regarding this idea in the following words:

It is necessary to reiterate that the womanist praxis in Africa has never totally identified with all the original Walkerian precepts. An important point of departure is the African obsession to have children....While Walker emphasizes that womanists love other women, sexually and/or nonsexually",...Ogunyemi argues that her African womanism rejects lesbian love...

Walker in her womanism regards bearing children in a very similar way as the Western radical feminist's ideology. It is the radical Western feminists who embrace lesbianism. Both these points are contrary to African beliefs and thus not relevant. It therefore, would be a difficult exercise to convince the African society, especially those members who believe in patriarchy, to succumb to the proposed transformation. In fact, Ogunyemi's definition of African Womanism is based on the argument that the gender question can be dealt with only in the context of other issues that are relevant to African women. Precepts that are not relevant to African women may therefore, be misleading and may potentially attract negative attitudes to the very women whose societies need to be transformed.

It makes sense that womanism does not resist men but incorporates them into the struggle, as their participation would yield better results in transforming society and its structures without delay. Womanism attacks gender oppression from a holistic point, using a separatist approach. Pluralism is highlighted in the garden metaphor where Walker sees flowers blooming together in their diversity. One can explain this by saying that in womanism there is acknowledgement of the different cultures that live in harmony side by side.

Gender discrimination is not necessarily practiced by men only. African researchers have identified another element of oppression and discrimination found to exist between black women and other black women. It is what Arndt (1993:28) refers to as "the power mother-in-laws wield over their sons' wives." The other main issue is that of racism because if it is still prevalent in a community it would be a futile exercise to attempt solving the gender oppression. Africana womanism, amongst other issues, shouldered the responsibility to address such types of oppression of women by other women that is prevalent in African societies. The leading proponent of Africana Womanism, Clenora Hudson-Weems, coined the Africana Womanist term which she clearly describes as her way of looking at gender issues in her book *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*. The absence of sisterhood is one



of the eighteen precepts of Africana Womanism that Hudson-Weems (1993:20) lists as one of the key components for human survival if there are to be harmony and security for women in society. Hudson-Weems (1993:24) clearly describes how Africana Womanism differs from the other predecessor theories:

...neither an outgrowth nor an addendum to feminism. Africana Womanism is not Black Feminism, African Feminism or Walker's Womanism that some African women came to embrace. Africana Womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent.

It is a theory that has not arisen as an appendix to other theories regarding women that preceded it. In fact, Africana womanism emerged as an independent theory aiming at addressing gender issues for all women of African ancestry. In other words it brought about a new dimension that was not considered in the theories that had come before it. In her description of how this theory differs from the previous ones Hudson-Weems (1993:24) claims:

It is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women. It critically addresses the dynamics of the conflict between the mainstream feminist, the Black feminist, the African feminist and the African Womanist. The conclusion is that Africana Womanism and its agenda are unique and separate from both White feminism, Black feminism and moreover, to the extent of naming in particular, Africana Womanism differs from African feminism.

According to this renowned scholar the new name Africana Womanism was designed with the aim of addressing the differing and dynamic needs of women in the African context. Masuku (2005:40) affirms:

This is the basis for Hudson's theory. She operationalizes her theory on the assumption that race is of paramount importance in any deliberations on or about African women. Since any discourse involving Africana people cannot escape the historical realities of Eurocentrism, oppression and domination, it makes sense to articulate a clear and firm position that is inclusive of those realities.

Hudson-Weems cites her own reasons why she prefers “Africana Woman” over all other terms that are in use. According to her, Africana womanism is significantly different from the mainstream feminism, especially regarding the perception of and approach to issues in society. This is understandable because Africana women and white women come from different segments of the society and, thus, feminism as an ideology is not equally applicable to both.

Such a form of womanism presents an agenda that is entirely different from that of the Walkerian womanism and the White feminism, for instance. It identifies a set of priorities that are different from those of previous theorists. Africana womanism was centred on the family not on just the female gender. Its priorities are that Africana Womanists do not just focus on the gender issue alone, but go further to address other aspects of human relations that include race and class. Such empowerment, as asserted, could only be acquired if the women live in communities that have successfully established their own racial and cultural integrity. This affirms the significance of accepting and acknowledging how essential it is to tackle the race issue first before attending to the gender issue if the envisaged empowerment is to be achieved. Such an idea is also supported in Hudson-Weems (1993:140) in these words:

As feminism is an agenda designed to meet the needs and demands of White women, it is plausible for the group of women who are themselves victims of gender oppression primarily, to tailor a theoretical construct for the purpose of addressing those needs of eradicating female subjugation first. However, placing all women’s history under White women’s history, thereby assigning the definitive position to the latter, is rather presumptuous.

The oppression of African women could not be seen as identical to that of the whites. The race and class issues for instance are essential in the liberation of women as anticipated. The need for a version of womanism containing the precepts found in Africana Womanism cannot be overemphasised. Africans, particularly within the continent but also beyond, exercise peculiar methods of oppressing women, such that it is only an African woman who knows and understands the African context and its complexities. It is not any person who claims to be a feminist or womanist who can successfully transform the different

countries that are dynamic in various ways. Reed as cited by Masuku (2005:38) confirms this argument in the following explanation:

Upon realizing that the term “Black Womanism” was not an apt terminology to include the total meaning desired for this concept, she decided that “*Africana Womanism*” was the perfect terminology for two reasons. Firstly, *Africana* identifies the ethnicity of the woman being considered, and this reference to her ethnicity, establishes her cultural identity as it relates to her ancestry and land base: Africa. The second part of the term, *Womanism* questions the accepted idea of being a woman. The term woman further argues that the *Africana* woman is the one who has received no special privileges in American society.

“*Womanism*” is far more appropriate than “*female*” (feminism) because of one of the major distinctions – only a female human race can be woman. Female on the other hand, can refer to a member of the animal or plant kingdom as well as to a member of the human race. Hence, a terminology derived from the word “woman” is more suitable and more specific when naming a group of the human race.

The above citation confirms how *Africana womanism* is unique and carefully coined to address what is behind the theory. The *Africana Womanist* has the responsibility of attending to issues of the black woman whose existence is piled with layers and layers of oppression and discrimination. Due to the fact that women of colour were still faced mainly by racial discrimination, it therefore became more essential to prioritise the main issue *i.e.* racism. It would be at a later stage that such a womanist would attend to the gender discrimination. This also displays the need for the *Africana womanism* whose precepts differ from those of its predecessors to utilise that advantage and fight for the woman who is racially and gender discriminated against. The theorist mentions the need to focus on the oppression of women by other black women in the African context as well. A theory like *Africana Womanism* becomes relevant to my research in that women in this context are faced with problems like the diverse African cultures that are sometimes used to conceal the existence of patriarchy in the African societies.

In a nutshell, the issue of its name has emerged above all other priorities of the women’s struggle. It has been important for those who are in the front line of

African feminism to strive for an appropriate reference that would not just be appropriate to them alone but that would be able to convince the men in the different communities. It is a much desired achievement for the scholars and activists to agree on a name that would make males realise how much skills are left untapped just because they are possessed by females. It is also for men to imagine how much the communities lose in the development of the African continent due to the fear and other negative attitudes that men often hold towards a transformed African community. It would be a significant triumph to reach a point where men can understand that women do not hate them and never intend to remove them from their positions. All that women want is to be given fair opportunities, respected as human beings and be treated as equals in all structures of society. Women are also eager to contribute in the development of their societies - in a way they are pleading to be allowed to work side by side with men, sharing senior positions equally. In the realisation of these objectives women will see themselves sharing equally in the cake of democracy and freedom.

We have observed that the issue of terminology has been a hurdle for African feminisms which in a way hindered progress towards the intended transformation of the African community. For purposes of this study I will therefore refer to African feminism as feminism and womanism interchangeably. The womanist and feminist terms will be understood to contain such precepts as “comprehensive” and “inclusive” to address the multicultural, dynamic and complex African community. Important are these precepts that will enable me to carry out the critical analysis for purposes of reaching the intended objectives.

### **2.3 PERFORMANCE AND ORALITY**

Performance as an approach is applicable to different disciplines that include among others theatre studies, anthropology and folklore. The main data under discussion that form the base of this research fall under the category of folklore. The significance of performance in any form of orature is accentuated by

Finnegan (1970:2) when she proclaims that oral literature is by definition dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion - there is no other way in which it can be realised as a literary product.

The oral nature of the praises that are the core of this discussion suggests an examination into the circumstances surrounding their performance. The literary character of these genres can be fully realised only when they are put into performance, which enables them to convey their full meaning. Okpewho (1992:42) agrees in these words:

It is ... in the study of performance that we are able to see the essential character of oral literature as distinct from written literature, that is, as an art form created in the warm presence of an audience as against the cold privacy of the written work.

It is apparent from what these scholars articulate that a critical study of any form of orature that excludes performance and orality is incomplete. It deprives the analysis of its real depth and understanding.

As performance is the basic component of an oral text it is desirable to provide a brief discussion of what it entails. This will focus on performance, its significance and its different types. Understanding performance and its characteristics is essential in enabling me to use it with success in the review that will follow.

### **2.3.1 Performance and its Elements**

Performance is not monolithic as it encompasses a range of views that may be considered when utilising it for purposes of such an analysis. Drewal (1991:1) describes performance as follows:

...performance is the praxis of everyday social life; indeed, it is the practical application of embodied skill and knowledge to the task of taking action. Performance is thus a fundamental dimension of culture as well as the production of knowledge about culture. It might include

anything from individual agents' negotiations of everyday life, to the stories people tell each other, popular entertainments, political oratory, guerrilla warfare, to bounded events such as theatre, ritual, festivals, parades, and more.

Defining performance does show that it is a theory that includes presentations of particular knowledge in a skilful manner which enhances reception and understanding of the particular knowledge. Bauman and Briggs (1990:73) emphasise the poetic aspect of performance in these words:

As the concept of performance has been developed in linguistic anthropology, performance is seen as a specially marked, artful way of speaking that sets up or represents a special interpretive frame within which the act of speaking is to be understood. Performance puts the act of speaking on display – objectifies it, lifts it from its interactional setting and opens it to scrutiny by an audience. Performance heightens awareness of the act of speaking and licences the audience to evaluate the skill and effectiveness of the performer's accomplishment.

Performance breathes life into a text that might otherwise be meaningless. It also makes an opportunity available to the audience (which may include researchers) to perceive the text as well as be in a position to undertake an analysis that is better informed. The audience is also entertained as the performer/performing group delivers/deliver the text in its context. Through actions like reciting, singing, dancing, acting a play or narrating a story the audience becomes involved in the reality of the text.

Bauman (1975:290) also declares performance as an artistic action, the doing of folklore and artistic event - the performance situation, involving performer, art form, audience, and setting, all of which are central to developing the performance approach in folklore.

Performance is responsible for spreading as well as passing this form of orature from one person to the other and from one generation to the other. Finnegan (1970:2) confirms:

... for these too are art forms which in the last analysis are actualized in and through their performance and, furthermore, in a sense depend on repeated performances for their continued existence.

Performance suggests an aesthetically marked mode of communication framed in a special way and put on display for the audience. This is how the praises are communicated as well as passed onto the next person who may have an interest in them. Through repeated performances such a study like this one could also be possible. The importance of performance especially in Africa is emphasised by Drewal (1991:2):

In Africa performance is a primary site for the production of knowledge, where philosophy is enacted, and where multiple and often simultaneous discourses are employed....Not only that, but performance is a means by which people reflect on their current conditions, define and/or re-invent themselves and their social world and either re-enforce, resist, or subvert prevailing social orders.

Such a view emphasises the centrality of performance to the social lives of African people. Performance becomes a subtle way of presenting a challenge and criticism of social order that the latter cannot accept in their societies. It therefore, becomes essential to focus on performance as it plays such a vital role in the lives of African people most of whose art is still verbal. Ntshinga (1993:101) further observes:

Performance is composed of three highly interrelated components, namely the performer, the performance and the audience. The three components of performance are so intertwined that it becomes impossible to treat them as completely different. This is because a performer does not operate in a vacuum, but in the presence of his/her audience to whom he/she communicates a message.

This brings one to the realisation that the effectiveness of a performance as an art of communication depends on the performer, the performance and the interaction with the audience, thereby introducing one to the three main important elements of performance.

### 2.3.2 The Performer

He or she comprises one element that forms the foundation of any performance. Without the performer the text cannot be brought into existence. Behague (1984:14) takes a performer to be an individual, who acts with the self-belief and probably with some group's approval or not, that he/she has acquired a respectable amount of knowledge and skill in a particular oral form and that he/she should be able to present those materials for listeners in a coherent, acceptable fashion. Furthermore, he/she takes the responsibility and performs for others. This does not confine this concept to a music rendition only.

Finnegan (1992:95) has the following to say about performer(s):

They (performers) may be acting singly; in pairs; in a small or large group; interacting or exchanging with other single or collective performers as leader, follower, or equal; overlapping or interchanging with more audience-like-roles.....relying mainly on words and gestures, or also exploiting music or dance; purporting to deliver works by others (human or supernatural); creative or otherwise in the sense of composing during or before performance; and so on.

This description of a performer makes it possible for one to accept the fact that it is important to study or analyse the performer as she/he has a significant role in the understanding of the performance as a whole. It is true that the performer(s) possess a particular status, experience and role in society that will influence the effectiveness of the performance. It therefore, becomes extremely relevant for one to keep in mind who the performer is as one proceeds with the analysis of the praises. This should shed light on information that may otherwise have been left untouched. Finnegan (op.cit.) confirms this when she states that:

The relationship of the performers to the general artistic division of labour, their economic position, or their place in the social hierarchy too may be significant to the performance and its local meaning in the large sense of the term. At the very least they form the background to any full understanding of the performance and its expected conventions.



The success of a performance falls squarely on the performer's shoulders, being highly dependent on his/her experience, social class, role in society and also on the way he/she perceives life in general. In such cases as the composition and performance of the praises being researched here one knows that the praise singer possesses certain outstanding skills and enjoys the respect of his society in general. He enjoys a particular status in his community as he is considered to be a mouthpiece of it.

The other performer of relevance in this study is the Nguni woman who performs by using the proverbs in her speeches. A member of society whose presentations contain proverbs gains recognition because what she does is to display her advanced command of her language. She presents her speeches using the proverbs appropriately and in a manner that respects the audience. Through different elements she is able to engage in communication with her audience. Without the performer the orature in the form of proverbs cannot be actualised.

The performer possesses a character or a personality that is shaped by his/her memories and past experiences. In the case of this study the performer is the praise singer whose life has also been shaped by the cultural beliefs of the Nguni people. He exploits her previous experiences, cultural beliefs and norms in performing. He is aware of the presence of the audience and exploits that opportunity as well, which is why Finnegan (1970:4) holds:

In addition the performer has various visual resources at his disposal. The artist is typically face to face with his public and can take advantage of this to enhance the impact and even sometimes the content of his words, but what in literate cultures must be written, explicitly or implicitly, into the text can in orally delivered forms be conveyed by more visible means - by the speaker's gestures, expression, and mimicry.

The performer has to be highly creative in that he has to make sure he operates at the level that suits the audience that he is faced with. A good example is that of an individual who has to perform for an audience that includes the king or a royal person. The performance becomes more formal and dignified. If the same

performer presents his item in a less formal situation he does it accordingly. Finnegan (1970:5) observes:

A particular atmosphere - whether of dignity for a king's official poet, light-hearted enjoyment for an evening story teller, grief for a woman dirge singer - can be conveyed not only by a verbal evocation of mood but also by dress, accoutrements, or observed bearing of the performer.

Dress conveys the mood of the occasion and also assists the performer in his/her activity. In the first place dress informs the audience more about the person who is performing. His/her status in society is also revealed by dress especially in traditional settings.

The performer has to prepare him/herself before going to present a performance. What is important is that the messages signified by all the other elements, besides the words of the verbal text, can be observed only by a person who is aware of the cultural beliefs of the Nguni societies. The effect of these other elements depends on one's existing knowledge of the culture. Attire is then recognised as one of the elements that are employed to communicate the inner feeling of the performer.

### **2.3.3 The Audience**

A performance cannot take place without the audience who according to Finnegan (1970:97) may take little or no formal part in the sense of delivering it but may influence the performance by its presence and reactions, that are enough perhaps to affect not only the manner of delivery but the formulation of the text itself. The audience is a further factor of performance that is essential for the actualisation of a verbal art: vital in that the performance is for and about matters that concern the audience. The significance of this factor is well expounded by Finnegan (1970:10):

A further essential factor is the audience, which, as is not the case with written forms, is often directly involved in the actualization and creation of a piece of oral literature. According to convention, genre, and personality,

the artist may be more or less receptive to his listeners' reactions - but, with few exceptions, an audience of some kind is normally an essential part of the whole literary situation. There is no escape for the oral artist from a face-to-face confrontation with his audience, and this is something which he can exploit as well as be influenced by.

The role of the audience is not just to look, listen and laugh, but also to interact with the performer(s) during the performance. In the performance of praises the bard performs with the aim of entertaining as well as communicating the message of each line in the praises. The presence of the audience therefore creates a situation in which the performer and the audience engage in mutual communication. The participation of the audience can take the form of laughter, gestures, vocal sounds such as ululating, clapping hands, whistling or in any other way. Such participation can be taken as a sign of appreciation for the performer's skills and creativity. Where some of the issues are sensitive or are of interest to the community, it would then be instinctive for the audience to make sounds of response towards the message of the lines recited: maybe a response that disapproves the inclusion or a response confirming the message or perhaps a response of laughing at the way the bard has presented the issue. It may be a serious issue addressed in a manner that will impress the members of the audience which may include the leader being praised. In response the performer may demonstrate further skills in his/her performance. What is important is that the audience does not become passive but contributes actively towards the performance.

The audience varies. Its composition depends on the ceremony as well as the environment where the performance takes place. Basically, the audience consists of members of society of all ages as the verbal arts are performed both in the traditional and westernised settings. However, these performing groups are at times invited to perform for specialised audiences. For instance, they may be asked to entertain guests who may have visited the area. All these different types of audiences have an effect on the performance itself. As Ntshinga (1993:112) advocates:

The direct involvement of the audience in the performance means that they simultaneously play both performer's and audience's role. Likewise the performer is simultaneously her own audience in the sense that she monitors and adapts her performance to her conception of how it should capture the interests of the audience present during performance. The type of audience involved affects the presentation in that for instance the artist may omit obscenities in the presence of people whom she respects which she would include in other contexts. This requires a creative and resourceful performer.

This demonstrates how the performances have to be varied in the different contexts. It also indicates the significant role played by the audience in the presentation. The final performance is a product of the artist as well as the type of audience with which he/she is faced.

As regards the audience it is important to mention the fact that in some cases it becomes difficult to separate the performers from the former, for instance where the performers also become the audience at some stage. A good example would be a traditional wedding where both the bride's and the groom's groups are competing in dance. This occurs where the groups dance facing each other, in some instances with one group advancing towards the other. In this case it is difficult to say which group is the performer and which the audience.

The audience itself is not static but exhibits a measure of dynamism; it may even change while the performance is going on. In such a case the performer will have to vary the performance in accordance with the audience she/he is faced with at that particular time, in that way being able to maintain the interest of his/her audience.

Since the composition of the audience varies according to the occasion, in return the performer responds in various ways. A performer who is an effective user of proverbs in his/her speeches would have to avoid using proverbs that are too demanding for an audience that either consists of young Siswati speakers or a Siswati speaking audience from other provinces. Failing to do that may well lead to the audience's failing to understand his/her speech. That

may be quickly picked up when the performer says something amusing such as a joke and finds that few members of his/her audience respond by laughing. Hence Dyubhele (1993: 6) observes that it is "because of the involvement of the audience that oral performance is regarded as a participatory art". This discussion displays beyond doubt how significant it is to understand the type of audience so as to pitch the level of one's performance accordingly.

Nevertheless, there are also performances that are presented without any intended audience. This is very common in the performance of work songs, when the performance is carried out for other reasons than entertainment: for ritual purposes or in making a heavy job feel lighter. These are performances enacted with no intention of relating to an audience. The same verbal texts may be performed in some cases with an audience. Regarding this view Finnegan (1992:98) thus explains:

Rhythmic work songs while grinding corn or paddling a boat are instances of this, singing or declaiming while walking on one's own, or personal songs while herding cattle. Some might argue that absence of audience means that these are not 'real performance'.

Such songs and performances may be for certain purposes. This likewise does not necessarily mean the verbal text loses meaning. These texts still convey messages that may at times be meant to comfort or motivate the performer who sometimes performs with an imagined audience.

The discussion above indicates how performance is relevant to this investigation as the two components of this research that is, proverbs and praises are both verbal arts actualised in performance. This applies particularly to proverbs. An analysis of verbal art that excludes this theory deprives the study of a perspective that would otherwise lead to more satisfactory findings and information. This is well summed up by Finnegan (1970:3):

In fact, all the variegated aspects we think of as contributing to the effectiveness of performance in the case of more familiar literary forms may also play their part in the delivery of unwritten pieces-

expressiveness of tone, gesture, facial expression, dramatic use of pause and rhythm, the interplay of passion, dignity, or humour, receptively to the reactions of the audience, etc., Such devices are not mere embellishments superadded to the already existent literary work – as we think of them in regard to written literature – but an integral as well as flexible part of its full realization as a work of art.

The quotation assists one to understand performance as it is carried out during the presentation of a text. All these elements are evident during the process of the performance. Otherwise, without these elements the text fails to impart the intended effect to the audience. It is clear that the text is realised through performance and interaction of the performer and the audience.

## **2.4 ORALITY**

The most important characteristic of the different forms of orature under discussion here is that they are transmitted by word of mouth from one generation to the next. In their original form, the praises and proverbs were not recorded. In fact, this is an underpinning feature of these different forms of verbal art. Finnegan explains that there is no other way in which an oral text can be realised as a literary product. In fact, Finnegan (op.cit.) goes further to explore the difference between a written literary text and an oral text:

The case of oral literature is different. There the connection between transmission and very existence is a much more intimate one and questions about means of actual communication are of the first importance-without it oral realization and direct rendition by singer or speaker, an unwritten literary piece cannot easily be said to have any continued or independent existence at all. In this respect the parallel is less to written literature than to music and dance; for these too are art forms which in the last analysis are actualized in and through their performance and, furthermore, in a sense depend on repeated performances for their continued existence.

The citation above reinforces how dependent on performance an oral form of literature is. The existence and diffusion or spread of this kind of literature squarely depends on repeated performances done over and again. It is through the performer's gestures, expressions and mimicry that an oral literary text survives. Finnegan (1970:16) supports this:

Oral ... essentially circulates by oral rather than written means; in contrast to written ..., its distribution, composition or performance are by word of mouth and not through reliance on the written or printed word.

One feature that characterises this form of literary text is that it is communal and not rigid. Oral texts can be altered to suit the context as well as the audience of that time and place. Through these texts culture is spread and altered over time. Variation is very common in this type of literary form. In such a manner, this form of art can be easily altered to suit the intended purposes. The main features of an oral text are summed up by Finnegan (1970:7):

In other words something more may be involved in the delivery of an oral piece than the fact of its actualization and re-creation in and through the performance, aided by technique of delivery that heightens its artistic effectiveness. There are also the cases where the performer introduces variations on older pieces or even totally new forms in terms of the detailed wording, the structure, or the content.

To support this idea Ong (1982:8) affirms that 'Oral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any writing at all...". It may therefore be said that by orality we refer to the fact that these forms of verbal art are composed as well as transmitted orally.

Finnegan (1970:2) further describes the relationship between oral forms and audience in the words: "The artist is typically face-to-face with his public and can take the advantage of this to enhance the impact and even sometimes the content of his words."

The performer's voice, gestures, body movements and facial expressions are the devices used to manipulate the social situation and convey the message. The performer ought to be someone who is creative and flexible in his or her performance. He/she always has to take into consideration the type of audience he or she is faced with. He/she must also consider the context under which the performance must take place. These all become determining features of the type of performance and type of verbal art put into display.

## 2.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter the theoretical framework that will assist in the analysis to follow has been articulated. The main purpose for this chapter was to look at what theories would be useful in the investigation that will follow. Theories that are discussed in this chapter were selected according to their relevance to the subject under study. I also considered how effective the theories would be in enhancing the understanding envisaged.

The feminist theory is implicit in the whole analysis as the main aim is to identify issues relating to the oppression of women as well as suggest ways and means of transforming society. It has become clear that one could not avoid feminism as it is implicit in the whole analysis. The different perspectives of feminism bring in the different ways and means by which one should come to understanding as one encounters the different aspects of subjugation of women. By using those angles the researcher should be able to suggest strategies to be used in improving the gender relations in our society. In the study of praises and proverbs we shall be able to see what role they have in shaping the psyche of the women.

Due to oral nature of the three main areas of discussion in this study it became necessary to include the performance theory. In their performance one becomes able to interpret their content and thus analyse how these oral forms portray the women.

It is envisaged that the theoretical framework formulated in this chapter will yield the best results in enabling one to understand women and their needs, be these in the context of the family or outside the family. This framework, it is hoped, will broaden the debate over gender inequality and discrimination not just amongst Nguni societies only, but also in the African continent and the diaspora.



## CHAPTER 3

### PROVERBS, WOMEN AND GENDER INEQUALITY

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Proverbs as words of wisdom in many communities of the world are the core component of this research; as such they are the focus of this investigation whose main intentions are to unshackle women from all spheres of subordination. In this investigation, among other things, ideological concepts in proverbs that discriminate against women across language groups will be critically reviewed. The Ndebele proverb that disputes self confidence among African women in general, '*Yadonswa yinsikazi iyokhalakathela*' and its implications have already been mentioned. One is yet to see how valid the content of such a statement is, especially with regard to African women and their leadership competency.

This proverb circulates among the Ndebele nation. However, this does not in any sense mean the belief stated by this proverb is particular to this community alone. It is indeed prevalent in various other communities and is a general and common manner of perceiving women who are not trusted to be of equal standing to men.

There is an equivalence to this proverb in Sepedi or Northern Sotho that declares, '*Ya etwa pele ke tsadi e wela leopeng*', (Mulaudzi 2010:2). This proverb according to Mulaudzi means a woman cannot lead the community or society; if she does that society will lack vision. Such a belief often determines control in every sphere of life and remains in circulation, thus serving the intended purpose of maintaining the status quo.

There is a strong belief that an individual composes a proverb from making certain observations or from his own imaginations. In fact, a proverb emerges

as a product of a mind of a talented individual who in most cases is unknown. When it is in circulation, it belongs to the community. Each time there is an occurrence seen to be relevant, reference to that proverb is made and it spreads as an observed fact. There is a suspicion that the Ndebele community may have borrowed this proverb from the Northern Sotho community. This would also be justified by the fact that the two communities are geographically situated very close to each other and share a number of common beliefs and customs. In fact the Ndebele language does show a considerable influence from Sepedi or Northern Sotho.

It was pointed out that this proverb was uttered by a male Ndebele journalist directing it to a woman Siswati journalist in a newsroom context. It was meant to call to order the latter who may have not been aware of the proverb.

Proverbs are literary texts that are used by both literate and illiterate members of a community. Authors who write creative works in African languages are fond of using proverbs in naming their books and chapters. This could be viewed as in keeping with the observation shared by Mieder (1993:ix) when he affirms that proverbs have not lost their popularity and continue to exist even in present day society that is otherwise controlled to a large extent by modern technology.

Proverbs in many instances reveal the beliefs, lifestyle, customs, norms, philosophy as well as the ideology of that particular community. This is also observed in that, much as there are proverbs that tend to prevail in societies generally, there are also proverbs that are identified with certain or particular societies. For this reason one is able to come to know the philosophy or beliefs of a community. The lives of individuals from particular society exhibit intricacies that go a long way in determining which proverbs are relevant and necessary to that particular community. In most instances proverbs appear to be accurate reflections of different aspects of human behaviour, although the extent to which any proverb is truthful depends on the specific context to which it refers as Gibbs and Beitel in Mieder (1993:x) observe.

The issue of context does become a central aspect when it comes to proverbs. Indeed this makes sense in that the truthfulness of a proverb can be determined by the specific context in which it is used.

In this chapter the intention is to examine proverbs sampled from some of the Nguni languages that make reference to women. The chapter will highlight the impact and significance of proverbs in portraying women. It is necessary to understand that proverbs here are being analysed for purposes of finding out how women are perceived in African societies. This is based on accepting that when proverbs are in use they communicate a world view by interpreting and analysing the behavioural patterns of people. As indicated, a further reason is to establish a way of understanding how women who arrive in positions of leadership can be assisted as they are a product of a gendered society. It is to empower them in grasping the size of the challenge they face.

Proverbs are used in enriching and giving colour to language even today. Mieder (1993:x) observes that:

Proverbs are flexible and adaptable to ever new contexts as interpretations, because their metaphorical language is not limited to specific contexts. They contain plenty of truth, wisdom, and knowledge, which they express in a few colourful words. The message of the proverb is communicated quickly and to the point, making it a very useful tool in oral speech, political rhetoric, newspaper headlines, book titles, advertising slogans, cartoon captions, and so on.

Proverbs are indeed forms of communication that do not just express what is intended to be communicated, but go further to emphasise how society perceives that particular issue. They also carry within them the expectations of society that cannot be easily challenged by anyone. In a way, a proverb also confirms a view that there have been many other occurrences of that nature that have taken place in the past. At times the proverb may be indicative of stereotypical attitudes that the community holds towards certain issues or situations.

Through proverbs, members of society are able to design and shape their life styles and cultures the way they want. This can be summed up as the political nature of proverbs, a view stressed by Mieder (2003:275) in this assertion:

...number of political roles of the proverb, including both the reflection and reduction of political anxieties and tensions, the slurring of marginalized groups, and they encapsulate of cultural traits and national states of mind. However, if we take the term 'political' to refer more generally to the whole sphere of power relations in human society, we can say that proverbs are attempts to make people behave or perceive in a certain way. Proverbs are a kind of linguistic instrument, a rhetorical device by which attempt to get other members of their society to see the world and behave in a common way.

It is evident that several authorities, amongst whom are Mieder (1993), Nyembezi (1990) Ntshinga (1998) and Masuku (2005), in their respective investigations have made observations that proverbs influence the creation of the mind view of a society. The political perceptions can also be accessed by looking at proverbs used by that community. For these reasons proverbs will be considered as a tool that will reveal the way women are perceived and conceived in African societies. It is often the group that does not have power that suffers the brunt of stereotype perception. Hussein (2009:97) further alludes to the fact that:

Some of the recent studies on African proverbs, however, have revealed that in Africa proverbs have been used to maintain gendered life in the continent through conveying the African people's understanding of masculinity and femininity. These works have attempted to show also that sexist proverbs offer their users insights about the wider discourse of gender as it is practised through other symbolic and material representations and actions.

Against this background the analysis will be conducted, in order to contextualise and interrogate the view that proverbs are indeed used as discursive habits in the patriarchal system: created and used to enforce the idea of male superiority.

### 3.2 DEFINITION OF A PROVERB

Despite the massive scholarship that has been undertaken on proverbs by scholars all over the world, it has been a difficult task to come up with a precise definition of a proverb. In an attempt to do so, there is a propensity to list its characteristics and functions as a way of attempting to define it. Scholars who have undertaken in depth study on proverbs agree that the concept 'proverb' is difficult to define, as expressed by Taylor (1985:3) in the words:

The definition of a proverb is too difficult to repay the undertaking; and should we fortunately combine in a single definition all the essential elements and give each the proper emphasis, we should not even then have a touchstone. An incommunicable quality tells us this sentence is proverbial and that is not. Hence no definition will enable us to identify positively a sentence as proverbial.

This is a view that expresses how challenging it has been to define a proverb. In effect the citation emphasises the fact that an inexpressible element makes an utterance fitting to be labelled as a proverb, which means a non-speaker of the language cannot easily detect whether a sentence is proverbial or not. The citation fails to shed light as far as understanding what a proverb is.

Scholars, however, have not given up in this endeavour but still devote their attention and energy in attempting to define a proverb. The definition they come up with often touches on different aspects of the proverb like the one by Krappe (1965:143) that claims a proverb is representing in its essential form, some homely truth expressed in a concise and terse manner so as to recommend itself to a more or less extended circle. It is taken to express the general truth literally, by a mere statement of fact.

The above description mentions its structure and its function in the life of human beings. The truth expressed is usually welcomed by many in the community who use that particular proverb. This reinforces its feature of being a truth that is

accepted by a large portion of the people concerned. Finnegan (1970:393) is one of the renowned scholars of folklore who takes a proverb to be:

... a saying in more or less fixed, form marked by 'shortness, sense, and salt' distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it. Even so general a picture as this contains some useful pointers for the analysis of African proverbs.

The truth expressed by a proverb is highlighted here. Finnegan further touches on its structure which she finds to be an important feature in defining a proverb. One other feature mentioned in these definitions is terseness, which is indeed a significant feature as it enables any user to memorise it without difficulty. Guma (1967:65) articulates similar ideas albeit in different terminology:

...a pithy sentence with general bearing on life. It serves to express some homely truth or moral lesson in such an appropriate manner as to make one feel that no better words could have been used to describe the particular situation.

In fact, Guma, a distinguished scholar in the field of proverbs, cites the following characteristics that he claims run through them. These are succinctly listed in Guma (1967:65) as follows:

- (a) They have a fixed and rigid form to which they adhere at all times and which is not changeable.
- (b) Some are didactic and teach a lesson by expressing a moral or moral ideal which is not particularly difficult of attainment but which is rather a summing up of everyday experience in getting on in the world as it is.
- (c) Others are practical in significance, and suggest a course of action to be followed in a given situation. In some cases they may be said to pass a judgement on a particular situation.
- (d) They are figurative, employ various structural forms such as contrast and parallelism, rhythm and alliteration, as well as balance.

- (e) For them to be firmly established in any language, they must have general acceptance by the community whose collective wit and wisdom they represent.

The above characteristics afford a broad understanding of the various features that can be considered in attempting to define a proverb. However, proverbs do not always adhere to all the characteristics given above. These characteristics are just an indication of some of the features that may be found as guidelines in identifying a proverb. In this study, these serve as mere guidelines for one to determine if a statement is indeed a proverb or not. What these points mean therefore in relation to the focus of the study is that a proverb is something that is taken seriously. It possesses an underlying cultural value which in one way or another defines the philosophy of the people. Such a philosophy becomes responsible for the gender discrimination against African women as they are also continuously discouraged from participating in leadership spheres. The existing setup is alleged to have been predetermined by those who lived long before the present generation.

A scholar who may be taken to be the father of the proverb, Mieder (1993:24) also made several investigations in an attempt to define a proverb. In one significant attempt he conducted a study by asking members of the public what they consider to be a proverb. From the 55 definitions that he collected from ordinary people he came up with a definition that is of acceptable clarity. This exercise provided, amongst other things, convincing information that, proverbs are a genre of folklore which is unfathomable in most languages. However, I tend to differ from the view that alleges the complexity is also brought about by the fact that the understanding of what a proverb might be also differs between generations. What individuals from previous generations would consider as a definition of a proverb may differ from what is today an acceptable definition of this genre. Mieder (1993:23) reached the conclusion that a proverb is “a phrase, saying, sentence, statement, or expression of the folk which contains above all wisdom, truth, morals, experience, lessons and advice concerning life and which has been handed down from generation to generation.” This indeed does

put together different parts of the 55 definitions obtained during his research and presents a suggested definition that I am able to identify with.

The definition given above which is an outcome of an authentic study refers to a number of aspects that are indeed common in what is considered to be a proverb. In this description there is mention of the fact that a proverb conveys wisdom, truthfulness and morals. The above definition points to the fact that a proverb has a particular form: short and often fixed. It is also clear that scholars agree with the fact that a proverb has pithiness as an important aspect. These features facilitate the use of memorisation. Mieder (1993:8) affirms that to maintain a maximum level of recognisability and memorability the proverb is often stated with a fixed form that is often not changed. However, it is noteworthy that a proverb may at times be altered to suit the circumstance at hand.

Proverbs are also known to be a creation of the community which makes it a form of orature. An important feature shared by all other oral forms of literature is that they move from one generation to another orally. Proverbs are characterised as a genre that moves freely from one community to another as well as from one generation to another. Proverbs that refer to a particular situation in different languages are found in different parts of the world, mainly because aspects of life are common across boundaries and continents of the world. For instance death, love, marriage and others are phenomena found in all existing communities of the world. It is clear that proverbs are considered to be carriers of wisdom, truth, morals and philosophy of a community. For these reasons they provide a very interesting and reliable source in understanding a community.

In conclusion proverbs are viewed as expressions of truth generally, accepted in the eyes of a particular society. They have a fixed structure, use metaphoric language to bring forth a truth and wisdom, perceptions, morals, beliefs,



attitudes and values that are accepted in that particular community. The philosophy of the community also emerges effectively through their proverbs.

It was for this reason that a motivation and desire to take a closer look at proverbs on women was triggered. In Siswati one proverb declares '*Emakhuba alingene balimi*', translated as "The number of hoes is equal to that of the farmers." Looking at such a proverb, the idea of the land that needs to be hoed by these farmers comes to mind. In this proverb the hoes represent girls and the farmers represent boys. While it is obvious to think of hoes and farmers at face value, it also goes deeper to mean that if boys are with girls it is always assumed that each boy has a partner. This expression is metaphoric and expresses what is believed to be an expectation in a typical African community. While the girls are represented by the hoes, the boys are represented by the farmers. Boys as farmers are the ones who use the tools (hoes) for action to take place. One could imagine the situation in which a hoe does not have a user, which means the hoe becomes a useless tool while the farmer could still be productive using other tools besides the hoe. The proverb clearly gives the status of the girls to be that of being lower while boys are of senior status as a farmer is the one who determines how he uses the hoe. This could be some form of expressing the subordinate level that women are meant to occupy. The expression is also easy to memorise as it is brief and to the point. It does become clear that activists of women's freedom still have a long road to travel before the hoe can share the powerful position of the farmer.

### **3.3 THE DYNAMICS OF PROVERBS**

An interesting aspect about proverbs is that as a form of folklore they can be adapted to suit the individual's intention with no difficulty. The fact that proverbs are oral means they belong to the folk and can be implemented to suit their needs. They can be altered in various ways according to society's needs and purposes. Regarding this Ntshinga (1998:2) states:

... proverbs only make sense in a given situation or context, and proverb users will always choose that proverbial text which happens to suit them best. And, if they cannot find an appropriate proverb for the occasion, it has become customary to simply change existing proverbs through additions or alteration of certain words.

This is done either with the intention of altering the meaning or challenging the statement made by that particular proverb, as affirmed by Krappe (1965:147):

If the coiners of proverbs were individual minds, the transmission, as in the case of the tales, lies with the rank and file of the population. Alterations and modifications are therefore bound to make themselves felt. However, whilst in the case of the tale those alterations are largely unintentional, but simply due to lapse of memory, the proverb is primarily subject to intentional modifications.

Such a view puts great pressure on the followers of the commonly accepted notion that a proverb is rigid. Taylor (1985:16) makes the observation that new proverbs are often made using old models. Certain frames lend themselves readily to the insertion of entirely new ideas. It is evident that while the old proverb could still be in use the newly coined proverb would also be in circulation. The need for the new formulation may have arisen from a context or situation for which a relevant proverb is not available.

It could be deduced that it is the context that determines which proverb should be used for a particular situation. It is clear that community members who are used to utilising proverbs generally find a way of providing for the situation at hand. In effect, this could lead to new proverbs emerging.

Proverbs are also a genre of folklore that is coined with the aim of expressing a particular attitude that is to be maintained towards a particular situation. If a proverb is used by a higher member of society it becomes known by many in a short while. Since the use of proverbs displays high skills of communication, it then becomes clear that such people may promote a proverb and in that way present the attitude in terms of which society is expected to perceive that particular issue or situation. Indeed it becomes easier for members of society

who have power and authority to influence the way a particular issue is perceived. It is worth noting that the commoners take it upon themselves to adopt and spread the view by using the proverb as it was heard from an influential person. Much as the individual commoner could also be doing this to echo that view, it also becomes a way of spreading the attitude even further since such forms of literature are spread orally.

The most striking characteristic of proverbs is their literariness, summed up by Nketia in Finnegan (1970:390) in the words:

This ... approach to proverbs which is evident in the speech of people who are regarded as accomplished speakers or poets of a sort makes proverbs not only a body of short statements built up over the years and which reflect the thought and insight of Ghanaians into problems of life, but also a technique of verbal expression, which is greatly appreciated by the Ghanaian.

Even though the quotation refers to Ghanaian proverbs it is relevant and applicable to the Nguni proverbs under discussion. The proverbs are not just short statements but also reflect much of the thoughts of that community. They are a way of expressing ideas in an allusive, figurative and or symbolic form. This does not just add freshness to the speaker's presentation but also enhances clarity and imparts vividness to what is being said.

It is noteworthy to mention the fact that proverbs may mean one thing in a particular situation but can be altered to signify the direct opposite in another situation. This is usually done in making sure that the present situation is challenging or contrary to what is being said by the proverb that is taken to be a way of life. Hence proverbs do lose relevance with time. Within the same cultural group there could be proverbs that contradict each other, thus causing confusion. In other words the statement that takes proverbs to be reflecting social and religious customs and beliefs is also subject to challenge.

It has been said that proverbs are didactic in nature as they are taken to present a general truth. In so far as it is not purely hortative, it may praise or recommend almost any virtue or attitude toward certain situations and problems as Krappe (1965:147) affirms.

This supports the view that proverbs are taken as expressions of everyday experience which is known and accepted by a group in society. They dictate to society what is considered as morally correct or wrong. Besides the external form with which proverbs are identified, they also tend to use different forms of metaphoric language. It is the figurative language found in proverbs that elevates the artistic standard of an utterance. Besides carrying more power, an utterance containing a proverb is thought provoking and displays the eloquence of the user of proverbs. In this way the proverb becomes a rich alternative to use in any given context. Mieder's observation in this regard is that proverbs have internal markers amongst which there are personification, hyperbole, paradox, metaphor and others. He further alludes to the fact that scholars want to count on the metaphorical feature as the main aspect that makes a proverb legitimate. This is confirmed in Mieder (1993:10):

Metaphorical proverbs also give us the opportunity to communicate in an indirect or figurative way rather than always calling a spade a spade that is stating everything in a direct way. By translating a realistic situation into a metaphorical proverb, we can generalize the unique problem and express it as a common phenomenon of life.

The metaphorical language of proverbs enables users to apply them to various situations and contexts. In this vein Mieder (1993:x) explains that they are flexible and can be adapted to new contexts, situations and interpretations. This, he claims, is allowed by the metaphoric language that makes a proverb wider than a specific context.

Mieder proceeds to argue that recent studies reveal that proverbs are changed for various reasons. They are often used as titles of books, as well as for advertising purposes. In many cases a proverb used in such contexts will not

contain all its original words. Sometimes a user prefers to leave out some words. Another user of the proverb may prefer to replace a word or two of the proverb so as to highlight the intended meaning. In some instances there is a tendency to add some words to a proverb to either highlight the meaning or to alter it. In most instances this is done for the purposes of making it suitable to the context at hand. This is well explained by Mieder (1993:8):

We might also vary the proverb for humour or irony or simply for the joy of punning. The key thing is that the fixed form of proverbs does not appear to be as sacrosanct anymore today as it might have once been. ... Thus proverbs are not absolutely fixed or frozen, but they actually live by being varied to fit various situations and purposes.

The citation does not consider the fact that another reason for making such a change would be for purposes of challenging the content and function of the proverb. In as much as this is one way that new proverbs are coined and introduced, it also brings in the view that members of society both upper and lower class can change and create a new proverb simply because the intention is to challenge the content and attitude of the proverbs as they stand. The innovative nature of proverbs makes them dynamic and changing with time, context and purpose for usage. Yitah (2009:75) explains:

As a refreshing contrast to essentialist representations of African society as static, which tend to focus on men and male concerns, the women's proverbial practice reveals a complex and dynamic society in which women's counter discourse provides representations that reshape agency and redefine identity. Their expressive behaviour provides an interesting perspective on the interrelationship between proverbs and social change, and in particular, on the way proverbs, as a genre... impact modern patriarchal societies in the wake of gender-awareness.

The proverb has become the best tool used by women for challenging the existing gendered environment in African communities. Again this is made possible by their oral nature in that their character can be altered without any one claiming copyright.

One other observation is that in cases of well known proverbs, just a mention of one central identifiable phrase serves to recall the entire proverb. Mieder refers to this minimal recognisable unit as the kernel of the proverb. This kernel can also be just a word. In effect, the mother tongue speakers of a language easily recall a proverb once a particular word is used, more particularly if the context is relevant and obvious to the listener as well. Mieder (1993:x) further states that:

...proverbs as metaphorical speech depend on social context and function for their meaning. In fact, proverbs exhibit a kind of semantic indefiniteness because of their hetero-situationality, poly-functionality, and poly-semanticity.

Proverbs can be used as a strategy in dealing with situations that may be recurrent in a social structure. The figurative language also elevates whatever is being said to the status of culture that is believed to be higher than that of society. In fact the aim is also to emphasise that this comes from the highest authority that cannot be challenged. Mieder's semantic indefiniteness, poly-functionality and poly-semanticity in essence mean a proverb must be analysed in its unique context or situation as this enables the listener to arrive at a relevant meaning.

One should mention the significance of the fact that proverbs convey meaning and are easier to understand when used in context. Ntshinga, Masuku and Mokitimi all concur in this respect. Context in this sense refers to the social situation where the proverb will be performed. It will indicate why and when the proverb is used which should eliminate any ambiguity or misinterpretations. Masuku (2005:99) succinctly puts this in the words:

Proverbs occur in the matrix of discourse, any approach to their meaning outside their contextual meaning should be discouraged. It is essential to heed the contextual setting of proverbs because this enables a scholar to explore possible meaning discrepancies between the proverb isolated and frozen on paper and the proverb used in the flow of discourse.

Here one notices the concept of proverbs contradicting themselves. Again the issue of choice that the user of a proverb needs to consider carefully becomes

important, pointing to the fact that proverbs are situation bound. One proverb will say one thing while another says the opposite. The significance of the context and social situation therefore becomes the main key to interpret the proverb correctly. It must be remembered that proverbs are in fact not limited to members of a particular society or group of people. Saayman in Masuku (2005:99) argues that:

...the problem of contradictory proverbs exists primarily because people ignore their social context. If one deals with proverbs only as a concept of cultural fact of truism, contradictions are easily found in any proverb repertoire. In contextual usage, however, proverbs function effectively as social strategies. In fact, meaning of any proverb is actually evident only after it has been contextualised. To put it bluntly: proverbs in collections are 'dead'. Proverbs in normal discourse are not contradictory at all, and they usually make perfect sense to the speaker and listener. After all people don't speak in proverb pairs, unless they are duelling with proverbs as a verbal contest.

The nature of proverbs is stated clearly by Guma (1965:65):

In their range and scope, proverbs cover a wide field. They extend over all areas of the community's activities and daily pursuits. They reflect its attitude to other people, as well as its sense of justice; its physical environment, as well as plants and animals, including their characteristics. They also reflect the relations between members of a single household, and extend from there to cover the tribe as a whole. They mirror the relations between the chief and the tribe and vice versa, and bring out the traditional role of cattle in marriage, and the upbringing of children.... they are all concerned with those things that the people know in their daily lives and not with things that fall out of the scope of their experience.

This is precisely the reason why proverbs were identified to be the most suitable genre in understanding the thinking of the communities under investigation. These communities are in a manner taken to be representing most African communities. Therefore, the findings of this analysis will serve as a revelation of how the African society perceives women. It will reflect on the nature of the treatment with which an African woman finds herself faced in the different spheres of her life. The main focus behind this review is to empower women to

be aware of folklore genres such as proverbs that reflect the beliefs of the community members they live with. It is intended to convey a stern warning to women that proverbs can be used to keep them away from aspiring to be in leadership. This indoctrination is designed to convince women to accept themselves as lower and to believe that they can never be equal to or above their brothers, husbands, managers or any other male in their lives.

### **3.4 NGUNI PROVERBS, PATRIARCHY AND LEADERSHIP**

Malherbe et al. (2000:5) attest that to understand gender:

....is to understand the word as signifying the whole set of social mechanisms by means of which members of the male sex are empowered and those of the female sex are disempowered. It includes such things as the masculine and feminine stereotypes as they exist in the media, literature and the popular imagination, and the expectations which people consequently have of men and women; socialization devices for training and maintaining men and women in their 'proper' roles and character; the masculinization of public spaces, reason and intellectual activity and the feminization of private places, emotionality and nurturing activity; compulsory heterosexuality and homophobia and the thousands of ways in which society enforces these; taking the model of the nuclear family as the incontestable basis of a 'healthy' society; and much more besides.

The purposeful channelling of the different sexes was intended to subjugate women and benefit men. Women are the ones who bear the brunt of this unfairness.

Deprivation of freedom due to gender inequality constraints is deeply embedded in the philosophical beings of individuals in the communities that practise patriarchy no matter how minimal it may be. According to Linnegarand McGillivray (1998:3-4) gender refers to differences between women and men that have a cultural aspect in that they are differences between men and women that society has constructed. Society went to the trouble of creating certain beliefs about what femininity and masculinity mean, with the implications already discussed.



Patriarchy is a term that one could place on the same level as apartheid, in this case being discrimination against women in preference to men. This expression will be taken to refer to the system in which men are in control and women are considered as subordinates. It is the structuring of a family in such a manner that the men become the heads and exercise primary authority over the rest of the family members. In a nutshell, patriarchy is an ideology that places men as dominant figures in social, political, economic and other spheres of life in the community, resulting in the oppression of women who in this system are relegated to the 'private institution' known as the family. Dlamini (1995:14) observes that:

Patriarchy may be viewed as the power of the fathers, which is social, ideological, political and in which men by force, direct pressure, or through tradition, religion, law and customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play and in which the female is subsumed under the male.

It is a form of discrimination that is more often than not practised in what people regard as their private space, the family. Men being heads of families may well have ways and means of keeping what happens in the family as private as possible. It is not surprising that there are proverbs like '*Tibi tendlu atitsanyelelwa ngaphandle*' that can be translated as dirt swept from your room should not be seen by people outside. All that this proverb means is that women should keep all the wrongs that happen in their families as private as possible. In other words, men are averse to making their wrong behaviour known by the public. Although patriarchy is in most cases sugar coated and justified as a cultural practice, especially in the African continent, in many instances it is practised under the auspices of religion, and many other aspects that are used to convincingly justify its existence and sustainability.

This form of discrimination still exists in most cultures of the world. What differs from culture to culture and time to time is the degree to which it is practised. A good example would be this expression taken from Shakespeare's (1992:6) play *Hamlet*: "Frailty, thy name is woman!" In this phrase, Hamlet is expressing

his unhappiness that his mother had cut short her mourning period for her husband as she was already seeing another man. In other words, his mother had displayed extreme weakness by falling in love with another man at such a short time from her husband's death as observed in the following website: [http://nfs.sparknotes.com/hamlet/page\\_28.html](http://nfs.sparknotes.com/hamlet/page_28.html) If such discriminatory words could be said in an Elizabethan culture, that in some respects one could consider 'civilised', it may be concluded that patriarchy is indeed probably a universal issue. Coming closer home this proverbial statement can be equated to the Siswati saying; '*Utitila lite njengemfelokati*' that can be translated as she easily complains like a widow. Basically it refers to the issue that women are difficult to please. It is alleged that if a woman overly complains she may as well be likened to a widowed woman who is said to always compare all the help given to her by the new man in her life to that of her deceased husband. In other words, the complaints of a woman are not taken seriously, but easily dismissed. It also means whatever the woman is complaining about will not be changed. She will never receive a different answer to her complaint.

In this respect the fact that females are obliged to behave in a particular manner is a social artefact, a form of oppression that keeps women restricted and limited in their scope. Furthermore, Jefferson and Robey (1986:209) confirm the view by stating that:

...patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women in order, precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for 'femininity' are natural. Thus a woman who refuses to conform can be labelled both unfeminine and unnatural.

Proverbs would be no exception to this practice and endorsement of patriarchy. Being an intrinsic part of cultural beliefs, they are at times used to promote patriarchy and its elements in the minds of community members. This view attracts strong support from Mieder (1993:x) who affirms that:

If used to manipulate people economically or politically, proverbs might even become dangerous weapons as expressions of stereotypical

invectives or unfounded generalizations. But for the most part, it can be said that if used consciously and perhaps somewhat sparingly, proverbs remain to the present day a most effective verbal tool.

This illustrates beyond anyone's doubt how proverbs can be used as a tool of endorsing gender imbalances in communities. It is certain that patriarchy favours men as they are often physically, economically, politically powerful members of society. Attempts at eradicating it are challenged strongly; in fact, some of the challenges stem from certain women as they have been brainwashed to accept the existing societal arrangement. Hussein (2009:98) affirms that "As a strategy, the dominant groups use language and other cultural resources to perpetuate their power and to safeguard their legitimacy. Proverbs particularly sexist proverbs are symbolic social practices and as symbolic practices they are oriented toward some objective. Their meanings are configured with and into other wider issues in society."

The strong supposition, as indicated, is that proverbs mirror the perceptions and beliefs of the African people. Some African communities will be used as models for the study, to establish the effect of proverbs in shaping the minds and beliefs of African people. The rationale for this is affirmed by Nyembezi (1990:*xii*):

Proverbs are a useful means of studying people....They reveal what it is that people adore, and what it is they hate; what they respect and what they despise. They reveal what the people's outlook of life is, and will provide a student of human nature a peep into the character of a people.

### **3.5 ANALYSIS OF PROVERBS**

Proverbs can be used for various functions amongst which are the following: to reprimand, to encourage, to warn, to teach, to express sympathy in a case of death and to bring hope where there is hopelessness. It is however important to mention that in the selection of proverbs to be used there are some determining factors. Besides context or situation, age, relationship and gender also count. There are proverbs that an individual may not freely use when addressing a person of a particular age, status or gender. Even when addressing an

audience it is necessary for the speaker to select suitable proverbs that will be understood as well as not offend the listeners, which may discredit both the presentation and the decorum of the presenter. In essence a speaker needs to be very careful in selecting appropriate proverbs so as to avoid doing more harm than good to his/her presentation.

Proverbs will be grouped below according to their contents for purposes of a better structured analysis.

### **3.5.1 Proverbs on Women as Mothers**

African communities accord women high recognition as mothers, a view supported by scholars who place great emphasis on the value of women in African society as they not only bear life, but also nurse, cherish, give warmth and care for life since all human life passes through their bodies. The statement is supported by Ntshinga (1998:75) when she states that:

A number of Xhosa proverbs relate to the mother as being central to the family. The family is a basic social unit in African societies and, therefore, relationships within this unit are very important. Of vital importance in the family unit is the socialisation of a child. Parents, especially mothers, play a major role in the guidance and discipline of a child.

It can be stated emphatically that mothers especially in African society play a major role in mentoring their children as they grow, and preparing them for adulthood. Her mentoring role is particularly towards the girl child. As her mother she has the major responsibility to prepare her for womanhood. Phrased in another way she is to mentor the girl child in such a way that the latter becomes an individual who will be a suitable product for the patriarchal society that awaits her in adulthood. The role therefore is embedded in the language in terms of proverbs and idioms. It should be noted that it is the duty of the mothers to teach their children the language they speak. The following proverbs are an exhibition of the truth contained in this statement.

**(a) *Ingan' igaba ngonina. (Zul)***

Translation: A child places reliance on its mother.

To a child the mother is everything. Every child turns to his/her mother for anything that he/she may need. This comes as no surprise since from the first day of the child's life the mother provides him/her with warmth, food, security and comfort. When the baby cries she is the one who easily understands what the problem could be.

This proverb in fact emphasises that while the mother is there she will always protect her child. At times the child takes advantage of the mother's presence and behaves wrongly with the knowledge that his/her mother will protect him/her from whoever may be offended by the act. The mother is indeed the first person who takes care of the child and his/her needs, which causes her to be a principal parent to the child in all respects. As in the proverb above, the role of the mother cannot be overemphasised as in the following.

**(b) *Unina wunina maZulu. (Zul) / Unyoko ngunyoko maZulu. (Swi)***

Translation: A mother is a mother, ye Zulus!

The biological ability of the mother creates a natural dependence of the child on her. The fact that the child first exists inside the mother's body and grows until ready to arrive in the world contributes greatly to the child's natural strong bond with the mother, as do her labour pains. This connection encourages the mother to sacrifice her sleep and every comfort to provide for the child. As a result she usually feels great love for her children. Most mothers often do all in their power to see to it that her children are comfortable. The proverb remarks that, indeed, a mother is a mother. There is no one like a mother, as Nyembezi (1990:143) emphasizes.

Another context of using the Siswati version of this proverb could occur during a time when children as adults neglect their mother when she needs them. Other elderly people may use this proverb to warn the children that 'this is your only mother under the sun. No matter what, she deserves your care and support'. This is said because indeed the mother has always been the major role player in caring for her children. Other proverbs refer to the mother metaphorically, showing yet again the importance of the role of the mother as in the following:

**(c) *Ilanga liya kunina. (Xh) / Lilanga seliyotilahla kunina. (Sw)***

Translation: The sun is going to its mother or the sun is going to throw itself to its mother.

This proverb refers to the fact that the sun is setting. The image of the west where the sun sets is likened to that of a mother who will receive her child with love. In other words the sun is going to enjoy protection and love from its mother so as to gain the energy for rising again the next morning. A mother is the one who can be trusted to give the sun proper protection and love so that it can rise and face its long route without fail the next day. Ntshinga (1998:76) concurs:

Going home is associated with going to the mother. A home is not a home without a mother. A mother is a valued person in society, in that she provides home, warmth and security to children. Even nature seeks that warmth which only a mother can provide. The proverbial expression emphasises the value of a woman, the mother.

The other image highlighted by the Siswati version of '*kutilahla kunina*' brings in the notion that the sun is tired after a long day and when it is setting, it finds its mother ready with open arms to receive and comfort it. This is indeed a positive depiction of a woman because it implies that the rising of the sun on the next day is enabled by the warmth, care and comfort that come from her. There is an

interesting allegorical reference in the following proverb as it yet again affirms women as mothers.

**(d) Intsandzane lenhle ngumakhotfwa ngunina. (Swi) / Intandane enhle ngumakhothwa ngunina. (Zul)**

Translation: A good orphan is the one who gets licked by the mother (as an animal looking after its young one).

The proverb generally means a fortunate orphan is the one who remains in the hands of a mother. This is a popular proverb in both siSwati and isiZulu as it also illustrates a positive role: that a woman is cherished to do well. The significant role that a woman plays in a family as well as in society at large is highlighted in this proverb. This is noticed especially during the time when the father is no more. The woman emerges with flying colours as she cares and sacrifices for her children to be protected as well as provided for as they grow up.

Death is a phenomenon that disturbs harmony in family life. The loss of a parent brings havoc to the family members and particularly to the orphaned children whose lives depended on the deceased. The community members would have realised that the situation for the orphaned children would be worse if their mother has passed away.

This proverb highlights the major role played by a mother in the family. For nine months an unborn baby grows in the mother's womb. During that time it is the mother who is responsible for the safety and psychological balance of the growing baby. She also has the responsibility of making sure that she eats correctly for this baby to be strong and grow without disturbance. The mother therefore caters for her baby's needs.

Even after the baby is born the mother is biologically able to continue providing for the baby's needs such as food, clothing, safety, good health, educational, psychological and emotional balance. She does not just breastfeed the baby, but also has the psychological readiness or preparedness that she develops during her pregnancy. It automatically becomes part of her life to keep her eyes focused on the baby. It is fitting therefore to see a proverb that expresses the trust that the world has in her. The proverb indicates the huge amount of trust the African society has in women as mothers.

There are debates over the relevance of this proverb. Feminists argue that after a baby is born any parent can look after it with success. They contend that such a proverb is oppressive and confines the mother to the kitchen or home. This is also echoed by Weedon in Ashton and Whitting (1987:26) who assert:

The projection of the wife and motherhood as natural destination of girls and women, in its turn, acts as a justification for their absence from other spheres particularly public life and the professions....This serves ... male interests by keeping power in the hands of men and keeping women in positions where they will fulfil the functions of wife and mother.

This, however, cannot be accepted as a sweeping statement as nowadays there are men who do well in looking after their children as single fathers. This has become common particularly amongst the middle class families. Hence this proverb is challengeable.

**(e) *Akulahlwa mbeleko ngakufelwa. (Zul) / Akulahlwa imbeleko ngekufelwa. (Swi) / Akulahlwa mbeleko ngakufelwa. (Ndb).***

Translation: The baby sling cannot be thrown away because of the death of a child.

The proverb means that the mother cannot throw away the baby sling just because she keeps on losing her babies. In effect, this is another proverb that also highlights the role of motherhood that is expected of a woman. Even if she



loses her babies through death she must not just give up. She is expected always to maintain her patience and never throw away the *imbeleko* whose only purpose is to carry a baby. This illustrates the obligation that a woman has; that of giving birth to children. It is a feminist view that bearing children is one of the ways to keep women in the private domain, though some may accept that God gave women the biological body that is a basic necessity for the production of children.

This proverb is often used to encourage an individual who is losing hope. When one looks at the metaphor referred to in this proverb the woman never loses hope that she will have another baby. In other words, the woman here is used as an example of never giving up. This is another instance of the amount of pressure on a woman in an African community. She is not expected to give up in producing a child as this is her primary role as a woman.

### **3.5.2 Proverbs on Women and Marriage**

The Western world with its feminist view believes that when a girl is born in an African family the whole family rejoices and envies the father who will one day be enriched by receiving *lobola* when the girl is married. This emanates from a misunderstanding of Westerners regarding *lobola*. It must be categorically stated that *lobola* in the African culture is an extension and an establishment of a relationship that goes beyond the bride and the groom, but involves the two families who become relatives. It cannot be disputed that there are African men who have commercialised the custom of *lobola*. This can be interpreted as greed as the bride is also expected to bring presents to her in-laws.

It becomes the responsibility of her mother and grandmothers to mentor a girl so that she makes it in motherhood. In this respect the family becomes an institution where the children are groomed for their future. A girl, in particular, is prepared for marriage, which causes the African family to lean more towards

being patriarchal. Weedon in Ashton and Whitting (1987:26) affirms that a family is:

...an institution bearing responsibility both for the physical reproduction of society and for the ideological reproduction of its citizens as gendered subjects with certain beliefs, skills and expectations. It is of primary importance in socializing children into specific socially produced heterosexual norms of femininity and masculinity.

In short the African family engenders the growing girl so that she emerges ready to fit into the societal patriarchal expectations. A young girl must follow in the footsteps of her mother by being patient, hard-working and dignified, while displaying motherly love. Although none of the values as they stand are offensive, it is the dogmatic nature of compliance with the standard of being a good woman in the service of men that characterises centuries of subordination of women. When she reaches a particular age she is expected by the family and the whole society, which also hold strong patriarchal beliefs, to start engaging herself in the preparations that precede marriage.

It can be noted that school attendance nowadays has led to a shift in the age of marriage readiness compared to the past. At present the time when she is married is usually determined by the age at which a girl completes her tertiary education. In fact nowadays there is also a tendency especially for the girls to challenge patriarchy by remaining unmarried, especially those who are employed and do not need to be dependent on men for survival.

As an African girl grows up she is made aware that her father's residence is not her permanent home. In fact, once she is seen to be at the age of getting married relatives start teasing her about when she plans to bring the family *lilobolo*. This indirectly puts pressure on her to consider it necessary and in essence makes marriage obligatory for her. She is often reminded that she is expected to leave the family one day for her final destination where she will take

up the responsibilities of being a wife. The philosophy of life of the African people is appreciably represented in the following proverbs.

**(a) *Sezivele ngempondo.* (Xh)**

Translation: The cattle are showing by their horns.

This proverb refers to the fact that the young girl is seen to be mature, showing that she can now be married. Such a proverb is used as a compliment to the family of the girl. This is said if she demonstrates good behaviour that impresses the family members. Ntshinga (1998:77) in affirming this view states:

A woman in African society was destined to be married. In Xhosa traditional society this entails a bride exchange in the form of (*lobola*) and family ties. When a child carries the chores of the home diligently, the Xhosa say that the cattle (*lobola*) are on their way, they are already showing by their horns.

Another interpretation of this proverb would be in reference to the girl's breasts. As they grow bigger they can be likened to horns as they point out like horns. The metaphor of horns is used as hyperbole to highlight the significance of the growing breasts as it means much to the family in terms of the girl's readiness for marriage. It is also befitting to consider this as meaning that she is becoming ready to be a mother. In that manner the breasts may be taken to be indicators that her father will soon be receiving *lobola* cattle. In both explanations her father will be wealthier than he is at present.

This is another bone of contention for feminists when it comes to the issue of *lobola* that continues to benefit men rather than women. It must be remembered that the hard labour of bringing the children up is carried out by the mother who is even applauded for doing well in this role. Feminists argue that besides the fact that *lobola* reduces the girl to a commodity it also becomes responsible for the abuse that the girl may experience as a married woman. This, according to them, can be interpreted as one strong root of patriarchy that displays an

imbalance in the distribution of material. It must be kept in mind that the father in this situation is the sole beneficiary of *lilobolo*.

It is an undisputed fact that a traditional African man's dignity is determined by the number of cattle he has in his kraal. This consequently becomes an important stage in being a father as he definitely receives *lilobolo* for fathering the girl who is being married. It often happens that he may not have even bothered to take care of the girl while she was growing. This view is further confirmed by an isiNdebele proverb '*Isithunzi sendoda yikomo*' which means that for a man to be respected, he must have cattle. In support, Ntuli (1999:26) asserts:

In Southern Ndebele culture a man who does not have cattle is regarded as being poor. The one with cattle is rich and respected even if he may be physically weak. The *ikomo* (cow) in this proverb symbolizes wealth. It was formulated after an observation of what constitutes the wealth of a man. The proverb may be pronounced to refer to a situation where an ugly or old man wants to marry a young, beautiful lady. The main idea is that even if he is ugly or physically weak, his physical weakness will not count against him if he is rich.

In his assertion Ntuli refers to Southern Ndebele culture; however, this happens to be the case in most African cultures. The significance of cattle to an African man can also be confirmed by a Xhosa proverb that says: '*Indod' engenankomo ayibazi ubuhlanti*'. This proverbial statement refers to the fact that a man who is poor does not know the kraal, which may be taken to mean that a poor man has no experience of how good it feels to have a kraal that is full of his own cattle. The independence that comes with possessing one's own means is indeed taken seriously, especially towards a man whose responsibility is to provide for his family. Ntshinga (1998:83) explains:

It must be remembered that traditionally, the wealth of a man was measured in terms of the number of cattle he possessed. The expression was used to ridicule men without cattle, whose poverty was considered to be a result of laziness. Such men know nothing about cattle.

It must be borne in mind that the cattle were used for ploughing fields, while cow dung that accumulated in the kraal would be used for fertilizing the crops, let alone the fact that the cattle would also be used for paying *lobola*. If there were any function or occasion such as a funeral, a ritual or a celebration the same cattle would be slaughtered for meat. In other words a man without cattle would have to plead with those who have cattle to acquire a cow. The challenge to his dignity would also extend to the in-laws' family. Failure to pay *lobola* meant the man would not be able to take care of their daughter. His credibility insofar as being able to provide materially for their daughter and her children would be at stake. The discussion has provided sufficient reasons as to why a man's dignity would be linked to the number of cattle he possessed. The change in the means of economy has gradually caused cattle to be replaced by money nowadays. Even the *lobola* is paid using money that is counted in terms of heads of cattle.

Much as this practice may be considered traditional and as belonging to the past, even today fathers receive lucrative amounts as *lilobolo*. A good example is a case that was published in various newspapers in South Africa, one of which being *The Sunday Times 24 January 2010*, in which a certain middle-aged millionaire married a young, beautiful girl who was a celebrity and highly westernised and fond of fashion. This became possible through his wealth. He had to pay an exorbitant amount of R100 000 as *lilobolo* to marry this young girl who was the same age as his own children. At the time of the article titled "*Khanyi, doll, you deserve an Oscar*" by Khumalo on page 7 of the newspaper mentioned above, it is written in detail that the young and sophisticated celebrity had left the millionaire for another man who also had the potential of doing the same, all because the previous one had gone bankrupt. This gives ample reasons for arguing that *lobola* has been commercialised. Even though in the past it was a token of appreciation, nowadays it has changed its shape and function.

Nonetheless, Dlamini (1995:71) and Msimang (1995:2-3) both dispute the fact that *lobola* is payment like it is in the commercial context. They confirm that it is a token of appreciation. However, such a view stands to be argued. If *lobola* is not a purchase price why is it that if the newly wedded wife fails to produce children, a younger girl *inhlanti* (a fish), from her family is sent to assist her elder sister, aunt or cousin by bearing children for her husband? Literally it means she is coming to cleanse her sister or aunt. The *inhlanti* becomes a co-wife, brought to rescue her marriage. It is a normal practice that no *lobola* is paid for the young girl sent to rescue the marriage of her sister or cousin. If there is it would be a small amount.

Another issue that is of concern regarding *lobola* is that if the wife decides to abandon the marriage, the man's family often goes to demand a refund of *lobola* from her family, particularly if she did not bear children to this man. Much as *lobola* was originally meant to be a token of appreciation to the bride's family, nowadays it has changed its shape and function. The questions given in this discussion are an attempt to present the view that there are instances in which *lobola* is commercialised in the modern context. The exorbitant amounts that some parents demand for their daughters, as *lobola*, have tarnished the image of this custom. The commercialisation of *lobola* can neither be denied nor reversed as culture does evolve with time. This practice has also contributed to causing women to be treated as minors and made to accept being subordinate both to their husband's families and society at large.

Another interesting issue about the *lobola* custom is that even though Christianity is often accused of having eroded the African culture and custom *lobola* has survived. A song by a Gospel group in the name of Ncandweni Christ Ambassadors, in their song titled "Lobola ndoda" states emphatically that a man should *lobola* his wife as he benefits from her services as a husband. The song highlights the significance of paying *lobola* as this is considered to have been a custom that was also followed when Jesus Christ was crucified. The lyrics emphasise the view that the bloodshed from Jesus on Calvary was a form of

*lobola* for all those who believe in Him. His death is likened to *lilobolo* that he sacrificed to demonstrate love to Christians as well as ownership over them. In this context, it does not necessarily suggest that, the crucifixion of Christ was the beginning of *lobola* custom, as it had existed even before his crucifixion. Even though, according to the doctrine of the church from which this group comes, members are forbidden to take part in some cultural and customary practices, *lobola* has managed to survive. It is difficult to establish the rationale behind this unless one is to consider the fact that the beneficiaries of *lobola* are the men. It is a fact that the church has been strongly patriarchal and is still dominated by men. This offers a plausible explanation as to why the *lobola* custom has been able to survive the cultural erosion caused by Western Christianity to most of the African cultural practices and customs.

Men have arranged matters in such a way that girls find themselves obliged to succumb to marriage even if they would have chosen not to. The manner in which marriage is made obligatory can also be seen from the derogatory names used for a girl who is not married, e.g. '*saliwakati*' in Siswati, meaning one who is rejected by men and '*lefitwa*' in Sotho, also signifying one who has remained behind while other girls were married. In isiZulu she is called '*umgodi onganukwanja*', meaning a hole that no dog is interested in sniffing. In Siswati she is described as '*Logugela etaleni njengemashica*' denoting that the girl ages in the rubbish area like the dregs after traditional beer has been brewed.

The pressure applied by this proverb to young African women cannot be easily, ignored. It is able to impose the patriarchal view onto the young woman so that she conforms to the expectations of society, at large. In the end, her father is the one who stands to benefit from her commitment and sacrifice. More preparatory warnings are given to the girl as in the following proverb.

**(b) *Ihlonipha lapho ingayi kugana khona. (Zul) / Ihlonipha nalapho ingayukwendza khona. (Sw)***

Translation: A girl must respect even where she will not marry.

As a girl grows up she expects that she will be married one day. The person and family who will marry her remain unknown until the marriage takes place. It is fitting, therefore, that she should treat all people with due respect for she does not know where she will ultimately find herself. It would be a very shameful situation if she were to behave in a negative manner to a member of society, only to find that she marries into that family.

This proverbial statement implies that she does not know her future. It is meant to instil the idea that she must always keep in mind that she is a temporary sojourner in her father's place. She is still yet to find herself a husband whom she will join for life. This is a very effective method of preparing her psychologically to leave her home to unite with another family that she does not know yet. Her good behaviour often works in her favour when she is married because she will be recommended to her in-laws, by many who have received her kindness and respect. She is made aware that as she grows she is writing her own book of behaviour that can either build her or destroy her later in life. The interesting part of this proverb is that the same is not said to young men as they grow up. Does this mean they are exempted from the expectation of respect and good behaviour? Is a young man discredited if it is known by the whole community that he shows no respect? One may consequently regard this proverb as expressing a stereotype and one of the instruments used by patriarchy to prepare a girl to suit the expectations of society. More of such advice is evident in the next proverb.

**(c) *Ukugana yinkatha yenkangala.* (Zul)**

Translation: Marriage is the grass-carrier in the desert.

This proverb is a way of putting pressure on a girl, of saying to her if someone approaches her for marriage it is not advisable to turn the offer down as marriage is scarce. The image of making a grass-carrier in a desert alludes to the challenge of finding enough grass in a desert to make a grass-carrier. If



one happens to be in need of making a grass-carrier while in a desert she will be obliged to collect any quality of grass as she would be in desperate need of the carrier, to cushion her from the heavy load that she is to carry on her head. This is another way of putting pressure on a young woman to accept the first offer of marriage that she receives as she is being warned that she may end up without marriage if she is choosy and waits for the best man to come her way.

**(d) *Indoda lirholo, watlhoga yona utlhoga iliwa. (Ndb) / Kungabi namali kweswela indvodza. (Sw)***

Translation: A man is a cave; if you do not have him you do not have a cave. The Siswati saying can be translated as to be in need of money is like not having a man.

The isiNdebele proverb given above indeed emphasises the obligatory nature of a woman's committing herself to marriage in this community. The image of a "cave" used here is based on what used to happen in many years ago. During times of war while the African men would be in the battlefield fighting the enemy, women, children, food and livestock would be hidden in the caves. Such caves were concealed so that the enemy would not easily see them. Africans strongly believed in the use of caves during such times which indeed provided them with safety and security for their most basic and precious belongings.

In this proverb a man is compared to a cave in that he is seen to be the one who can provide safety and security of all kinds to a woman who is considered to be too "physically weak" to fight her battles in life. This statement suggests that a woman must always have a man in her life as she cannot face the challenges of life on her own.

The Siswati saying alludes to the fact that if one does not have money it is as if she does not have a man in her life. This appears to be a modernised way of

expressing sentiments similar to the isiNdebele proverb. The image of the cave is simply replaced with that of money, a modern form of security. This is a good example of content evolving over time and expressed in a different wording. The main issue here is that any need that a woman may have is associated with the situation of not having a man in her life.

The Siswati proverb is more interesting in that the wording shows in many respects that it was probably created by a woman speaker. Perhaps she was in need of money to pay for some essential item and ended up lamenting that if she had a man in her life he would have done something about it. There is, of course, another way of interpreting this proverb. In some instances it could be uttered in a sarcastic manner, rebuking a man who is in the woman's life but not living up to his expected role of being a provider. This is a typical example of a proverb that shows how women also participate in making other women feel inferior. In this regard Hussein (2009:98) explains that:

The patriarchal system is the system in which both men and women participate both discursively and through action. One way in which women participate in patriarchal discourse is by using and maintaining proverbs that disparage them or articulate their subordinate position. As much as a patriarchal system that women do not participate in does not exist, no proverb exists that communicates society's assumed secondary position of women without women themselves using such proverbs.

The sentiments expressed in this citation describe the nature of patriarchy and how women themselves, assist in reinforcing it. The above proverbs emphasise the significance attached to men as providers and imply that every woman should have a man in her life. Stated precisely, a woman's life without a man is equated to disaster. This indeed is what Hussein (2009:103) remarks about when he further explains that these proverbs convey the message that the patriarchal society's view is that women do not possess the mental and physical strength of men. By doing so, the proverbs create discursive preconditions for legitimising women's unprecedented dependence on men.

Such a perception cannot be easily removed from the African minds. It is not surprising that African societies are not yet at ease with families that are headed by women and that have sprung up in numbers, especially in urban areas. Worst of all, this is strengthened by women themselves. Yet men too are expected to be married as it is taboo for a man to remain unmarried until death in African communities. Hence, a man in the Siswati culture may not be allocated land if he does not have a wife. That is mostly practised in the rural areas.

**(e) *Kuwa kwalenye indlu kuvuka kwalenye. (Swi) / Ukuwa kwendlu ukuvuka kwenye. (Zul)***

Translation: The fall of one house is the rise of another.

The proverb refers to the fact that while the family of a girl loses her when she is married, the other family benefits as it receives an extra member. This proverbial expression is used to advise the girl who may be concerned about her family that she will leave behind when she marries. It is intended to make her take it as normal that there is nothing out of order in leaving her family. Another family will be benefitting and she should not be perturbed. These are words also used to counsel her family, who are to accept the fact that even though they are losing a member of their family, there is another family that is gaining an extra member. This is normal.

This proverb may also refer to the fact that even though the family may be losing a member they should be consoled by the fact that the son-in-law will in a way become part of their family. They may benefit from the fact that he will also take his in-law family as his own. This could be confirmed by a Zulu proverb, '*Umkhwenyana yisigodo sokuqhuzula.*' This statement can be translated as referring to the fact that a son-in-law is a log from which to chip. The whole statement is based on what used to occur in the past regarding the relationship between the son-in-law and his in-laws. It was normal that African people did not

pay a fixed amount of *lobola*. Nyembezi (1990:133) affirms that in the past a man would pay the girl's people what he could afford. As a result, if his in-laws needed help of any nature they would go to him and ask for help. The image highlighted here is that of a short tree trunk which is not simply used for fire making unless there is no firewood. In that case the people will chip the trunk to obtain whatever can be used for making fire until the women can go into the forests to collect firewood. In brief, the man has to remain on standby in case his help is needed. Let us see what the following proverb will highlight regarding marriage.

**(f) *Umendvo ngumkhumulansika. (Swt) / Umendo ngumkhumula nsika. (Zul) / Ekwendzeni kukagobagagu. (Swt)***

Translation: Marriage causes a pillar to fall down. The Siswati proverb means that in marriage even the most self-assured girl is bent / pulled down.

The first proverb literally means marriage pulls down even a pillar which is trusted for its strength in supporting the hut firmly even against the strongest storm. The image brings to light the fact that things in marriage can be extremely difficult. The proverb is used to warn a woman who may be proud and finicky. She is warned that once married, she may find herself having to surrender her smugness, and become domesticated. The image of a pillar being pulled down ought to drive some sense into the head of a fastidious young woman who plays difficult to please. This is meant to indicate to her that in marriage she will be expected to give up all that she cherished as an individual but instead focus on listening to and pleasing her husband and in-laws.

The other proverb also expresses a similar attitude, that as a young woman she can be as self-assured as she may be, but marriage will force her to tone this down if she wants to make it a success. It is alleged the first individual who often makes the life of a newly wedded woman unbearable is her mother in-law.

She is, therefore, advised that she should not take it personally but should understand that this is the nature of marriage. In fact, it becomes worse when she is being married into a polygamous family which is definitely guaranteed to add to her difficulty. Such words are also used when she is already married and complains about the challenges she is encountering in her marriage back at home. Elderly women, including her mother, urge her to take it upon herself to change her way of looking at things and exercise patience. Emphasis on such a view is evident in the proverb that will be discussed below.

**(g) *Uyofika kaMkhatsali sidvwaba siyokuhaca. (Swi) / Uyofika kwaMkhathali, isidwaba siyokuhaqa. (Zul) / Ekwendzeni kukaMkhatsali. (Swi)***

Translation: You will get to Mr Mkhatsali/ Mkhathali, the hide skirt will encircle you.

The place of marriage is likened to Mkhatsali's home. This is yet another proverb that alludes to how difficult and challenging a marriage can be. Such a proverb would be used mainly towards an insolent and defiant woman who is still unmarried. If one focuses on the stem of the word *Khathala/Khatsala* it denotes the state of being exhausted. In this context it refers to the fact that no matter how strong and inexorable a girl may claim to be, in the marriage institution she will reach the point of giving in and being compliant. Another interesting image is that of *ukuhaqa/kuhaca* which refers to an act of entrapment carried out by the hide skirt worn by married women. This image indeed brings the idea of the woman's personality being crushed to the point of suffocation, as she ends up surrendering. The proverb warns her that in marriage she must expect to meet more than her equal, and that her attitude will definitely change. It is the adversity that a woman often encounters in married life that allows such a proverb to be used as a warning to disrespectful and arrogant girls who are still to be married.

Confirmation of this view and perception also stems from a Siswati wedding song that contains the following lyrics:

***Mfati longesiye make***

*Leader: Mfati longasiye make,  
Namhla senginjengenkomo.  
Chorus: Yewuyehha yehha yehha... yehha yehha yehha.*

*Leader: Lelive sengulelinye lesilomo,  
Lelive lingishiyile.  
Chorus: Yewuyehha yehha yehha...yehha yehha yehha.*

*Leader: Laph' ekwendzeni kukaMkhatsali  
Kwakhatsala make.  
Chorus: Yewuyehha yehha yehha...yehha yehha yehha.*

**Woman who is not my mother**

Woman who is not my mother,  
Today I am like a cow.  
Oh yeh yeh yeh... yeh yeh yeh.

The world is different oh yeh,  
The world has left me.  
Oh yeh yeh yeh. yeh yeh yeh.

Here in marriage is at Mkhatsali's place  
Even my mother gave up.

The whole song, whose composer is not known, is expressed through the bride's voice. She is complaining that where she is going is no longer her parental home. In this new home, she is like a cow that is pushed around to give milk. Lastly, she highlights the fact that she is aware that in marriage, no matter how much she may exert herself, she may arrive at the point of giving up as her mother also did. In short, the '*khatsal*' verb stem seems to be dominating the perception of marriage as seen in the proverbs discussed above. It has become a trend, that some of the married women in African families do give up in their marriages, but stay on for the sake of their children. That is why a mother may well weep when she sees her daughter going out of her parental home to be married. She pities her girl, from her own experience, but she

cannot stop her from going ahead. Although there are men who find themselves in marriages that are not working, such men tend to be considered, protected by their family members as traditionally a man does not leave his place to join the woman. On the other hand, the woman leaves her family where she has all the necessary support to live with the husband and his family.

**(h) *Akuqhalaqhala lahlul' isidwaba. (Zul) / Akulichalachala lehlula sidvwaba. (Swt)***

Translation: There is no cheeky woman who ever got the better of the skin-skirt.

This statement is often directed to a girl who may be very disrespectful before marriage, and demands for things to be done her way. The elderly women say these words as a warning to a girl who displays defiance. When one examines the proverb it is as if there is war between the fastidious girl and the skin-skirt. The skin-skirt wins the battle. In short, the girl is defeated and finds herself forced to conform to the expected mannerisms.

The image of the skin-skirt is again used to symbolize marriage and its challenges. The above proverb highlights the fact that in the African society the woman definitely takes the second place. She is not her husband's equal, and must obey him at all times. She is also to give her unconditional respect to her in-laws. Such an expression may also be used for a married woman who is seen to have been tamed by marriage. Such a proverb at times is employed when people reflect on how impossible she was before marriage. It may also be uttered, in warning a married woman who is reminded that she is fighting a losing battle if she thinks her in-laws will change. She is advised that, she is the one who must change her attitude and behaviour.

**(i) *Umendvo kawutfunyelwa ligundvwane. (Swt) / Umendo kawuthunyelwa gundane. (Zul)***

Translation: No rat is sent to check beforehand how things will be like in one's married life.

This is another proverb that is used as a warning to a girl as she grows up. The image of a rat is befitting here because of the fact that a rat is known to be tiny, clever and can sneak in and out of a house without being recognised. In other words, it would have been better if a rat could have been sent to go and sneak into her married life beforehand, and observe the situation in order to report back to her. Knowing about what would take place in her married life would enable her to change her mind in time. She would be in a better position to make an informed decision. Unfortunately, life does not permit this and she plunges herself into marriage having no idea of what the future carries for her.

In most cases a young woman often creates her own imagination that depicts her married life as characterised by all the good things she wishes to have in life. She often assumes that she is going to stay with the man she loves most and imagine herself being pampered with love. This on its own makes it necessary that the elders who do have experience in life intervene by giving such warnings to her so as to prepare her for the realities of life, even the worst challenges in her married life. In fact, life in general is never predictable. For this reason she needs to be warned that married life is no exception, in that she is likely to face very challenging circumstances and surprises.

The statement is also intended to advise a young lady who is marrying that she must not give up when things do not go according to her expectations. It is normal as all people around her go through that and still go on with life. It is to give her courage and help her to realise that all other women that she sees persevering in their marriages also have unexpected things happening in their married lives.

**(j) *Umendo kawubhulelwa. (Zul) / Umendvo kawuphengulwa. (Swi)***



Translation: One cannot go to a diviner before-hand for a prediction as to how her married life will be like.

The fact that traditionally Nguni people consult a diviner to obtain an idea of their future does not mean a lady who is to be married can do the same. This is making emphasis in that even a diviner could not have the wisdom of predicting the girl's life in her marriage due to its intricacy. This one is yet another proverb that expresses sentiments that are similar to the one discussed above. It is indeed the responsibility of elder women to advise the young woman who is being married as she does not have much experience in life. She is made to understand that it is normal for every married woman to encounter difficulties. Such statements counsel her and strengthen her physical and psychological resistance in facing future tests of this nature.

**(k) *Ukwenda ukuzilahla. (Zul) / Kwendza kutilahla. (Swi)***

Translation: To marry is to throw oneself away.

This is a statement that highlights the fear that a young woman may feel as she enters a marriage. In this proverb marriage is perceived as a place where rubbish is left to rot. In other words, it is taken to be a place of ending and of perishing. If one considers the image of '*lahla*' which denotes to throw away, this suggests that she is no longer of value to life. Although the throwing away which is the core of this proverb is done by the lady herself, it is suggested that she is doing it under duress. Indeed the view is further supported by the information that has been given above regarding the fact that marriage to African families is seen as a necessary and obligatory ending for a girl. She is not certain of the life she will lead in her marriage; hence the proverb. It does in a way suggest that she is throwing herself away into a place that will make her perish. This situation is also made worse by the fact that she will be joining a family that she is not familiar with. She obviously will not be liked by every

individual in the in-laws family. However, she must still go ahead and throw herself into this commitment regardless of all the uncertainties.

Marriage being likened to being flung into a place of decay is further affirmed by this song commonly sung during a wedding. It is popular amongst both amaZulu and emaSwati.

### ***Kwendza kutilahla***

*Leader: Kwendza Ma!*  
*Chorus: Kwendza kutilahla ngishiye make ahlupheka*  
*Leader: Ngisho lokwendza bo!*  
*Chorus: Kwendza kutilahla ngishiye make ahlupheka*  
*Leader: Uyahlupheka make!*  
*Chorus: Ngamshiya make,*  
*Leader: Uyahlupheka make ekhaya!*  
*Chorus: Ngamshiya make, ngamshiya make, ngamshiya make ahlupheka.*

### **To be married is to throw yourself at a rubbish place**

(To be married oh Ma!  
To be married is to throw away myself while my mother is worried.  
I mean to be married oh ye!  
To be married is to throw myself and leave my mother worried  
Oh yes I leave her unhappy  
Yes I leave her unhappy, leave her unhappy leave my mother unhappy.)

The sender of the message in this song is the young woman who is being married. She expresses her awareness that she is literally throwing herself into an environment that will suck out all the life she has. The other point emphasised here is the fact that her mother who loves her so dearly, is unhappy over this move. The word '*hlupheka*' could also refer to the fact that even her mother is not happy in her own marriage, and thus feels distinctly unhappy about her child going into this exigent institution. This further emphasises the act of throwing herself away that is succinctly presented by the proverb above.

She may, as a girl, have behaved in a very domineering and snooty manner towards people, only to find that she later marries and has to change her behaviour, as no one in her new family will tolerate her fussy attitude.

**(I) *Umfati ulibamba lishisa. (Swt) / Umendvo uyancengwa. (Swt)***

Translation: A woman holds it (a pot) even when it is hot.

You have to beg marriage.

The image of the hot pot is a very befitting in this proverb. It is well known that the central responsibility of a woman, especially a married one, is to cook for her husband and in-laws. She is to have a close companionship with the pots. Food is central in an African family. In this instance the proverb states that even if the pot is too hot to touch, which refers to the fact that even if things are hard and unbearable in her married life, she is expected to persevere and never show any emotion. Perseverance is a key attribute that every woman being married is expected to possess. It is very important advice that is persistently pumped into her head by her grand-mother(s), mother(s), aunts and all other elderly women in her family. The young lady is ceaselessly advised to exercise patience no matter how hard her married life becomes. This turns her into a strong persevering woman, which in turn gives credit to her parental family.

In the African culture it is an embarrassment, even a taboo, for a woman to give up on her marriage and return home. Her family perceives her to have failed them in that they are regarded as having failed to groom her for her marriage. In fact, a woman who decides to return to her parental home is called names, all to discourage this from happening.

The girl's father, or elder brother in the case of her father being deceased, is the one who received *lobola* and will not be pleased to see her return home because the *lobola* or a portion of cattle or money may be demanded by the deserted husband's family. In most cases that *lobola* is no longer there as it

might have been spent on paying for other major family responsibilities. Even if it still exists, no one will want to lose wealth that is already in his possession. The woman therefore becomes a misfit even in her own parental home. Her brothers' wives despise her and call her names. They make her life miserable as she is no longer welcomed as part of the family.

In fact, the elders go on to use the saying '*umendvo uyancengwa*' meaning she must humble herself and nurse the situation herself. The statement also stresses that it is rare to receive an offer of marriage; thus she was lucky to have done so and she therefore must treasure it and exert her best efforts to make it a success.

Proverbs in this section draw attention to the significance given to marriage in the African way of life. They actually make it clear that its success is dependent on the manner in which the woman handles herself. She is the one who is made to carry the responsibility of either making or building her marriage. Language is utilized to make her realise the fact that she needs to be married and failure to do so causes her to deserve being called by names as well as become a misfit in society.

### **3.5.3 Proverbs on Women as Weak Minded Beings**

It is a common occurrence that women are associated with being mentally weak. They are often perceived as people who cannot use their minds and who cannot do anything of substance. For this reason in the African culture women are considered as children who need the guidance and protection of men. This perception is succinctly stated by Mathumba (1988:153) when he explains that amongst blacks, a woman does not enjoy the same social status as a man. He further explains that the two major qualities of a woman are bearing of children and industriousness. This philosophy about women can be confirmed by the proverbs that will be discussed in this section.

**(a) *Intfombi kayendlulwa. (Swi) / Intombi kayendlulwa. (Zul) / Intombi libele lendlela. (Ndb)***

Translation: A man is not supposed to go past a girl without saying that he is impressed. A young lady is sorghum ploughed along the pathway.

This proverb is meant to condition the thinking of men that they always have to say they are impressed by any girl they meet even if they do not mean it. It gives the impression that women are like children in that they always look forward to being admired by men. The mentality of a woman is therefore degraded to that of being stupid and seeking for attention. Even though this proverbial statement could also be interpreted in a positive manner, in that if a man goes past a woman who is in trouble or walking alone in the dark he is expected to give her help, such an interpretation does not correspond with its usage in everyday speech. These are some of the expressions that feminists challenge when they see women appear on advertisements with their bodies showing semi-nudity, suggesting that they are available to offer their bodies to men.

However, while one could argue that African girls show off their bodies when they are dressed in traditional regalia like that of emaSwati which do indeed leave a great part of the body visible, it can also be argued that in this situation the context is specifically used for that particular traditional event. After the event the regalia is replaced by clothing that covers the woman's body in a satisfactory manner.

**(b) *Tala bantfu tiye ebantfwini akukho ntfombi yacom' inyamatane. (Swi)/ Zala bantu ziye 'bantwini akuntombi' iyogan' inyamazane.(Zul).***

Translation: They (girls) leave men to be with other men.

This is a statement that is often used by men when they are courting and pleading to be accepted as lovers. They use this proverb in expressing their love for the girl. The statement further informs the girl that she can leave her present lover and accept the new man in her life. It draws attention to the fact that it is acceptable to leave one man for another. It may be considered as a proverb that presents women as weak beings who cannot live without a man in their lives. It is also important to point out that this proverb is meant to work on the psychological thinking of women and make them consider themselves as existing in this world only to serve men as lovers. Self concepts are of much significance to human beings as they control their thinking and their way of doing things generally.

**(c) *Indvuku lenhle igawulwa etiveni. (Swi) / Induku enhle igawulwa ezizweni. (Zul) / Intonga ehle igawulwa eentjhabeni. (Ndb)***

Translation: A good looking stick is the one that you will get from afar.

A philosophy that is guided and based on patriarchy emerges well in proverbs that are created by the community. In this proverb the stick represents a woman. Thereby it advises young men that they must travel to other places to acquire the best looking stick. His choice becomes broader as he moves to other areas. The utterance suggests a woman is to be hunted like a wild animal. In addition a woman from another area will not be known by the local community. They will have little to criticise her for, as they will be seeing her for the first time. This favours the man who will be praised for the beauty of his wife. The proverb was also intended to advise young men to move around to find women from elsewhere to avoid incest. The mindset of the young men is manipulated in such a fashion that they must know that their responsibility is to move around and look for a beautiful woman to marry. The woman on the other hand is made to think that she has to wait for the right man to come her way.

It must be kept in mind that in-laws often encourage their son to marry more wives. This benefits them in that the elder wives turn to them for sympathy and protection as their son will be occupied by the new wife. This may be seen to be affirmed by the proverb *'Indvodza ifela emaceleni'* which means that a man should meet his death away from home. In other words a man is discouraged from always being seen around women and his home. He may even be ostracized by other men if he is perceived to be with his wife all the time. They may call him *'indvuna yebafati'* or even allege that he is succumbing to the effect of a love potion that his wife has used in taming him. Manhood in the African culture is about being wild and being difficult to please. It must be remembered that men also become groomed into being sexist and exhibiting the approved masculinity as prescribed by patriarchy. The elderly men make it their responsibility to impose the patriarchal way of thinking onto boys as they grow, so as to sustain the ideology. Men are no exception to the control and effects of patriarchy that prevail in most communities.

**(d) *Umlobokazi uhamba esagcobile. (Zul) / Umlobokati uhambe lingakomi (libovu). (Swi)***

Translation: The bride left while the grease smeared on her had not dried up.

This proverb denotes that the bride has left her marriage too early. It is based on the custom that, during her wedding, anointing is carried out as a sign of acceptance into the new family. In the emaSwati custom the red clay *libovu* is mixed with some animal fat; nowadays Vaseline is often used for making this a smooth and greasy ointment. This is literally smeared first on her head and on her face and arms by an old woman at her in-laws' home. This is a very significant custom that marks her entry into marriage as well as being a symbol of acceptance into this family. While one could also see this practice as a symbol of domination and accepting to be subservient to the husband and his family. The *libovu* is only done once in her lifetime. Dlamini (1995:75) explains the nature of this practice in the Siswati culture as a symbol of no return to

girlhood, as it is culturally believed that, this red clay cannot be used more than once on the same face. It is alleged if this is repeated, the woman suffers mentally or psychologically. The statement made here is that a woman cannot be married more than once in her lifetime. Thus she weeps when smeared with the red clay and sings a song full of sorrow. Dlamini (1995:76) further makes this observation about the practice:

The significance given to the *libovu* can be seen as a means of depriving women of the choice of moving out of marriage once they have entered it. The fact that this *libovu* is not applied to the male partner who is also involved in this commitment implies that he is exempt from the commitment. In other words, the traditional marriage commitment is one-sided. One can therefore take this practice as one of the forces used to oppress a woman so that her life is controlled by those in power.

Actually society is made to believe that her life is no longer the same after she has been smeared by the red clay which is purposely applied to symbolize her being locked into the marriage even if things do not go well.

Nyembezi (1990:134) also observes that, the proverbial expression may be taken to mean that a woman has been a complete failure in marriage, that she could not even last the first few weeks or months in it.

Such a statement is unfortunately, used towards a woman who is alleged to have illustrated failure by leaving too early. The man who has failed to keep her for long enough in the marriage does not seem to bear any blame as there is no proverb directed to him. Even the very fact that, it is the woman who is smeared but not the man makes it not binding for him. In fact, it suggests that he is openly allowed to marry other wives.

For this proverb to be fair and free of stereotypical sentiments it should refer to both the man and woman. The fact that she could not last for long enough in the marriage implies that neither could tolerate the other for long enough but the proverb is directed to the woman. Again the failure is directed to the woman, illustrating how patriarchal such a society is. She becomes the victim in a



situation that she cannot control alone. The proverb depicts the woman as a person who makes foolish decisions and does not know what she wants in life.

**(e) *Umlilo wabamba umfati emuka. (Swt)***

Translation: Fire delayed a woman who was attempting to escape from her marriage.

The context of this proverb is that a married woman has decided to quit her marriage. She intends to sneak away without the family members seeing her. In Siswati the term '*muka*' literally means to drown in a river which implies disappearing without trace. In the Siswati custom the meaning is extended to refer to a married woman who has gone AWOL. As her escape occurred during a cold season she took some time trying to warm herself from the fire before leaving. She unfortunately overstayed such that she was discovered, and her plan could not be accomplished.

The proverb is used to warn any individual not to allow anything to derail him/her from his/her objectives. While it ends up being used to warn both men and women, the depiction of the woman is sexist. It presents women as people who are easily distracted from their intentions. This is indeed, a proverb intended to make women accept themselves as poor thinkers, who cannot stand up to the demands of life.

#### **3.5.4 Proverbs on Women as Wicked Beings**

Another negative feature coupled with women is that they are often perceived as wicked people, associated with all sorts of evil from witchcraft and worse. Mathumba (1988:147) discusses a Xitsonga proverb that depicts a woman as most wicked. The proverb is '*Ku teka I ku hoxa nyoka exikhwameni*' which is translated as, to marry a woman is to put a snake into one's pocket. This proverb is stated with great emphasis, acknowledging the view that the woman

you marry as a man is bound to cause one a lot of headaches. In other words, even before the young man marries someone he already anticipates conflict and evil from his wife to be. Although this proverb is used in the Xitsonga community its content is a common belief amongst most of the African communities. The question that needs to be answered then is: why does the man go ahead and marry when he knows that he is bringing upon himself trouble? The answer is enshrined in patriarchy and its demands on individuals. This will be evident in the proverbs now to be discussed in this section.

**(a) *Umswane wembabala awungeniswa ekhaya. (Zul)***

Translation: The bowel contents of a bush-buck should never be brought home.

Witchcraft has always been regarded as a most antisocial practice by Africans. For this reason if a family was suspected of practising witchcraft it would be destroyed by killing all its members. Nyembezi (1990:137) confirms:

The practice of witchcraft, although widespread in the past was definitely not encouraged in Zulu society, because it was regarded as antisocial behaviour. Families accused of practising witchcraft were destroyed or banished.

If a young man has fallen in love with a girl from a family suspected of witchcraft he will be discouraged from marrying her. The belief was that she would bring the practice either to bewitch members of the family or to contaminate them, who may end up being labelled as practising witchcraft. The above proverb would then be used in advising the young man against marrying this woman.

Consequently girls from such a family would not easily persuade men to marry them regardless of how beautiful or well mannered they might be. On the other hand, nothing is said about stopping girls from being married by boys from families suspected of practising witchcraft. Hence the proverb becomes sexist and unjust. It is as if the girls are the ones who may potentially spread witchcraft

but not the sons from such families. Such a statement displays how patriarchy was and is still able to control and disadvantage women only even for ills they have not committed.

**(b) *Lilumbo livuka esidvwabeni. (Swi) / Ilumbo livuka esidwabeni. (Zul)***

Translation: The magic emerges from the skin-skirt.

The skin-skirt, *sidvwaba* in Siswati and *isidwaba* in isiZulu is generally used to symbolise marriage. It is true that it is a traditional outfit worn by married women. For this reason it is used as a befitting symbol for married women. In this proverb the literal meaning is that the magic emerges from the skin-skirt thus referring to the fact that this woman is now showing her true colours. In most instances, as Nyembezi observes, this pertains to a weakness of morals which may not have been observed previously. Nyembezi further provides a variant of this proverb as '*Amanyala avela endlini*' which also expresses similar sentiments. It can be translated to mean filth emerges from the house. While residents have lived there for a long time without suspecting any filthiness, all of a sudden it emerges to be seen by all.

Such a proverb is used in most cases to highlight the fact that the woman has kept her true colours hidden from the in-laws but all of a sudden starts to behave in an unbecoming manner. She is perceived to have been a hypocrite for as long as she wanted to be regarded as a well behaved individual.

Such a proverb is not used of the male partner who often hides his true behaviour until he is sure to reverse the commitment will be difficult for the woman. It unfortunately creates the view that a newly wedded woman is likely to show good behaviour for the sake of being accepted and only later reveal her real personality. Proverbs of this nature express stereotypical perceptions of women rather than of men who in fact may be very deceptive towards women in order to be accepted.

**(c) *Izinkonyane zilandel' onina. (Zul) / Ematfole alandzela bonina. (Swi)***

Translation: The calves follow their mothers.

This is a statement that must have been constructed after observing the behaviour of cows and their calves. It is a fact that when a cow moves to another spot the calf follows. It is probably from this observation that such a proverb was coined to blame all the bad behaviour of a child on the mother. In this context the calves represent children, especially girls. The cow stands for the mother who is blamed if her child is ill-mannered. One explanation states that this proverb refers to the fact that if parents are well mannered the children are also likely to follow suit, in short that children take after their parents (Nyembezi 1990:136).

This is challengeable because such a proverb is often used to discredit the mother of a child who has done wrong. At times the statement is used by the father of the house blaming the mother for the wrong deeds of the children. In most instances when in fact the same child has done well the statement will be reversed as the father will want to receive the accolades. As commented, in patriarchal societies women are associated with bad behaviour and men associated with the good. This is also confirmed by the following proverb.

**(d) *Inkonyane yomdlandla yeqa la kweq' unina. (Zul) / Inkonyan' ifuz' unina. (Zul)***

Translation: The calf of a wild buck leaps where the mother has leaped.

The calf has taken after the mother.

Again the calf of the wild-buck is observed as leaping wherever its mother does. The two proverbs share the same sentiment as that of the proverb discussed above. Nyembezi (1990:136) affirms this:

It may be used as a warning. A boy may want a certain girl in marriage. The girl may appear quite satisfactory, but there may be things known about the mother which may not be pleasant. The people would then say

although the child seems good, there is no way of telling what may happen later, for, she may have the mother's weakness latent in her and this may show itself later. The proverb is used particularly of mothers and their daughters, and to a lesser degree of mothers and their sons.

In other words, the daughter is discredited because of her mother's weakness. The saying also emphasises the view that a daughter is likely to follow her mother in erroneous behaviour. It is disturbing that the same cannot be said if the father has sons who are ill-mannered. The father is not associated with them. In contrast, there is even a proverb that protects the father from the wrongs of his sons: '*Uyise akanalicala, licala linendvodzana*' literally translated as the father is innocent, the case is with the son. This proverb is intended to clear a father if his son has committed a crime. Stated differently, the father cannot be blamed for his son's wrong deeds. Again, one notices that the African way of looking at a woman in society is far from being fair.

**(e) *Ikhiwana elihle ligcwala izimpethu. (Zul) / Likhiwa lelihle ligcwala timphetfu. (Sw)***

Translation: A beautiful fig is infested with worms.

This proverb depicts women as evil beings especially when they are beautiful. The beauty of a young woman is a thorny issue for members of most African communities. It is believed since she is lovely she will have many admirers. She is likely to keep changing them as she wishes. In fact if a woman is attractive she is automatically suspected of conducting affairs, no matter how innocent and loyal she may be to her marriage. Nyembezi (1990:156) states this succinctly in explaining that the proverb can mean that a beautiful person is evil, promiscuous or unfaithful.

This proverb is used among Nguni communities as a warning to whoever marries a beautiful woman that he must be careful as she is likely to display bad morals and behaviour in general. A man who is brave enough to marry a beautiful woman may well live under constant fear if he is affected by this

proverb; thus the man is also obliged to be extra observant to ensure there is nothing wrong with her morals. Once she is beautiful she is associated with unfaithfulness, laziness, evil heartedness, cruelty, stubbornness and many other weaknesses that blemish her beauty. The perception is further affirmed in the proverb to be discussed below.

**(f) *Naloyishayile akayosi naloyosile akayidli, naloyidlile udle licala. (Swi)*  
*/ Noyibethileko inyoni akakayibasi, noyibasile akakayidli, noyidlileko uzidlele umlandu. (Ndb)***

Translation: The one who hit it (a bird) has not roasted it, the one who has roasted it has not eaten it and the one who has eaten it, has eaten a case.

The image of a bird is used in this proverb to imply a woman. She is hunted, but even after settling down with a man there are still fears that some other men may take her. It is for that reason that he is said to have eaten an object that will haunt him for all his life. As with the previous proverb, if she is beautiful his fear is even stronger. Women are therefore individuals who are portrayed as untrustworthy.

However, in real life matters may be the opposite. When a man marries a woman she is often fearful of younger girls taking him away from her. All her life may be full of fear, especially in African communities, as polygamy is something of a birthright for their men whose culture strongly backs them. If a man decides to take another wife the first must either exit or stay on, bearing an environment of competition, jealousy and constant fighting. It is therefore puzzling that this proverb accuses a woman of being untrustworthy in the marriage commitment when such happens more often amongst men than women.

Hussein (2009:104) observes that all the proverbs which portray women as people not to be trusted in society project evil onto women and portray them as

atrocious partners of men. Such proverbs convey the patriarchal society's abhorrence of women's assumed infirmity, indecisiveness, weak wittedness and lack of sense of direction and independence. They are meant to warn men against indulging with women and impose representational limitations on how men should behave towards women. They accentuate the patriarchal view that a man who is open and free with women is like a man walking around utterly naked. This may create a constant fear in men as they might not wish to be seen to be trusting women lest they are ridiculed as weak men.

**(g) *Umakoti wasikw' emlonyeni ngendlala eqob' inyama. (Zul)***

Translation: A bride cut part of her mouth while cutting meat during times of famine.

This is another proverb that depicts women as senseless people who cannot think and who easily fall into unnecessary embarrassment. It refers to the fact that if a girl has grown up acting wrongly she will continue to act the same way even after marriage, especially when there is a situation that forces her to do so. The reference to famine implies that food in general was scarce. The bride then avoided asking someone else to hold the other end of the piece of meat as she was cutting it, which resulted in her cutting her mouth. Obviously this accident caused her secret to be known by everybody around her. Nyembezi explains that in Zulu culture meat is cut into pieces before it is eaten. In fact, it is according to Nguni custom to share food with all others present. For the bride to have cut the meat holding it in her teeth she was doing this covertly. She ended up cutting her mouth which can be interpreted as a punishment for being greedy and not wanting to share with others.

It must be pointed out that a bride is expected to provide the family, especially her in-laws, with food. In normal cases, if there is not enough she is the one who will rather not eat anything. It is therefore very serious that she did what she did as it means she failed to cater for her in-laws. The proverb is meant to

warn other people not to be greedy even if there are pressing circumstances. One can imagine how embarrassing it would have been for a newly wedded bride to be known to have displayed greed as stated in the proverb. However, it is somewhat puzzling for this statement to be referring to a bride because in Nguni custom meat is normally handled by men. By the time it reaches the women it has already been cut and is ready to be eaten. This appears to be mocking the women folk who are often perceived as stupid, selfish, greedy and short minded. Such an expression is sexist and demeaning to women. Such statements are meant to make them feel inferior while men are seen to be clever. This proverb may be seen as a tool to ridicule and make women a laughing stock.

### **3.5.5 Proverbs on Women and Authority**

In African communities, as noted, women are not considered as beings that can think and contribute in a valid manner to solving the problems of the area. Mathumba (1988:155) gives two Tsonga proverbs that allude to this view: '*Vavasati a va na huvo*' and '*Awasati mutsanza nanzu*'. The first means a woman is of no value especially in the tribal court. The latter means a woman cannot provide a solution to a case simply because she cannot be relied upon. In short, whatever evidence she may give cannot be conclusive in any case.

The two Tsonga proverbs display emphatically the perception of women in the public domain. EmaSwati say that '*Lemfati liyahletjwa*': which means if a woman has a view she will rather discuss it with her husband in private so that when he meets other men the next day he will present it as his own.

There is a strong expectation that men should exercise firm control over their wives. A man who keeps women in their place is a good master in African society. On the other hand, a weak-minded and irresolute man becomes the plaything of his wife or wives, according to Nyembezi (1990:140). This will be evident in the further proverbs to be discussed.



**(a) *Ikhanda elixegaxegayo lofulel' abafazi. (Zul) Kudvonsa indvodza ngemphumulo. (Swi)***

Translation: A weak head (of a man) will be used by the women for thatching their huts - To pull a man by his nose.

African families are very conscientious about a man being regarded as the head, with full authority, in his family. All members of his family and the community at large accept that he is the master, while the wife or wives and children hold subordinate positions. Both the men and the women of his family and community are very observant and immediately act if they see their brother or son bowing to the rule of his wife. The head of the family is always reminded that he must maintain his position. A man who is seen to be flexible and as allowing his wife or wives to do as they wish is immediately identified and called to order. This proverb is used to shake him up a bit and remind him of what he has always been told about a man who does not hold onto his authority.

The image of a man's head that is not firm is meant to draw attention to the fact that people are realising that he is not firm enough with his subordinate(s). He is warned that he must be careful lest his head is used as thatching material by his subordinate(s), often his wife or wives. This is indeed an exaggeration stated in this manner so as to alarm the man, making him firm and authoritative as head of his family. One could imagine the head of the man, supposedly the head of the family, being displayed on the roof of the hut for everybody passing the homestead. The objective is to make him realise that if he continues to be soft in his house he will soon be a laughing stock for all members of the community.

Another skilful choice of diction is that of the verb "thatching" in this proverb. Thatching material is gathered by women, who also perform this duty. The family has to have the roof thatched for protection from rainfall, stormy weather,

the scorching sun and all other extreme weather conditions and also to provide security and privacy for the family. If women can use the man's head for thatching their huts it means his head will be readily available for their use. In other words every men are discouraged from being soft headed as it is alleged they make themselves vulnerable to being dominated by women thus lose their manhood in public.

The Siswati equivalence of this proverb given next to it also highlights the fact that a man should always hold onto his authority. If he is perceived as being soft he is considered to be a man who is being pulled by his nose. Again the image of a woman doing this to such a conspicuous part of his face means everyone in the vicinity will witness this act, and he will be a laughing stock.

The two proverbial statements make it clear that while a man is doing his best in administering his family he is also watching how the other man is doing it next door. The main fear is that if one man loses control of his unit this may spread and spill over to other families, whose men will lose their authority. These statements are patriarchal and meant to maintain the ideology of superiority of men over women as well as to reinforce in the women's minds the idea that men are the only ones mandated to exercise authority over their families.

**(b) *Umuzi weziqhwaga uyachitheka. (Zul)***

Translation: The home of two strong people breaks.

In this proverb there is strong emphasis on the fact that one of the two people constituting a family as husband and wife should back down if there is a conflict over any issue. This is usually used as a statement to advise the woman, especially, that she may not continue standing up to her husband as this may result in the destruction of their family. In fact, the belief is that in most cases if the woman also has confidence and believes in herself, there is bound to be

chaos leading to this result. This assertion is supported by Nyembezi (1990:139):

In a family where a woman believes herself capable of challenging every act of her husband, and where the husband is not determined to 'put his wife in her place', there is bound to be chaos. Such a family is likely to break up.

It is unfortunate though that in this explanation the one who is often expected to back off is the woman. This is exactly what makes the proverb biased and stereotypical. As long as there is the expectation that the woman will compromise it does sound like a statement that still prefers the man to run the marriage. Such use of language remains patriarchal and destructive of marriages as it promotes the unreasonable insistence of men that they are right even when they are not. It must be remembered that "it takes two to tango". The failure of one spouse means the other spouse did not accommodate him/her.

Nyembezi (ibid) further explains that the proverb may signify that each of the two in a family should learn to be patient with one another and be not ruled by temper. I concur with him that they must both find peaceful ways of settling their disputes and differences and should always make an effort to accommodate each other. Such use of language is constructive in creating a transformed society that would not just be balanced emotionally but would also be accommodative in nature.

**(c) *Yadonswa yinsikazi iyokhalakathela.* (Ndb)**

Translation: If a cow leads the way, the herd shall fall into a ditch.

The proverb is designed mainly to challenge women in leadership positions, conveying the clear message that whoever makes the mistake of placing a woman in such a position must expect disaster. In other words women do not 'have what it takes' to be leaders. This may be closely related to the English proverb that says 'A woman's place is in the kitchen'. This is indeed a revelation

of how patriarchal our communities can be. This particular proverb stems from amaNdebele culture. However, this does not in any sense mean the belief stated by this proverb is particular to this community alone. It is indeed prevalent in various communities in the world even though some communities may not have gone to the extent of composing a proverb to this effect; but it is a general and common manner of perceiving women who are not trusted as of equal standing to men. What is stated by this proverb occurs in almost all spheres of life. This strong patriarchal sentiment applies when the woman is obliged to be a good cook, a good mother, and a good nurse who takes care of the old and frail members of the family.

On the contrary, African women are physically, mentally and psychologically strong. That is why some of them head families when they are either abandoned by their husbands for other wives or have lost their husbands through death. They continue to survive and even flourish during the absence of the so called “head” of their family.

It is also strange that a proverb of this nature could be used against the same women who are expected to accept the fact that *‘Intsandzane lenhle ngumakhofwa ngunina’* as discussed earlier in this chapter. When this orphan remains in the hands of the mother, who is there to lead the family? The mother sees to it that she provides all the needs for her orphaned children. It is very clear that such a perception is constructed and remains in circulation to serve the intended purpose of maintaining the status quo of those who want to cling onto power forever.

The Ndebele community is known in the whole world for their colourful blankets, beadwork and decoration of walls. It is very interesting that the colourful regalia and beadwork are crafted by Ndebele women as are the decorative walls of their houses. In fact, the culture and customs of amaNdebele have been sustained by the women in this community. As noted, very few people know what a Ndebele man looks like in his traditional regalia. Ndebele culture and

customs have attracted the attention of tourists far and near, even from other parts of the world. Esther Nostokana Mahlangu has been mentioned.

Since 1989 Esther has been to exhibitions in various countries. Amongst these one can count the following countries USA, France, Germany, Italy and Mexico and many other major countries. She has received awards from several institutions at provincial, national and international levels. Information on her might was obtained from the website given below. Her excellence is well summed in these words:

She has put her adaptations of the distinctive highly coloured geometric Ndebele designs on everything from cars to airplanes. One such example is in 1991 when she was invited to paint a prototype of the new BMW 525i model. Esther's car, eleventh in the Art Car Collection, was the first to be decorated by a woman artist and as a black woman artist from a little-known South African community to be included in a prestigious international artistic line-up of artists including Frank Stella, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol and David Hockney. All her International exhibitions have presented her with unique and new challenges, which she has approached, without discarding the constraints of her traditional culture. [www.africansuccess.org/visuFiche.php?id=219&lang=en](http://www.africansuccess.org/visuFiche.php?id=219&lang=en)  
(2010/06/21)

Judging from the citation she is indeed a celebrity of high standing. She has represented the amaNdebele community as well as the South African community in a manner not to be ignored. Her legacy will live on even after she has long gone. Are those outstanding traits not enough to defy the above proverb?

Another outstanding figure is the musician Peki Emmelinah Nothembi Mkhwebana, mentioned earlier. The two Ndebele women are outstanding in preserving sustaining and promoting Ndebele culture i.e. traditional music, painting and beadwork. They of course embody more than enough proof of the fact that women are beings who have brains like men. It is also evident that indeed women can be successful and outstanding in leadership. Hence the validity of this proverb under discussion leaves much to be desired.

Outside the Ndebele community one encounters outstanding women like Sibongile Zungu who became the first woman senior traditional leader (chief) of the Amadlebe tribe in an area, deep in the rural areas of Kwazulu Natal. During her reign, she greatly improved the lives of the people in her area. She built a clinic, improved roads and many other structures needed by a community in rural areas Gevisser (1996:48). When she was forced to step down from her position due to the threats that she received from those who could not embrace transformation, the community at large was strongly against her stepping down. Traditional leadership is another sphere that is still strongly patriarchal since men make use of culture and ancestors as the rationale behind their strong clinging onto patriarchy and its practices. However, Zungu serves as proof that women can lead in the traditional sphere as well as deliver development better than some other male leaders.

South Africa is one of the countries that has been able to transform parliament and government structures. We witness success in the government ministries and departments led by women. We can count a number of women ministers who are outstanding in their performance such as Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma in the department of Home Affairs, Nosiviwe Nqakula in the Correctional Affairs department, Lindiwe Sisulu in the department of defence, Lulu Xingwana in the Arts and Culture department, Angie Motshekga in Education, Naledi Pandor in Science and Technology and Baleka Mbete who even served as a deputy president of the country in the past as Mtintso (2012:21) also affirms. There are many other outstanding women who are successfully making it in major positions such as being Premiers of provinces and Directors General of ministries. Some are excelling as Chief Executive Officers and managers, in both the public and private sections of the country's economic spheres. All those are challenging jobs that demand for a sound mind and great thinking.

The strength displayed by women in high positions does indeed challenge the fact that women can be doubted in leadership positions. Both history and

empirical evidence challenge the validity of the proverb that doubts the intelligence and capability of women in the public domain.

### **3.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In this chapter an analysis of proverbs, with respect to establishing how African women are affected by the language that is used towards them, has been carried out. This has brought out the meaning behind the idiomatic language relating to women in proverbs; needless to say how language frequently affects women's image negatively, although sometimes positively to a certain extent. Furthermore, an attempt to define a proverb comprehensively was made, but because of its linguistic complexity, this was very difficult to do. However, a working definition emerged as an outcome of all the considerations for purposes of this investigation.

The nature of proverbs also received attention in this chapter. They have been seen to be extremely dynamic, while at the same time they need to be examined within their functional context. Without the latter, their functionality could be drastically compromised.

The proverbs under study are those that pertain to women and how they are perceived in their communities. It therefore became necessary to introduce the term patriarchy so as to create the context within which these proverbs were to be discussed. This formed the base for the analysis, as indeed the hypothesis was that the proverbs tend to be more sexist and used as tools to confine a woman in a servile or inferior position.

The analysis of proverbs in this chapter has supported the hypothesis stated at the beginning of the study. The main view is that the gender inequality in African communities cannot be fully attributed to African culture and customary practices. There are cultural and customary allegorical statements that credit women as leaders of some kind. The most positive perception of women was

evident in the proverbs that applauded women as mothers. This proved to be the major responsibility in which a woman is perceived to excel, particularly in situations when she finds herself having to carry this responsibility alone.

One hardly needs to say that the African community treasures and places great trust in women when it comes to motherhood. This allows the sustenance of the family that feminists criticise for being the centre of women's oppression as it keeps the women away from the public domain. African feminists, on the other hand, are very comfortable with the existence of the family. All they want is that it must not be the only place where a woman is given a chance to excel. She must take part in the public domain as well to show how capable she is and share in the economy side by side with the men.

Proverbs on marriage offered a rich resource in that they revealed how significant this phenomenon is to the African community. There are proverbs and statements that are intended to keep informing and reminding the girl about her being a temporary resident in her father's house, which is sometimes done in a subtle manner. Proverbs about how important it is for her to find someone with whom she will spend the rest of her life are used so that she realises that this is unavoidable. Otherwise, certain statements emphasise that if she is not married her life will be lonely, miserable and worthless. The more she sees her peers marrying the more she feels the need as the encouraging words come from all angles. She eventually succumbs to the demands of society.

The most potent observation made in this discussion concerned the significance of *lobola* for African men as it often boosts their image and status in society. To an African man this is an easy way of creating wealth. The more girls he has, the wealthier he will become. He is even admired and respected by many in his community. Daughters are therefore treasured for the fact that they bring cattle to the family. In a way this also makes marriage obligatory as the father would always look forward to this moment. Again the mother has to do the spadework of grooming the girl and make her a good product for marriage. The imbalance



of material distribution becomes obvious when *lobola* is received. The men are the sole beneficiaries and nothing can change this. If the father is deceased the elder brother stands in for him. If the girl is born outside marriage her uncle is the one who receives the *lobola*. The custom dictates that it has to be a man.

The longest section with the largest number of proverbs was that on proverbs and marriage. The rationale for this is the fact that the complexity of proverbs also reveals how intricate marriage is amongst African communities. Because of the nature of African marriages the proverbs create the philosophy of the community. Both men and women are concerned about the success or failure of a marriage. Most of the proverbs in this section seem to have been coined by women speakers. The statements appear to express what one might consider experiences of elderly women. It is unfortunate, though, that almost all these proverbs perceive marriage as hell on earth. These proverbs are used by elderly women firstly to warn the girl about the reality of marriage. The same expressions are also used when the young woman is already married and has come home to report difficulties she is encountering in her marriage. She is reminded of what she was told as she grew up. The main objective at this stage is to provide counselling and cause her to accept the hardships she is encountering and to understand that many married women go through such experiences. At the end she is to learn to live with these challenges no matter how difficult and tormenting they may be. All the proverbs in this section emphasise that there is no room for backing out of marriage.

In this discussion, it was also revealed that women are perceived as evil people who can never be trusted. It was disturbing to see how the African communities take women to be. At some stage this perception is blamed on the fact that men may know that at times they ill-treat women badly but because they are physically weak and in most cases are dependent on the man for basic needs they stay on in the marriage. This could possibly cause the suspicion that they may take revenge in another way. It becomes difficult to understand why the same woman who nurtures life from the first day a baby arrives and sacrifices

her sleep and rest for this purpose would develop wickedness to the point of practising witchcraft. It may be true that for a greater part of her married life she could be living in sorrow and unhappiness due to the treatment she could be receiving from the husband and her in-laws. Women are also portrayed as poor thinkers who make stupid mistakes. Some proverbs highlight the fact that no serious decision can be taken by women, as they are considered to be childish in their thinking. A major observation regarding such proverbs is that they are meant to oblige women to accept that they are inferior and cannot think like men. In that manner they are forced to be content with being relegated to the private domain of the home.

Another important observation was that women in the African context are not seen to be eligible for leadership. The proverb that serves as the premise of this study is indeed confirmed to be portraying the usual way in which women are regarded by most of the proverbs under this section, regardless of the fact that the same African community acknowledges the skill, care, love and ability that a woman always displays in real life situations.

In a nutshell, it may be stated that patriarchy is still vibrant and in control in our African communities, yet is often practiced under the pretext of African culture. Proverbs bring to reality and contribute towards shedding light about the nature of the community in which women actively engage.

This chapter has illustrated how difficult it is for democratic governments that create policies which are affirming women in the different spheres of life. Such efforts are more often created as an attempt towards correcting the imbalances of the past. Patriarchy seems to be a greater hurdle than apartheid as it is practised in a subtle manner and is not easy to identify. This discussion does indicate that if any government is serious about implementing the policies in favour of women there must be help offered which could be in the form of workshops for the black woman who has been bombarded by proverbs and statements, with the results mentioned. Her psychological readiness for

occupying higher positions in the public domain is often dampened by the type of conditioning done to make her content in servitude of men.

This chapter can be summed up in the words of Hussein (2009:105) that explain:

The most important idea, however, is that in Africa, proverbs about women are not neutral and they are systematically used to perpetuate domination, inferiorization, exploitation, pathologization, infantilization, and exclusion of women, Furthermore, to understand the meaning of a sexist proverb and why it is used, one should look further and see the complex relationships between text discourse, intertextuality, and context. In so doing, one can easily see the ideological foundations of the regime of power / knowledge depicted in the proverbs.

The chapter has provided a clearer picture of what a proverb is capable of doing in a community. The use of proverbs about women is also context bound. It is noteworthy to state the fact that besides shaping the philosophy of the people their use also places the speaker at a higher level in the context of his/her audience as it displays that s/he has a good command of his language. Furthermore, discriminatory proverbs are not only used by men but also by women towards other women. It is possible to justify this as they are also products of patriarchy and in some cases are not even aware of the discriminatory nature of that particular proverb. The fact that there are some proverbs which affirm women is not accidental but reveals the fact that women have been in leadership positions in the past. The history of the African continent affirms that view. This will be even clearer in chapter five of this thesis. What proverbs dictate becomes an ideology of that community as well as of the culture and the way things are apparently to be done.

## CHAPTER 4

### ORAL POETRY AND THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL WOMAN

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Praise poetry is a genre that has been found to play a significant role in African communities. It exhibits key aspects that have been intrinsic to its existence and survival over centuries. These will be covered in this chapter. The discussion will facilitate a better understanding of the nature and functions of the genre. Sub-genres that may also be seen as different types of oral poetry will also be given attention in the forthcoming discussions. The focus in looking at these sub-genres will yield an understanding of their interdependence as they have existed and survived over the years. Furthermore, it is imperative to examine the role of the woman in the development and mentoring of the praise singer-*imbongi*. Such information will not just provide one with an overview of folk poetry, but it will further furnish the researcher with intellectual capacity that will support and justify one's interpretation of praise poetry in its existence and sustainability. These elements will be examined in relation to their influence on, or being influenced by, impending socio-political situations from time to time. It is important to note how these are dominated by a sense of patriarchy and certain social beliefs and practices.

#### 4.2 PRAISE POETRY IN PERSPECTIVE

Praise poetry as an oral genre may be accorded the general definition that it is a genre of compositions that were and are still crafted artworks, composed with the intention of praising whoever is the subject of praise at that moment. Cope (1968:26) makes a noteworthy observation that praise poems are naturally inclined to be in favour of the chief, but they may just as well be in criticism of him. Cope (1968:28) further affirms this view as follows:

...when he (*imbongi*) presents the chief to the people in his recitations, he is also representing the opinion of the people to the chief. Thus the praise-poem contains criticism as well as praise. The special position of the praiser enables him to criticize with impunity certain aspects of the chief's personality or actions, either by overt criticism or covertly by the omission of praise.

The quotation unequivocally explains that when the *imbongi* is praising a leader he becomes the voice of his community. He enjoys the privilege of criticising the leader in one way or another without being accused of doing so. It is still in his mandate to negotiate for acceptance, respect and loyalty to the leader being praised. He does so by depicting him or her as a hero in many ways. Therefore, praise here is relative in the sense that even when vitriolic sarcasm or criticism is levelled at the subject it is still referred to as praising. The creative *imbongi* uses his artistic skills to weave the criticism into the praises in a manner that will not trigger anger in the leader. This type of poetry is initially created orally, lives and circulates through the mouths of its performers from one person to another as well as from one generation to the other. In this genre lines can be shifted around to other texts as they do not necessarily have to be performed in the same pattern. This makes each performance unique: different from another. The *imbongi* may freely use some lines taken from praises of previous leaders in the lineage of the leader being praised, so as to accentuate and draw attention to the heroic capability of the current leader.

The sub-genres of praise poetry comprise clan praises, praises for the ordinary members of a community, i.e. men and women, girls and boys, praises for domestic and wild animals like a cow, a lion or a dog. There are also praises for inanimate objects such as food, geographical areas, utensils that human beings use like a spear, a car and any other items seen to deserve praising. To the African people praising is part and parcel of their day to day life. Finnegan (1970:122) observes that although praise poetry is normally addressed to distinguished human beings, praise poems can also be concerned with almost anything that exists in life – animals, divining bones, beer, birds, the wind or rainfall. A stick may be apostrophised in high sounding terms as if it can

understand what is being said. In short, there is nothing that escapes the eye of a praise singer in the African context.

Besides the fact that in most cases praise poems are composed by other people who happen to be in proximity to the subject of praise, it is also common for an individual in African communities to praise him/herself. In effect, praising is inborn to most African people. It is normal for an individual to burst into spontaneous tributes in almost every occasion that takes place in the African village. Opland (1998:6) concurs with this viewpoint:

...in the rural areas it is not uncommon to see someone stand up at a ceremony and burst into spontaneous poetry. This usually happens at social functions with many people present, events such as weddings, beer drinking parties or dances. The poets here feel themselves inspired and moved by the specific occasion and give expression to emotion through energetic verbalization.

Africans are in most cases very emotional. They have their own way of responding to anything that shakes their emotions. These outbursts of praising are often directed to the achiever or the parent of the person. They are prevalent in occasions and ceremonies for ordinary members of society. It is a skill that arises spontaneously amongst people, especially if they are witnessing some outstanding performance. With the advent of urbanisation it has become possible to witness such spontaneous outbursts from people who reside in urban areas. This is evidence that despite the modern changes in the black people's lifestyle, traditions still follow them wherever they are. There has been a strong wave of the African renaissance that has revived the African identity to be even stronger than before. They now organise traditional functions in urban areas. In this way spontaneous outbursts are no strangers to the urban audience as individuals have the opportunity to praise themselves or be praised by other members of the group especially during cultural dances.

The flexibility and adaptability of praise poetry are evidenced in the fact that musicians punctuate their songs and performance with it in order to enhance

their images or perhaps to draw energy from it. Interesting is the fact that a musician can have his/her praises memorised, but depending on the audience the musician may be so moved to improvise some additional lines that they end up being permanent lines in his/ her praises. With the advent of embracing the African renaissance, Christian churches began to welcome praises for Jesus, God or any concepts that have to do with Christianity. This resulted in different praises being composed in Christian churches that had previously declined to embrace such cultural practices as praise singing. Concurring with this view Dhliwayo (2007:5) observes that praise singing, like religion, is dynamic. Its significance is determined by the ideology of the day. Praise poetry has moved from one generation to another, surviving challenges brought by the different ideological interpretations.

Since time immemorial the male folk have used praising for motivation and gaining focus on and strength for what may have been a challenge at that moment. They would recite their praises as a way of summoning courage and strength. It must be kept in mind that praising moves the individual to some higher level in his or her spirituality. The individual shifts to a level of experiencing the poetic muse which can be described as being possessed by some poetic spirit. Cope (1968:28) observes parallels that exist between the *imbongi* and a *sangoma* (diviner). This comparison serves as evidence that the *imbongi* also connects with some forces that move him or her to some higher level spiritually. Likewise, if he/she emerges victoriously from any challenge, the jubilation of the victory is accompanied by either self praise or praising from those witnessing the achievement. For this reason one could reiterate that praise poetry is pragmatic and praising is often central to almost every occasion that takes place in the lives of African people. Occasions like those that mark the rite of passage are accompanied by self praise or praising by others who are part of the event. In most cases part of these praises end up being used as a symbolic reference to the individual. In fact the one, two or three words taken from his/her praises and used as a name become part of the identity of that person.

African women are no exception to praising, not just creating their own praise poems but also praise poems for their companions, children and relatives. It must be borne in mind that women also hold their own events in which they sing and perform their praises and those of their companions. More often than not these ceremonies give women an opportunity to praise one another, even to add new lines to the existing praise poem of a compatriot. Song, dance and communal events often create a platform for women to freely recite their praises and even to include some lines that are avoided especially if they are provocative towards men. Because these praise poems are oral in nature there is no one who can claim copyright over them.

Frequently they contain messages about the individual, her encounters as well as battles she has successfully won in her life. One of the most common preoccupations of women is polygamy. Praise poetry composed by women is characterized by such themes as polygamous predicaments and discontentment with regard to problematic relationships with the extended family. It is also a measure of their successes and failures in life, adding voice to women's virtues.

Praise poetry that is composed and recited for women and men, in authority, or prestigious individuals, of leading communities in traditional areas is the most developed amongst all other types of traditional poetry. It is common course that folk material is oral and communal by nature. Folklore is known to exist as texts that have no individual claiming copyright for it. The *imbongi* (praise singer) who composes and performs praises for leaders of communities and nations, become part of the traditional leader's entourage. He remains close to the leader for as long as he/she is still in power. As the traditional leader ages more lines are added to the praise poems. For this reason praise poems for an individual in authority are more formalised and longer as compared to praise poetry for ordinary beings. These praise poems are performed in front of the whole nation or community. On the contrary praise poems of ordinary individuals are known only by those who are close to the subject of praise.



The role played by praise poetry amongst African communities is immeasurable and causes this genre to remain significant in the lives of African people and their leadership. Pongweni (2004:1) elaborates on the significance of praise poetry and makes it apparent that there is more to simple praise in the African context:

Praise poetry is essentially, the poetry of power – the poetry that celebrates victorious rulers, or ... vilifies inefficient ones. We can learn much about the power structures of some (old) African chiefdoms and kingdoms from praise poems. What is implicit in them is the nature of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. The praise poet is the medium through which the ruler's aspirations are mediated; he is also the spokesman of the ruled.

The above quote gives credence to the role and functions of praise poetry in African communities. Praise poetry remains a powerful instrument in idolising the ruler as an individual worthy of praise and respect. This poetry not only pleads for respect for the ruler, but also serves as a mediator between the ruler and his people as issues of concern amongst the ruled are indicated in a very creatively symbolic and subtle manner in the praises. This does wonders in establishing and sustaining mutual respect between the ruler and the ruled as well as maintaining order and stability amongst communities. Praise poetry conveys both praise and criticism as the poet recites these in public and in the presence of the subject being praised, which brings in the view that Africans are peace loving people and are more inclined to conform than to rebel against their leadership. This view is properly captured in Pongweni as he asserts that the praising and criticizing, evident in most praise poems for leaders are typical of the behaviour of Bantu people who prefer conformity over deviance, particularly when it comes to the issue of ordinary folk and their leaders. The citation by Pongweni proceeds to describe the role of the poet who is a highly skilled individual who composes as well as recites the praises of the traditional leader. This view forms the base of the discussion in that it will indicate how women traditional leaders are perceived by the African society.

Regardless of the fact that this genre of folklore has such significance for traditional leadership, it has remained oral in nature for a long time. It was only after the arrival of missionaries that praise poems started to be written down. Be that as it may, this genre still demands to be treated as oral lore by those who research it. While the written forms are useful to readers and researchers in different parts of the world they still fail to capture the performance which remains the context in which these praises are recited. The interaction between the poet and the audience cannot be encapsulated in the written texts. It is in this vein that some scholars such as Pongweni (2004:1) place emphasis on the manner in which praise songs should be studied. This scholar states that praise poetry is basically an oral art that remains inextricably tied to performance. According to him, written versions of praise poetry are lacking and cannot denote the extra-linguistic aspects of performance such as gestures, the interplay between the poet and the audience and the general elusive ambience of the occasion. Malaba (1982:27) also concurs with this view:

Ideally the study of oral poetry should be a multi-media event. Students should attend an actual performance, in an appropriate setting, and respond to the poet as part of the audience. Ideally, the event should be recorded on video and, in group sessions, be played back, so that the complex nature of the performance itself can be gauged: for instance how does audience response/participation affects the poet's performance? Which parts of the poem elicit certain responses, and why? What mood is prevalent? And in what ways does it alter?

This is supposed to be the obligation of researchers who intend to analyse praise poetry in its entirety. Although it could be an expensive exercise it still remains a standing principle as obtaining such records would enable the analyst to discover everything about this genre that exists as oral. This contention is supported by well known folklorists, Kunene (1971) and Cope (1968:26) as they strongly assert that this genre of folklore needs to be and should be studied in its historical and cultural context. It is the only way that the interpretation and analysis will reach their optimum heights, thus enhancing their degree of reliability. It is unfortunate though that accessing sufficient fund that would allow researchers to take this advice into cognisance will always be a challenge. In

this study the researcher will use material that has been recorded in various resources. This is justified by the fact that the main subjects for the analysis are individuals who have long since died.

Praise poetry for those in authority plays the momentous role of unifying members of the community under such leadership. This form of poetry not only establishes the acceptance of the leader by his or her subjects but further imparts courage and improved self-confidence to him or her.

It is an issue of concern that most discussions on praise poetry rarely include women due to the reason that praise poetry is alleged to be intended for physical heroism. As women do not go out to fight in battles, neither do they go on any hunting spree, discussions on praise poetry ignore their existence. It remains disputable that women are alleged not to be contributing much to leadership in the true sense of the word. The argument in this chapter will refer to women leaders that existed long before colonisation and those who feature in traditional leadership in the present era. Praise poetry will be analysed in the context of folk literature that tells a story about the attitude of the African communities then and today. It is hoped that this discussion will reveal the real origin of gender related injustices in African communities. Praise poetry affect and contextualises women as they pursue their respective roles in different African communities, in particular those of Nguni cultures. The focus falls on patriarchy and gender relations as they manifest themselves in the lives of Nguni women in leadership roles.

It is expected that the analysis will lend a hand to the empowerment of the African woman of the era who is often told her leadership is not in accordance with the African culture. This analysis will also suggest how praise poetry for African women who are leaders could be utilised to assist them in executing their leadership duties.

### 4.3 DEFINITION OF PRAISE POETRY (*TIBONGO*)

Previous discussion is deepened here. Praise poems or *tibongo* are a well developed category of folklore. They are oral by nature as they were initially composed impromptu and passed from one generation to another by word of mouth. The verb *kubonga* (praising), in the Nguni languages, means being grateful or expressing the feeling of appreciation and gratitude by the individual who is on the receiving end either of a gift or assistance of any nature. *Kubonga* or expressing gratefulness is a very important phenomenon to African people. A good act is immediately reciprocated by an expression of being grateful. In the Nguni culture this is articulated by using the surname (*sibongo*) of that individual. If possible the gratefulness is even expressed by reciting clan praises of that individual for the good she or he has done. A surname is, in effect, a vital aspect of an African individual as it does not merely define the identity of the individual, but also imparts to the individual the pride of being associated with the heroes of his or her clan.

The concept *kubonga* which refers to the act of expressing gratitude has an extension of meaning which is to praise or declaim praises. To praise is a term that according to *Reader's Digest Oxford Complete Wordfinder* (1192) is "to express warm approval of; to glorify; to eulogize; to honor or to pay homage". An individual is praised for doing something good. Praising is positive in that it indicates that the one being praised has achieved or has performed something that is approved by those around him or her.

One can deduce that praise poetry suggests any phrase, sentence or sentences, where emotional language is used to describe something. In essence this confirms the view that praises can be of any length, depending on what the praise singer wants to express about the achiever at that time. Even though praises are composed and sung for anything that takes place in the life of a human being, this purpose is different in praises for kings and chiefs, as mentioned earlier.

Kunene (1971) refers to praise poems as heroic poetry or eulogies and explains that they are used for praising or eulogizing an individual for good or heroic deeds. *Tibongo* in Siswati, *izibongo* in isiZulu and *iimbongo* in isiNdebele are the praise poems that were used to hail warriors and community leaders, that is kings, chiefs and others who were seen to have acted heroically. Heroes were accorded these praises after they had displayed bravery in their triumphant excursions: during hunting, after wars or in the leadership of his community.

One cannot ignore the fact that some individuals composed their own praises. Such compositions are often triggered by achieving or succeeding in whatever challenge was faced. Such jubilation may be due to the success of his or her children and close relatives. Grandchildren are no exception. It must be borne in mind that success amongst Africans is equated to attainment of fame.

Because women were never associated with heroism, they tended to be relegated to the back seat. This argument is well documented in the explanation of why women were not counted among those who were praised. For instance Finnegan (1970:111) makes this observation:

In its specialized form, panegyric is the type for court poetry and is most developed and elaborate poetic genres in Africa. It seems to go with a particular ethos, a stress on royal or aristocratic power, and an admiration for military achievement.

This quotation goes on to highlight the fact that besides being intricate such forms of praise have a tendency to emphasise royal heroism and authority. Whilst traditional leadership is not always confined to the male folk, there is not much said about praising women whose leadership skills are also outstanding and could be labelled as heroic deeds. Accordingly, there is no valid reason to exclude women from this cultural practice.

Finnegan continues to explain that praise poems for kings, chiefs, and other leaders are formalised as they are expressed in public by the poet who composes and recites them. This performance takes place in front of the leader

and his/her followers. As stated above a specialist the composer of praise poetry is usually someone who has an outstanding skill in composing. Besides being a fast thinker and creator he should also be very observant. In effect, his duty is to put together his observations in the praises and present them in a strategic and engaging manner to both the leader being praised and his subjects who are the audience of the performance.

What should also be reiterated is that praise poems do not contain praising only. The formal praises that we are concerned with in this discussion are sometimes, utilised as criticism of a leader who is seen not to measure up to the expectations of his followers. This is where the praise singer's skills play a major role. He will make a careful choice of words and present the criticism in a manner that does not just allude to the dissatisfaction of the nation but in a way warn the king or chief about possible dangers. This is confirmed by Finnegan (1970:115) who succinctly states that praise poems of people in leadership more often than not include derogatory remarks, veiled or otherwise, or give advice as well as praise. While the praise poems are meant to eulogise the subject being praised, as Cope (1968:28) accordingly affirms:

.. so the former (bard) is in a sense the intermediary between the chief and his subjects, for, when he presents the chief to the people in his recitation, he is also representing the opinion of the people to the chief. Thus the praise poem contains criticism as well as praise.

It is worth mentioning that praise poems are classified as poems because of their poetic qualities. They are characterised by such features as being presented in rhythmic lines and in stanza form, containing repetitions, alliteration and imagery which are all used to convey the message intended in a fascinating and creative way. One or more forms of imagery are also thrown in where these perform an effective role of putting stress on the issues being communicated. Cope (1968:35) shares similar sentiments:

Praise composition is consciously an art; there is conscious striving after literary effect and a continuous effort to attain a richer, more emotive, and a more memorable use of language.

Praise poetry for Queen Mothers, women chiefs and heroines will be the key focus in this chapter. The rationale in focusing on their praise poetry is the extrapolative nature of this genre in as far as the individual's achievements and personality are concerned. The analysis will acknowledge and accept the fact that women can and should be recognised as heroines in their respective endeavours. Cultural communities in the past as well as today have made opportunities available for African women to showcase their capabilities.

In the following analysis it will be interesting to see how women heroines are praised for their heroic deeds.

#### **4.4 PRAISE POETRY AND THE NGUNI WOMAN IN CONTEXT**

It is of vital importance that we reflect on how Nguni women contribute in developing the skills of praising in their children, boys in particular. In one way or another, as indicated earlier women, as mothers, grandmothers, sisters and aunts, play a significant role in developing a boy who at adulthood becomes an *imbongi*.

##### **4.4.1 The Role of the Nguni Woman in Praise Poetry**

African women are the vital role players in the development of individuals who at times grow up to be talented bards. It is undisputed that women are responsible for creating the foundation that enables the child to grow and become an acceptable member of her/his family as well as in making her/him a suitable community member in terms of behaviour, cultural and customary practices. Besides being dependent on the mother, a growing child is also nurtured in a manner that in most cases is determined by her. The African custom gives the mother more time and space as African men leave the

responsibility of bringing up the child squarely on the mother, and the grandmother if she happens to be present.

When the baby cries and seeks attention the mother sings a lullaby or recites a chant that will soothe the baby so that it may fall asleep. The lullabies often contain lyrics that are not complex as the objective is to convey a soothing sound to the infant who is uncomfortable at that time. At times there are no words but just the humming of sounds in a rhythm that calm the baby. As expected the baby responds to these rhymes and lullabies. A good Siswati example would be as follows:

### ***Umlolotelo***

1. *Thula mntfwana,*
2. *Unyok' akalimanga,*
3. *Walibala kulala,*
4. *Gcimu fahla!*
5. *Nangu sewuyabuya,*
6. *Nang' esigodzini,*
7. *Eshi ... eshi ... eshi!*

### **Translation**

#### **A Lullaby**

Be quiet my baby,  
Your mother did not plough any crop,  
She spent her time sleeping,  
Oh by the way!  
Here she comes,  
There she is, down the valley,  
Esh.... esh .... esh!

The sound on the last line of this lullaby at times is repeated over and again or simply used to create a soothing rhythm. At the time of reciting the lullaby the baby is held either on the mother's chest, shoulder or tied on her back. The child is at times, held in the arms but supported by the mother's body. As she sings she makes gentle movements similar to rocking the cradle, a movement that brings a soothing feeling to the child. As the child responds to this by becoming calmer, the pronunciation of the lyrics disappears and they are no



longer mentioned; instead the 'esh...esh...' sounds continue to put the child into a relaxed mood. The mother also lowers her voice. Amazingly, the child responds to this process. Such a response suggests that there is a strong effect brought about by the singing of lullabies. It also indicates an existence of a psychological connection between the singing and the baby. The baby grows up being bombarded with songs and rhymes that leave an indelible mark in the child's psyche and also serve as foundation for the child's skill of composing poetic texts.

One other form of poetry used in making the baby calm down is the use of the surname and the clan praises. In Siswati clan praises are called *tinanatelo*, while in isiZulu they are known as *izithakazelo*. This type of poetry is very popular amongst Nguni speaking communities as it recognises the patrilineal link from the founder of the clan down to the present generation. Nguni speaking communities regard this as significant for their identity. Clan praises generally begin with the immediate surname that is the founder's name but more lines are added by all other names, in particular heroes in the history of the clan, until the founder's name is reached. Other lines describe the members of the clan with respect to their behaviour, their totem, their heroic events, and how they link with other known heroes. In a Nguni family the founder of the clan is acknowledged as clan praises are recited. Pongweni (2004:1) in the website given below describes clan praises in these words:

The praises of the clans serve to remind members of who they are, where they come from, the vicissitudes of their lives, how they overcame challenges to their existence, and so on. The poems are thus biographical sketches as well as being means of portraying the subject's self-image. In all instances, the heroism of both individuals and their clan as a whole are praised, just as their antisocial conduct is pillored.

Clan praises are also used for calming a baby. Remarkably, the baby responds instantly when the mother uses its surname and clan praises in an effort to calm the child. In the African philosophy there is a strong belief that a baby has a connection with the father's ancestors. Therefore, if the clan praises are recited

they connect the baby with the ancestors who are believed to be protecting every member of the family including the baby. Clan praises are poetic in nature. The following example supports this view.

### ***Sibongo nesinanatelo sakaNdlovu***

1. *Ndlovu*
2. *Gatjeni*
3. *Boya benyatsi*
4. *Buyasongwa buyasombuluka*
5. *Nine bakaNdlovu tid' ekhaya*
6. *Ngekweswela belusi*
7. *Nine bakaKhumbul' emagwala*
8. *Nine bakaDemazana Ntfombatana*
9. *Nine bakaSihlangu lesihle.*

### **Translation**

#### **The surname and clan praises for the Ndlovu people**

Elephant  
You of a branch  
You of the hair of a rhinoceros  
While being rolled it becomes loose  
You of elephants that graze at home  
Because they do not have one to herd them  
You of Remember the cowards  
You of Demazana Girl  
You of a beautiful Shield!

The poetic nature of these clan praises becomes a powerful influence on the baby; even though it cannot speak it needs to hear more being said to it. It is also effective to use poetic talk as it easily draws the attention of the baby. It is indisputable that a baby learns most things from the person or people who spend the most time with her/him. Babies learn faster when the talk is poetic and has rhythm. Gunner (1984:94) makes this observation about clan praises:

...it is the mother who sees herself as having the greatest responsibility in instilling in the infant and young child a sense of clan identity and a personal relationship to the past of his father's clan. ...Mothers have a variety of ways of using the clan praises. They use them for address, as terms of endearment, encouragement and praise. They are also

considered an important means of soothing and quietening a young child and often used.

As the mother and/or grandmother recites all these forms of poetry they are in a way introducing to this baby a sense of recognising sounds and poetic texts. These women gradually facilitate and strengthen the exposure to poetry and this forms the foundation of the praising that the baby will use at a later stage in his life. It has become clear that the use of clan praises is essential in introducing the art of praising to a growing child. Clan praises also impart self identity to the growing child. It remains the duty of the mother to develop self-confidence and such a form of identity in the child. Gunner (1984:97) highlights the relation of clan praises to praise poetry, stating that clan praises are taught through repeated use in different contexts that may be those of intimacy and affection. She further observes that the growing child is directly exposed to compact metaphoric language of praise poetry that evokes vivid imagery of war, honour and a heroic past. The eulogy found in the clan praises enhances the child's sense of identity and sense of worthiness.

As the baby grows the mother uses more poetry. When the baby's legs are strong enough he is often made to dance by holding his body in both hands and making him jump up and down on his mother's lap. When the mother is engaging the baby in such dancing she sings songs to give rhythm to the performance. She at times composes and sings some songs in the form of chants that take the rhythm of dancing as the baby is lifted up and down on her lap. In some cases, the mother sings *izangelo* to lull the baby to sleep. AmaZulu refer to these chants and semi-praises as *izangelo*. *Izangelo* often contain lyrics that at times tell a story about the child, even to the extent of verbalising her aspirations and wishes for him. If the baby arrived a long time after she had been married, her jubilation may form part of the lyrics of this poetry that could be termed mother-baby songs or chants. At times, some statements indicating her feelings about co-wives, in the case of a polygamous marriage, can be verbalised in these compositions. Even her relationship with

her mother-in law can form lyrics for *izangelo*. In describing *izangelo*, Ntuli and Makhambeni (1998:55) have the following to say:

*Angithi phela uma uzifunda izangelo lezi ufumana ukuthi ziyizidlaliso eziqanjwa ngunina womntwana. Ukuziqamba kwakhe usuke ekuqondise ekumthunduzeleni noma ekumthuliseni lapho ekhala noma efuna ukumlalisa. .... ziqanjwa ngunina womntwana eziqambela lowo mntwana kuphela zingeke zisetshenziselwe noma ubani njengomlolozelo.... Kanti futhi uma ufunda lomlolozelo uthola kubongwa lowo mntwana kanjalo kwethulwa nomlando kafushane.*

### **Translation**

When you read this type of poetry (*izangelo*) you find that they are texts that are crafted by the mother as she plays with her child. Their creation is always directed to lulling the crying baby or making the baby sleep...they are created by the mother for that particular baby they cannot be used by any other person as a lullaby to the baby. In fact, when you read them they refer to this particular baby and they give some short history.

In most cases such poetry gives the mother a convenient platform to say whatever she wants to as she praises her son/daughter. In agreement with the above description, Gunner (1984:99) considers *izangelo* as a type of poetry that “is composed by women and is characterised by its use of allusion for the purpose of complaint and sometimes invective directed usually at the composer’s husband or at one or more of her co-wives.” The women referred to are those who use this particular platform to express their grievances and dissatisfaction at the treatment they receive from the people who are directly part of their marriage. While the mother directs *izangelo* to the baby it remains known that she is indirectly targeting someone else, either her husband, co-wives, or in-laws. Their poetic language protects the growing baby from the harsh messages that *izangelo* carry. This type of poetry assists in making the message reach the targeted audience but keeps the growing baby censored from such verbal tussles. Masuku (2005:166) has this to say on *izangelo*:

These praises are recited when she is with a group of married women on a social occasion. In some cases women have a special song that is sung after the praise poem. The poems are also recited by the mother to her child in the homestead where the hidden complaints would carry particular weight. The mother is in a sense reciting the praise poem to and for her child, but she (the mother) is also reciting it for the benefit of whoever else may be listening; if the persons referred to indirectly in the poem hear it, so much the better.

It can be argued that such praises cannot be recited on social occasions as is alleged in the quotation above. *Izangelo* remain as poetry that a mother composes and recites as texts directed to her child. It is well known that more often than not the lyrics could be directed either to her husband, her co-wives in a polygamous marriage or her other close in-laws. Because in most cases they are recited while at home in the midst of close family members, they pick up the message while the mother recites to her child. They are often used in the company of some kind of play, dancing and lulling the child. They are individualistic in that they cannot be used for another child. The lyrics of *izangelo* do not just contain pungent or complaining messages but also offer the mother an opportunity to express her desires, her needs and her aspirations in both her life and her child's future. The audience of this poetry is mainly the family members. *Izangelo* can also be considered as therapeutic in that the mother is given a chance of ventilating, her dissatisfaction in particular. An excellent example would be the following *izangelo* that were composed for an individual who occupies a place in the annals of politics in South Africa:

1. *Umendo ngabe ngiwendile mfana kaShenge,*
2. *Ukuba angigananga noNombiba,*
3. *Ngangithi ngilele abengichinsa usengumthini,*
4. *Nginxanelwe luhududu lunye lungahlali lakwaSondaba,*
5. *Lungumamba yehlane lakwaSondaba,*
6. *Yona ilala ohlungwini engethuswa umkhwani,*
7. *Ngithe mina ngiyahamba yangilum' isandla,*
8. *Yangilum'unyawo lokunyathela,*
9. *Ngijuquwe imamba Ehlanzeni,*
10. *Ngaye ngavuswa isibibi samagceke,*
11. *Ndansundansu yangishay' intombi yomuntu,*
12. *Yangishaya yangehlula-ke mina,*
13. *Angiqondene nalo ngoba angibangi lutho,*

14. *Mina nginefa lami lokudalwa,*  
 15. *Amaxheg' amadala nehlule empini yaseTshaneni,*  
 16. *Nisazithembisa nisathi niyabuya kwaNdunu ningahlabana,*  
 17. *Kanti eyakwaNdunu sekuyintombi kaMamonga,*  
 18. *Shenge!*

### Translation

Married life would be sweet, son of Shenge,  
 If only I were not married in the company of the wicked one,  
 I felt as if I was sleeping that an otter squirted me,  
 I was persuaded by another long trailing thing that would,  
 Not remain in the [cursed] forest of Sondaba,  
 It was like a mamba there in the wilderness of Sondaba,  
 The one that lies in the freshly burnt veld, where,  
 Mealie leaf does not disturb it.  
 And I felt as I walked along that it bit my hand;  
 It bit my foot as I set down.  
 I was struck down by a mamba there in the thick bush  
 Country.

And I was brought back to life by medicine from the lonely Highveld,  
 Touch and touch again, a commoner's daughter struck me.  
 I don't care in the least,  
 Because I compete with nothing,  
 I have my own ancient inheritance.

You old doddering men, you won at the battle of Tshaneni,  
 You still promise yourselves that you are going back to,  
 Ndunu for another battle;  
 But I tell you the one at Ndunu is Mamonga's daughter.  
 Shenge!

(Gunner 1979:257)

Princess Magogo composed the above *izangelo* for her son Mangosuthu Buthelezi when he was a baby. It is clear that she, a member of the Zulu royal house, was not happy in her marriage. Evil forces and witchcraft seem to be dominating her composition. This is evident from lines 5 to 9 in the poem above where there is an emphasis on the image of a mamba snake which indeed is known as a very poisonous snake. Its victims often die from its poison before they can receive help. The polygamous setting seems to be the main source of her misery. The mother-in-law also features in the composition Masuku

(2005:169). The images used are of very high complexity and they reveal the disposition, tone and ambience of the whole composition. One cannot escape the complex language used in this *izangelo*. This is a characteristic of this poetry that demonstrates beyond any doubt that this type of poetry is basically not meant for a young growing mind. It clearly confirms the fact that the message in the composition is intended for the adult members of the family involved, as they are more often than not the targeted audience. Satire also becomes a useful tool in the composition of such poetry. Tunner (1990:13) describes satire as a composition that is a subtle attack on a person, or situation which uses any means at hand to discredit whatever the composer fears or does not like. Indeed, *izangelo* serve as a vehicle for presenting a complaint without face-to-face confrontation.

In this case an *izangelo* was being made a platform of protest and for expressing the despondency that the Princess endured in her marriage. The rhythm in the recitation has an immense effect in the moulding of a future bard or a non-specialist bard as Gunner (1979:258) refers to them. Such strategy is unique to women as peace loving members of their families. This on its own is an indication that they take control of issues and their emotions in the family environment. The use of different types of poetry is essential in the development of the praising skill in the growing child.

Story telling often done by the grandmother, also plays a large role in moulding the *imbongi*. The folk stories frequently contain songs that are part of the folktale, which the audience joins in singing. Many skills are developed during the story telling sessions. Besides the fact that the children learn to listen, sing, narrate as well as imagine things, they also develop the skill of creating praise poetry. It is this type of poetry that gradually causes the baby to become acquainted with poetry and its rhythmic patterns. This is the skill that the children build on at adulthood as it forms the relevant base that they need in order to appreciate praises as well as create them.

It may be argued with confidence that all praise singers or praise poets are products of mothers and grand-mothers. The foresight displayed by women as mothers and grand-mothers is characteristic of their future-looking tendency. They are ever concerned about the growing member(s) of their family. The leadership that African women display in the context of a family is exercised with great skill. The predisposition in the child bears fruits to be enjoyed by all including the fathers. It is extremely unfortunate that in most cases fathers calculatedly hold onto the accolades and are regarded as the person who has carried out the outstanding job, especially, if the boy grows up to be a professional *imbongi*.

It is therefore distressing to see that after becoming specialised praise singers some of such men neglect their mothers and grandmothers. This calls to mind the patriarchal nature of an African community. Gender discrimination becomes the only rationale for such an inexplicable bias. The discussion therefore makes a call to researchers in that there is a dire need for them to start paying attention to women and praise poetry in the African continent and the diaspora. Opland (1998:196) advocates the following:

This gender discrepancy in generic output is almost surely attributable to the fact that women are prominent participants in the tradition of *intsomi*, the Xhosa folktale, but although women are as active as men as composers and transmitters of personal and clan praises, the *imbongi* is always a male.

In this citation Opland blames the absence of women from participating actively in formal praise poetry on the fact that they are actively involved in the telling of folktales. In essence he views women as not deserving enough to be considered as *imbongi*. With all due respect, such a justification does not hold water. In other words, he finds it justifiable that discussion on praise poetry is silent about women in the Xhosa language. This is arguable. Is it indeed women's distinctive role in the folktales which justifies their being left out when it comes to professional praise poetry? Such a justification is in keeping with the view that praise poetry is essentially considered to be the poetry of power that



celebrates victorious rulers and powerful leaders. What plays a role in this issue is gender discrimination. The absence of women in such debate is intended to keep them away, less relevant in authoritarian contexts that accordingly ought to be for men only. The above excuse is not convincing to any person who is aware of how culture has been used by those in power to drive women to the periphery.

It is not clear why Opland alleges that women actively participate in clan praises. This is another part of the quotation that leaves much to be desired. It is true that women as mothers and grand-mothers do teach and encourage the growing child to recite their clan praises as well as memorise them. Clan praises themselves are a reservoir that displays discrimination against and domination over women at best. Clan names disadvantage women to the utmost. I doubt that women ever have an opportunity to create the clan praises for their clans since these praises comprise the names of those who are considered to have been heroes and those who are being celebrated for the accomplishment of establishing the clan in its history. It is unfortunate that clan praises contain names which define the lineage of the clan. Since most women are obliged to marry into another clan, their chances of being included in the list of praise names are always compromised.

Such an observation therefore causes *tinanatelo* to be perceived as very discriminatory towards women who are the bearers and developers of the very heroes who end up featuring in the clan praises. This is due to patriarchy. The marginalising of women is deliberately done as a means of ignoring and trivialising the role of the mother in life. This is meant precisely to make women lose their credibility and self confidence and accept that they are inferior, so as to prove that they have no other role in life except for making children and nurturing them to adulthood.

However, it is worth noting that some Nguni cultures and communities acknowledge women in their praise names. AmaXhosa for instance make use

of clan praises which include outstanding women of that clan. An example would be that of a clan praise which includes Nokwindla or Nobetha and many others. In the other Nguni cultures it is still to be proved whether all the names in their clan praises are indeed those of men; some may be those of women as first names can be misleading. Patriarchal influences may downplay those that were actually women's names.

In any case, an interesting aspect in the Nguni culture is that of addressing a community or nation by the name of an outstanding Queen Mother in the history of the dynasty. For instance emaSwati are at times addressed as "Nine bakaLaZidze" meaning "You of LaZidze". LaZidze was a prominent Queen Mother in the history of emaSwati kingship, who was a daughter of the well known Zwide, of the Nxumalo people of KwaZulu Natal. She was addressed by her father's name; emaSwati made the name sound more Siswati, though: instead of calling her LaZwide they used LaZidze. Her name was Tsandzile Ndwandwe, mother of King Mswati II. Another Queen Mother often used in addressing emaSwati is Gwamile of the Mdluli clan using her nickname Mgwami which is taken from her praises. She was a grandmother of the previous king Sobhuza II. Amongst other Queen Mothers she also emerged as an outstanding Queen Mother in the history of the kingship of emaSwati. EmaSwati are sometimes addressed as "Nine baMgwami" meaning "You of Mgwami" or "Nine bakaLaMvelase", "You of LaMvelase", Mvelase being the name of her father. It is noteworthy, that when Labotsibeni grew up she was fortunate to be staying in royal kraals. As stated by Kuper in Ginindza (1996: 140) Labotsibeni was groomed by LaZidze who was Indlovukazi at that time: the case of one woman educating another who later found herself in the position of using the skills she acquired from the Indlovukazi LaZidze. No wonder she rose to such stature.

Another example of acknowledging the existence of women in our Nguni cultures is that amongst amaZulu who at times call their KwaZulu Natal *elaKwaMthaniya*, meaning the land of Mthaniya. Mthaniya was a wife to Jama

who bore him an heir, Senzangakhona. As the absence of male issue, who would be a successor to Jama, had become a concern for the whole community, at the birth of Senzangakhona amaZulu were delighted. In fact, others considered this a mystery. As mother of Senzangakhona the nation saw it befitting to call their country *elaKwaMthaniya*.

#### **4.4.2 Praise Poetry and the Nguni Woman**

##### **4.4.2.1 Types of Nguni Praise Poetry**

Most African societies are patrilineal in that the descendants of a particular clan follow the male parent's line. The individual who becomes the founder of a clan is honoured by calling all those who descend from him by his personal name (Cope 1968). The surname usually referred to as *sibongo/isibongo* is the name of the founder of a clan in some Nguni customs. The use of this name in addressing all those who belong to the clan could be seen as a way of expressing gratefulness to the founder. It may be taken to be a way of reminding all those who belong to this clan that, by the way, your founder is Gama, Ndlela or Dladla. In fact, he remains a hero of the clan and is honoured, as all his descendants are called by his name. For this reason the African way of saying thank you to an individual is expressed by using his/her clan name, i.e. surname. In a way the person is being reminded that he/she has done well like her/his founder Gama or Ndlela. Indeed, this brings pleasure to the individual being thanked and encourages her/him to do more good things for the one expressing the thanks.

In African culture and customs a girl maintains her surname or clan name even after being married. Dlamini (1995:156) asserts that a married woman forfeits all that she has as she joins the new family. She further states that the married woman in the Siswati custom belongs to her in-law family for the rest of her life. That view is strongly contested, because in Siswati custom, research has confirmed that a woman retains her maiden identity even in her new family. If

she is born of the Gama family she will be known as LaGama. In other words, she carries her identity throughout her life. She never loses her maiden sense of belonging. The mention of her maiden surname is a way of acknowledging and keeping everybody aware that, not incidentally, this woman comes from the Gama clan. In a way she is an ambassador of her maiden clan. This practice on its own motivates the married woman to keep doing good as she is constantly reminded of her heroes. Also for this reason, if she dies the marital family cannot bury her without the knowledge and presence of her maiden family.

Music and dance are always part and parcel, of African celebrations of any nature in the African life style and are often accompanied by praising. The dancing woman may either praise herself or be praised by those around her. These praises may be created by or for the individual while she is performing or may always have been used for praising her. In this instance it may be assumed that self praising is an appeal for attention from the crowd or even for self affirmation of the dancer as she performs, to be ranked as excellent. Self praises are usually designed to inform anyone who does not know the woman who she is and what her achievements are, as well as what she is capable of doing. Indeed the praises fulfil that function. A clear example would be the following lines taken from praises recited by a Swazi middle aged woman Fakubi LaManyatsi Ndlela performing a traditional dance amongst her peers:

### ***Tibongo TaLaManyatsi***

1. *Ngasho mine sishigashiga saMakhasane,*
2. *Ngisho mine Ndingilizi leyavalela Mubi egumeni,*
3. *Ngisho mine waSicandza saboMphumaphi,*
4. *Mine lengavalela Mubi kwahholola LaFakudze,*
5. *Ahholola ngesikhwele lesingenasichwaga,*
6. *Ngasho mine sigayigayi lesiyimphumakudze,*
7. *Imphumakudze yekudzabuka eSigcineni le!*
8. *Sibhejane lesishaye Lomshiyo sangamshiyi.*

9. *Lomshiyo wagucuka sidvuli semuhlwa,*
10. *Ngimi-ke loyo - longashiywa nangekuhlwa,*
11. *Uyangiva! Uyangiva lapho ngikhona!*
12. *Ngive! Ngive lapho ngihamba khona!*
13. *Shwili! Manca! Siyayivala lendlela!*

## Translation

### **Praises for LaManyatsi**

There I go - me the offspring of Makhasane,  
 Me round figured who locked Mubi inside my windbreaker,  
 Me who conquered Mubi and left LaFakudze weeping,  
 She wept from jealousy that attacks any human being,  
 Me born by Sicandza of Mphumaphi,  
 Me an industrious individual from a distant area,  
 Me from a distant area of Sigcineni,  
 A rhinoceros that has hit Lomshiyo area repeatedly,  
 Lomshiyo became an ant hill,  
 That is me – the one not to be left at dark,  
 Do you hear me! Do you hear how I move!  
 Hear me! Hear me when I make my moves,  
 I'm finalizing this! We have come to closure.

*(Self composed by LaManyatsi)*

In the few lines above it is evident that they are composed and declaimed by the individual woman herself while she is dancing. In an informal interview she explained that she is in a polygamous marriage. LaFakudze is the co-wife whom her husband married later. She is a young woman from Lomshiyo, the area where they are based. She also explained to me that even though Mubi, her husband, married her co-wife afterwards she has remained his most loved wife. This may be due to her beauty, her industriousness or her strong personality. Be that as it may Mubi is the only person who knows.

In the *tibongo* above we are informed briefly about her looks; that she is roundish which may suggest being plumpish and also shortish. We learn about her place of origin, Sigcineni that happens to be far from where she is at the time of reciting the praises. We also are told of her clan name Manyatsi that has Makhasane as its clan praise. We also hear about the man in her life, i.e. Mubi, whom she claims to have conquered. We also learn about the fact that she shared her husband with another woman of Fakudze clan. In a nutshell, she wants everybody in her audience to know that she has the best looks and has achieved greatly, even in retaining the love of her husband. In the case of this example, the praises may have been composed by her, but they may later be used by any other member of her family who also has the liberty of making additions to the existing lines. Another issue to be observed regarding praises like the one above is that when they are being recited during a dance performance they tend to take the rhythm of the performance. The last three lines in the example do not play any other function beyond providing the rhythm of the dance. More lines may be added to these as achievements and creativity allow. Along the way praises are added in a continuous manner. The more achievements an individual boasts, the longer her praises become. These additions do not necessarily have to be made by the initial composer.

In isiZulu the equivalence of this type of praise poetry is called *izihasho* which is the plural of *isihasho*, a sub-genre of praise poetry that is very popular amongst amaZulu. It is known as being composed and performed by married women. As seen in the analysis above *izihasho*, like *tibongo*, bring together eulogy on achievements, provide a brief history of the individual, and comment on her physical appearance as well as certain character traits. Indeed, in some instances criticism is tactfully included by the composer. They accord identity to the one given the recognition of being praised. However, it must be noted that some lines may not be freely expressed in certain contexts. Gunner's reference to this particular type of praise poetry as *izibhinqo* is a noun formed from the verb stem *bhinqa* in isiZulu which refers to 'speak sarcastically'.

Masuku (2005:130) in her doctoral thesis refers to this type of poetry as *izibongo zabantu* (praises for people) which does not really specify their difference from other types of *izibongo* (praises). It can be argued that since traditional leaders are human beings, *zabantu* may be ambiguous and taken to refer to any human being. In the same discussion Masuku (ibid) refers to this type of poetry as *izihasho*. These are, as she explains, are praises of ordinary members of society. In most cases, they are neither formal nor lengthy. But as *izibongo* the *izihasho* are also composed in a similar way in as far as figurative language, rhythm, and other poetic techniques are concerned. Even though they are a product of non-specialists, they are very rich in poetic characteristics; hence they make good material for analysis.

In the African context there is a tendency to work together and celebrate together. As women work in the fields, such activities as improving the huts of their homes, putting mud on the walls of the huts and doing many other duties cause them to gather in groups. Besides the fact that this social arrangement assists in making the duties easier to do, it also makes available time for togetherness and sharing of ideas. It also allows for the creation of praises as individuals, but become known by the member folks who also could add more lines on the existing praises or compose praises for their social mates. In effect, in the traditional context it is observed that reciting praises for women go together with the ability to work together as a group, which constitutes corporate strength. Dlamini (1995:123). The recitation is often accompanied by song and performance and in these contexts there is further emphasis of the community's value placed on their social identity as married women. According to her such occasions for reciting praises for women create a sense of dynamic unity. This is where women are given an opportune platform to dance amongst their folks, which may result in her being praised as she excels in her dancing.

In the same vein Gunner (1979:243) affirms that:

Married women usually perform their praise poems in the company of other women. They are performed in a variety of social occasions,

sometimes in the privacy of a homestead house, in open courtyard and in the fields. The feeling of group solidarity and shared ... socialise often very strong on these occasions.

This should not be taken as emphasising the view that only married women engage in praising. It is only that in the African woman's life the stage of girlhood is short lived as at some point she is supposed to get married. This does not bring about only a change to her name and self-identity, but also a sense of being reborn that can be taken, to bring her life to a new beginning. In this way she loses touch with her folks, environment and has to start all over again to reconstruct her self-perception. For this reason there is more praising of married women than of girls.

Turner (2003:204) gives an elaborate observation about the audience of *izihasho*:

Women's *izihasho* are not performed at large and important public gatherings, but rather at more intimate settings, sometimes with men present from their community, but more often amongst other women in more informal settings such as in the fields, while working or resting, or in certain homesteads when a celebration is taking place. When men are absent from such performances, women are at liberty to challenge and expose emotions and sentiments and to use vulgar language that is normally inexpressible in more formal, public domains.

The remark above gives a clear indication that these praises are meant for special gatherings. Hence, if they are performed for an audience that contains men and children, the performer opts to withhold some lines that may get her as a woman into trouble. *Izihasho* are oral compositions that are composed by anyone who does not necessarily perform community leaders' praise poetry. This type of praises assist in shedding light on the expected standards of morality, the lifestyle, norms and the values of that particular community.

It is also important to state that women poets do not just improvise or perform for other women only. As Opland (1998:6) observes, a performer in these societal events may be either male or female. What this person does is defined



as *ukubonga*. He further explains that women in particular are well known for their skill of shouting poetry with the intention of encouraging the men or boys. When women are performing *ukubonga* in this case it is in order to encourage the one praised. In isiXhosa such praising is referred to as *ukutshayelela* which can be loosely taken to mean 'to sweep the way clear for someone'.

An interesting feature of this type of poetry amongst amaZulu women is that they have moved with *izihasho* into the modern environments where they live and work. Turner (1990:57) affirms that indeed, there is a particular type of *izibongo* that does not belong to what Finnegan (1970:111) refers to as panegyric in nature. Turner (1990:57) further explains that this type of *izibongo* teases, exposes, condemns rebukes and chastises the subject praised. Some of the subjects of these *izihasho* are quite contemporary and address issues of concern in the current era. What remains unexplained is which events and communal activities provide a platform for the performance of these modern *izihasho* in urban environments. The audience cannot be deduced when one looks at the modern context brought about by a township lifestyle.

While this modern type of poetry is instrumental in sustaining acceptable morals amongst community members it also serves as an effective vehicle for expressing complaints and dissatisfaction about certain behavioural patterns in a community. Turner (2003:206) who has done an in depth study on a vast collection of such *izihasho* observes the fact that:

... where specific women who transgress socially acceptable norms in urban settings are exposed, one must once again bear in mind that they are atypical examples of *izihasho*; it is more usual to find the good and the bad balanced and blended together to give an overall picture of the person. As this research focuses on aspects of conflict and criticism in the oral genre, it has resulted in the presentation of these specific examples of *izihasho*.

The citation above gives evidence that by nature *izihasho* are supposed to include good and bad so as, to provide balanced information on the individual praised. However, Turner decided to focus on *izihasho* that are satirical, and

those that have to do with conflict resolution in communities. This is a commendable study of this type of traditional poetry. The only issue of concern is that her research projects a wrong impression of *izihasho* amongst amaZulu women. It is as if amaZulu women in modern environments have to wait until there is a woman who transgresses the expected behaviour so as, to be inspired to compose *izihasho* on her. It would have balanced her argument to include a few *izihasho* that also contain positive comments at the beginning of her chapter, and thereafter move to the derogatory ones as they were the main issue of focus in her discussion. Considering the fact that not much research had been done on amaZulu women's *izihasho*, a reader who does not command any knowledge of isiZulu would wrongly assume *izihasho* are mainly disparaging. Of course she does provide some information on the presence of positive *izihasho*. She justifies her approach by stating that her study does not look at *izihasho* in general but focuses on those that gave prominence to satire, conflict and criticism. It is worth mentioning that such *izihasho* may not only focus on the wrong behaviour of an individual, but might also pay attention to deviation from the cultural and customary practices. We can consider the following examples from Masuku (2005) as she uses Turner's collection:

### ***Izihasho ZikaNobuhle Buthelezi***

1. *Maphek' ethulule njengebhodwe lasehlobo!*
2. *Uyathutha uyaphelekezela webhasi!*
3. *Izolo ubusefemini,*
4. *Namuhla usemgaqweni*
5. *Emalolini nasematekisini.*
6. *Abamnyama nabamhlophe baziwa nguwe*
7. *Kazi ingakanani lento yakho!*
8. *Bayadela abayaziyo.*

## Translation

### Praises for Nobuhle Buthelezi

The cooker of different foods like the summer pot!  
You are transporting and accompanying people, you bus!  
Yesterday you were at the firm,  
Today you are in the street in lorries and taxis.  
Both Blacks and Whites are known by you.  
I wonder what the capacity of your thing is!  
Happy are those who know it.

(Turner in Masuku 2005:60)

As suggested in the paragraph above, promiscuity appears to be a central theme. Nobuhle here is likened to a pot that is used in summer, a context associated with plenty of food; thus a pot is assumed to be excessively used during that season. The subject praised here is also equated to a bus which transports passengers from one place to another. The image highlights the fact that she changes men at a shocking pace. Turner (2003:242) sums up this image: "This line refers to her in a commonly used formula of a bus, a vehicle which transports many people provided they have the fare – a reference to her many customers." This is unfortunately, a theme that is in contrast with her name. Towards the end the poet expresses a desire to see her private parts that enable her to attract so many men.

Another interesting example is the one that follows:

### ***Izihasho ZikaThembani***

1. *Isigubhu samanzi siyavuza*
2. *Kadlulwa zindaba,*
3. *Kadlulwa bhulukwe.*
4. *Umaphenti uyaxega uma ebona indoda.*

5. *Umabheja abebomvu uma ebona indoda.*
6. *Ubuso bugcwala injabulo uma ebona amabhulukwe.*

## Translation

### Praises for Thembani

The gourd of water is leaking.

No news passes her,

No trousers pass her.

She is the one who sees a man and the panties are loosened.

Her complexion changes on seeing a man.

She is the one whose face breaks into a smile on seeing trousers (a man).

(Turner in Masuku 2005:58)

In this example, the poet starts by challenging Thembani regarding her skill in being a gossip. While she is being criticised for her gossiping skill in line 1 where she is called a leaking gourd, a metaphor that describes this weakness, she is also condemned for promiscuous behaviour from lines 3 to 6. The image of her panties loosening up at the sight of a man is a satire that puts emphasis on her unwelcome sexual behaviour. Satire in most instances of this genre is used as a tool to critique the women considered to be transgressors. Be this as it may, it remains to be established as to whether these women indeed deserve to be perceived as such loose women or whether this is an exaggeration by women who live in fear that they may lose their husbands to the women with such ability. In some instances, such *izihasho* could be composed as revenge, out of jealousy, because that woman's husband may have conducted an affair with one of the women praised in such a manner. Zulu on page 2 of his article published in the following website: ([www.oulitnet.co.za/isikhundla/08clan.asp](http://www.oulitnet.co.za/isikhundla/08clan.asp)) is writing in response to Ntuli's article and makes this observation:

A fascinating aspect up to this day about all patriarchal societies of the world is that women, to a greater degree, are curators of these systems that entrench male domination. Much of what Ntuli calls derogatory

remarks and tags about unmarried women, as far as I know, comes from the very women who are supposed to have empathy and sympathy for unmarried women.

This is a further confirmation that women themselves are at times the creators and custodians of negative perceptions of women who may be in unfortunate predicaments. It could be argued that these *izihasho* are created as a means of discouraging such behaviour from women folk who feel deviation from the expected norm deserves to be punished. It is unfortunate that some of the criticism made is not fair to the criticised. It must be remembered that in most African communities culture is dictated by men, at times together with elder women.

Magwaza (2001:26) explains that women in African communities are considered to be custodians of culture and are expected to transmit ethnic identity to the young. In that regard they have an obligation which deprives them of the privilege of expressing their emotions like their male folk. Women in such communities are not expected to deviate from being submissive even when the culture that they are guarding exploits their dignity and rights. In other words, much as such *izihasho* regulate good conduct in the community, they may also be an integral part of the patriarchy that dominates many African communities. They could be demanding conformity as dictated by the men of the community. From the look of things this type of poetry is not openly recited in front of the subject of praise. The negative and condemnatory nature of the content may be so serious that the subject of praise would be offended and retaliation could be expected. I think in most cases they are recited behind his/her back amongst small groups of acquaintances who know who is being praised in this manner.

Praise poetry for women in leadership positions analysed in this chapter tends to project such qualities. These poems often do not contain much about their good deeds but instead exhibit content that is more critical and condemns the individual praised rather than eulogising her.

#### 4.4.2.2 Women in Formal Praise Poetry

It cannot be denied that during the gathering of material for analysis of praise poetry researchers were received by men in the royal kraals. The appointment with the traditional leadership families would never involve women as no man would allow his wife to speak to a stranger. While this may have been intended as a gesture of protecting women, it is unfortunate that facts about women and their lives were presented by a man who would be responding to questions from the researcher. What became documented were the women's behavioural patterns as expected by the men. In most cases, the said patterns were and are supported by the mention of culture. Consequently, the information that has always been collected did not include what would have been voiced by women if they had been given a chance of being interviewed. The question is: will documents about women contain correct information?

Regardless of the fact that feminism and womanism make efforts at negotiating for the transformation of societies that are still characterised by patriarchy, in most instances, their efforts have met strong opposition as well as trivialisation, particularly in traditional leadership. Traditional leadership has strongly resisted considering transformation. It has remained an institution whose members claim they are custodians of a culture from which they cannot shift away. They have vehemently objected to the idea of having a traditional community led by a woman. It is noteworthy, though, that there are a number of communities which have been led by women in Africa. Besides the various cases of dual kingship where a king reigns with his mother, aunt or wife there are kingships that had and still have dynasties which contain women leaders. A clear example of a kingdom led by women from one generation to another is that of Modjadji of Lobedu. Why makes other tribes and traditional communities to ignore such an existing example. Does it mean they are not interested in learning from a dynasty headed by women, to transform their own leadership? The reason is rooted in patriarchy and in line with maintaining a status quo that has more often than not sidelined women from leadership roles.

Praise poetry in this debate is scrutinised to determine how it reflects on achievements by women members of society in the African community. Of vital importance in this argument is that it will unveil the misnomer that has almost clouded the use of the term 'praising' in the context of eulogising achievements of an individual member in the community. At this point, it has been alleged that, this misnomer was used deliberately to maintain the subordination of women in African communities. The rationale behind this concept is based on one of the essential functions of praise poetry; that it does not just establish acceptance of the leader by the people that he/she leads, but also increases the leader's self-affirmation.

Up to the present time, it has not been possible to have women praise singers for the king and Queen Mother. Much as this appears to be a trend, in the present day where women are educated there have been some instances where one might find a woman performing praises in ceremonies like the king's birthday, or his coronation. An excellent example is that of the day of the present King Mswati III of Swaziland in whose coronation, Gloria Mamba, a renowned folklorist, who was a lecturer at the University of Swaziland at the time, was allowed to take the stage, as co-presenter of a version of the king's praises. One would take this to be an innovative act that has been brought to Siswati customs by education. It must be mentioned that, the praises that were sung were not orally formulated but were the product of an educated person who made use of the western way of composing this poetry. It is also important that this has remained an isolated incident, which has not been, repeated since then. Amongst emaSwati, a male *imbongi* takes responsibility for praising the king. The same or another *imbongi* may be responsible for creating and performing the praises of the Queen Mother. If women cannot be involved in serving as *timbongi* for the Queen Mother this makes it very difficult to obtain material that will express both the female and male perspective. In other words, researchers end up analysing praise poems composed by men and highlighting the male perspective.

#### 4.5 THE BARD (*IMBONGI*) AND WOMEN IN PRAISE POETRY

Almost every African particularly in the traditional environment is involved in praise singing in one way or another, as has been indicated. However, praises composed by ordinary people on any subject remain known only by close members of his/her community. Opportunities of ordinary *imbongi* to perform their compositions are made possible by social gatherings and activities such as, traditional weddings, *lobola* ceremonies, drinking ceremonies, gatherings to welcome boys returning from the mountain (*ukwaluka* in isiXhosa). What is important is that the size of the audience for their performances cannot be compared to that of an *imbongi* who praises a leader. Opland (1998:10) makes this observation regarding *imbongi* at personal or family level and the *imbongi* who performs the praises in official echelons. He starts by raising the question as to what qualities make *imbongi* in the official echelon differ from any other poet in the community. He succinctly answers:

The spontaneous poems of ordinary people are occasional, connected to a specific event; in different circumstances the individual might not feel moved to stand up and *bonga*. ...an *imbongi* plays a particular role, serves an official function and is expected to perform at ceremonies of importance; he knows this is expected of him and he has the ability and confidence to do it.

The citation identifies a clear difference between a poet at community level and one who has the role of praising the leader. It is fascinating that while an *imbongi* at family or social level composes praises that are confined to the particular event, and often performs after being moved by the ambience and general mood of the occasion, an *imbongi* at professional level does not have to wait for his emotions to be enthused for him to start performing the praises. The praise singer, poet or *imbongi* for kings, chiefs and other leaders in the African context and Diaspora is the present centre of attention in the discussion. Finnegan (1970:84) views *imbongi* as follows:



*Imbongi's* profession was to record the praise names, the victories and the glorious qualities of the chief and his ancestors, and recite these in lengthy high-sounding verse on occasions which seemed to call for public adulation of the ruler. The poet had two duties: to remember and to express the appropriate eulogies. Though these praises tended to have a set and recognized form (particularly those of dead rulers), the poet's task did not consist of mere memorizing. The praises had no absolute verbal immutability, and emotional and dramatic force in actual recitation (as it) was expected of a successful *imbongi*.

The *imbongi* does not just need to have an interest in reciting praises but he must also be highly skilled. Although there is no official training that an *imbongi* must go through, these specialized skills can be learnt from close relatives who are already doing this job. The *imbongi* has a responsibility to learn to compose while he is performing these praises. He must possess a clear idea of the history of his subject as now and again he might use lines from praises of the leader's predecessors, especially if they are appropriate to the current leader being praised. Vail and White (1991:75) observe:

The poet is expected to be eloquent, someone who can speak well. But he is above all expected to be knowledgeable. ...a good poet is somebody who knows the history and can explain everything.... When something happens in the land he puts in.

The most compelling quality for *imbongi* is that of being patriotic to the leader and being loyal to the values for which the royal house stands. He has to be trustworthy and must be accepted by the community or nation led by the subject of praise. He must always be alert so as to keep his subject of praise aware of the community's concerns while giving voice to matters that do not please the leader and his nation. In other words he establishes and maintains harmony between the subject of praise and the nation he leads. Dlamini (1989:22) argues that the criterion used for an individual to become *imbongi* amongst emaSwati is based firstly on the deep love of their king and kingship as well as the inborn skill and ability to express this love by composing and singing the praises. Another quality in his personality, also mentioned by Vail and White, is that he must know the history of the dynasty as well as that of the leader's predecessors. This makes him an *imbongi* of high standing.

In the context of emaSwati when a king is still young or new, the *imbongi* uses the praises for previous kings to praise this new ruler. Praises that are used in most cases are those of kings who are remembered for outstanding deeds during their reign. It also becomes a tendency for *imbongi* to use the praises of the king whose name has been used for naming, the newly installed king. For instance, in the context of emaSwati nation, the previous King Sobhuza II was given his name after King Sobhuza I. Some of the lines in his praises are those that belonged to King Sobhuza I:

### ***Izibongo ZikaSomhlolo (Sobhuza I)***

1. *USobhuza mgezen' izandla nezinyawo*
2. *Niyambona wonakele,*
3. *Uhamb' emalibeni abathakathi*
4. *NgawoMkhiza noMabhoko.*

Nyembezi 1968:149)

### **Translation**

#### **Praises for Somhlolo (Sobhuza I)**

Sobhuza should be washed hands and feet  
He has clearly displayed his being out of the way  
He has walked over witchdoctors' graves  
Of Mkhiza and Mabhoko.

According to Nyembezi (1958:130) who has records of praises for the two emaSwati kings i.e. Sobhuza I and Sobhuza II, the names Mkhiza and Mabhoko refer to some Sotho kings that were in the neighbourhood to emaSwati that Sobhuza I conquered. Regardless of the fact that Sobhuza II did not wage war against any nation, because of the praises above he simply receives accolades not just for entertainment but to make him aspire to be as brave as his grandfather. These are some of the many lines that refer to matters earlier than the reign of Sobhuza II. In essence, this strategy was and is still a way of setting

standards for the newly installed leader. This is not unique to Sobhuza II but it is a way of developing and moulding a king who is just taking over a position of traditional leadership.

As *imbongi* is expected to be very close to the kingship, more often than not, he stays with the royal house as he is required to observe all that occurs. He in effect travels around with the king. Besides being creative, an *imbongi* needs to be a sociable individual who can freely mingle with members of the nation. Here he is able to hear their perceptions of that ruler. The complaints about and commendations towards the king are all more easily uttered in ordinary citizens' gatherings. This gives him exposure to ordinary citizens' feelings about the king and his leadership as a whole. He uses his strategy and skill to compose some lines from what he has gathered at social gatherings. In this way the praises keep gaining more lines. Of course an *imbongi* for the royal house enjoys a unique status in the community at large.

While Mamba (1985:3), a renowned Swati scholar of folklore, describes an *imbongi* in the context of emaSwati, as a person who is born with the skill of composing and reciting the praises, she goes further to explain that some of the lines that *Imbongi* recites as lines of his making are constructed by the members of regiments. When the latter have converged on the royal palace they spend their time carrying out assignments that are to be performed nearby. In the evening they relax in their groups around the fire and Mamba asserts they use that moment as an opportune time for creating lines that end up being added to the king's praises. The official *imbongi* therefore chooses those that he finds to be of interest and befitting to add.

As in all other Nguni traditional culture and custom the *imbongi* has always been a man. One could take this to be inherent in the fact that men are the only people who are allowed close to the reigning king and royalty as a whole. Such behaviour is socialised into all growing girls so that even when they are adults they never attempt to approach close to the king and Queen Mother, unless

they are relatives. One other possibility could be that women are kept away from the king and queen because the former are being protected, since they are considered to be weak and vulnerable to any strong traditional medicine that the king and the Queen Mother are using. Women are in most cases kept away from royalty because they are perceived as people who may divulge the secrets of the kingship. One other possibility is that women are often suspected as sorcerers. In the labelling of women as witches Schapera (1959:241) says a witch is an *umtsakatsi* in Siswati, *muloi* (Sotho) and *umthakathi* in isiZulu and isiXhosa.

The witch is a *moloji* usually a woman, though possibly a man, who has inherited a peculiar disposition from her mother. She has a double personality. By day she is a normal, healthy person, quite unaware of the dreadful powers she possesses. But at night she becomes an evil creature.

This clearly indicates that witchcraft is associated with women. She too is alleged to have inherited this power from her mother. It is most important to state that *imbongi* enjoys special impunity even if he includes some lines that leave the subject of the praises puzzled. As mentioned, the praise singer does not just become a spokesperson of the nation but also serves as a mediator alerting the leader to some frustrations of the community as well as establishing loyalty amongst the community members. Cope (1968:28) succinctly states:

The special position of the praise singer (*imbongi*) enables him to criticize with impunity certain aspects of the chief's personality or actions, either by overt or covertly by the omission of praise.

This indeed confirms that *imbongi* cannot be a stranger from a different community but he must show loyalty to the king or kingship for his statements of rebuke to be considered objective, which will be the only way the leader will remain united to the led.

Some interesting innovations in the praise singer's role have been observed in present-day life that is dominated by modernity and technology. Praise singers

are now able to record their praises on electronic devices, which is an exercise that might assist emerging praise singers. However, it has not been possible to use the recorded praises instead of live performance of the *imbongi*. Another observation is that in the modern environment praises are also performed for political leaders as well as any other leaders. This has broadened the scope of the praises; recipients enjoy the remarkable effects of African praise poetry.

Amongst emaSwati there has been a shift from confining the duty of *kubonga* to the prerogative of the professional *imbongi*. In cases where the king or queen has travelled to other countries and abroad, a crew of journalists always travels with him/her. It has become a common occurrence that there are certain journalists who have the skill of praising, who seize an opportune moment and display their skills in praising the leader when the professional *imbongi* is not available. Amongst emaSwati one journalist who has displayed this skill is Qhawe Mamba who had been accompanying the king outside the country. Qhawe would burst into singing the praises of the king. This is very interesting since the journalist in that case assumes the role of *imbongi*. In most cases he will focus on performing those praises that are of the *Imbongi's* making. It must be stated that Mamba enjoyed a special relationship with King Mswati III; thus he had the liberty of crossing the line of his duty to perform as *imbongi* as well. It is difficult to imagine that a woman journalist could also do the same. Patriarchy and the subservient nature of African women become a stumbling block. It is taboo even to challenge this unfair discrimination on women in the name of culture.

The official *imbongi* enjoys the status of being considered as an educator, a politician, a source of social news, a negotiator, an adviser to both the leader and the nation, an historian, entertainer and a mediator and peace maker when there is need. The recited lines do not merely end up as praises but also emphasise moral standards expected from the leader as well as from his subjects.

Viewing the discussion above it is apparent that Nguni culture has predetermined roles that require both men and women to take responsibility for them. Women and men do not even need to discuss these roles as each member of society is groomed in that manner from childhood. The issue of praising the king and/or Queen Mother often remains a prerogative of men. This could be due to the fact that the leadership is idolised and considered as the core of the nation and is to be kept powerful at all times.

As women still suffer the stigma of menstruating they are disqualified from serving in close proximity to the king and Queen Mother. The belief is that when a woman is menstruating she is deemed unclean; thus she may not get close to the leadership as the belief is that she may weaken the traditional medicines that the royal leaders use to strengthen their positions. This is a belief that does not cloud Nguni royalties alone; Lindsey (1997:32) attests that:

Menstruation has been viewed as a disease of women and historically with suspicion, scorn and fear. In some contemporary cultures the menstruating woman is forbidden to mingle with others and must undergo ritual purification at the conclusion of her cycle. The medical literature has viewed this normal physical process as a pathology which victimizes women....the myths associated with it have not been dispelled even in the health care and scientific community.

Menstruation as stated above has a history of being viewed with scepticism as some men and women could not understand it. In fact, the fact that a menstruating woman is considered dirty during her days of menstruation, does shed some light on the facts mentioned. My view, stemming from this quotation, is that women themselves lose their confidence because of this perception. They therefore would rather keep away from royalty as they may in the end be blamed for weakening the power that the king and Queen Mother may have attained from traditional medicines. Those responsible for protocol would never agree to such involvement of women, as indicated. It must be noted that the woman poet, Thembekile Msibi, whose praises we have analysed in this study, she did not recite them in a public event, but has compiled them for a Siswati

folklore publication that she co-edited with Vilakati, titled *Giya Sigiye* (2006) which contains contributions from various authors.

The truth is that some women could be capable in praising and it would be unlikely that they would fail in doing so. Nevertheless, this does not excuse patriarchy from being partly contributory, to the distancing of women from the King in particular as the protocol is under the control of men.

Such discrimination that originates from these beliefs becomes responsible for the gender inequality that prevails even in modern institutions. It may be alleged that the stigmatisation that a woman suffers when menstruating may be part and parcel of the attitudes that men hold towards women. For instance, in a typical Siswati home the wife is obliged to keep away from her husband when menstruating as she may be accused of weaken his sexuality - for life. In some cultures she is not even supposed to cook for her husband.

It is for this reason that the praise singer will become an important individual in this study. His compositions will in a way provide the perceptions that members of the community hold towards a woman in leadership. Praises hailed at heroines, especially those in traditional leadership, will enable this research to make findings on the African community's view regarding women who excel in their leadership endeavours. It will also give credence to the view that heroism is not confined to physical strength, especially in this modern era.

#### **4.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The chapter has successfully given a perspective about what praise poetry embodies and also allowed the reader to understand that praise poetry possesses different elements, aspects and features that have remained integral to its existence even in the modern era.

The different types or genres of folk poetry have been explained as they feature and are used at different stages of the growth of an African child, regardless of sex or gender. The researcher also discussed the role and function of praise poetry in regulating the ills of society. The argument furthermore shed light on the foundation that women provide in the development of a growing *imbongi* who is expected to become a successful professional *imbongi*.

The influence of patriarchy in the divergent contexts from which praise poetry is composed has been argued. This debate also afforded a clear understanding of how women generally remain unfairly ignored when it comes to professional or formal praise poetry. The deliberation has also offered a precise understanding of the role played by praise singing in upholding the patriarchal status quo in African communities. Praise singing has been and still remains a prerogative of the male African man, never of a woman. Such a privilege can never be accepted as fair to women who are as talented as male formal praise singers.

Such a practice could in fact, be seen as responsible for rubbing in the stereotypical beliefs and perceptions. The growing generation may well remain fixated on these. Such practices at the worst make it very difficult even to promote transformation. The boys will grow up knowing that no woman is allowed close to the absolute leaders of the nation. The girls will also absorb an attitude that in the end disadvantages them as they end up lacking confidence to take on senior positions even in the labour environment. These views are responsible for the psychological being of a girl who will grow up socialised as inferior. Such low esteem is very difficult to cure. Such practices are more glaringly discriminatory than even those that take place in the family.

The absence of women in clan praises also creates deeper roots of gender inequality. The fact that there is no name of a grandmother in their clan praises is extremely negative for the growing children's minds. It contributes towards making women accept discrimination and abuse to which young women are vulnerable because they accept themselves as the weaker sex.



## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS OF ROYAL WOMEN'S PRAISE POEMS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented a detailed description of praise poetry. A variety of aspects were explored. The intention was to lay a firm foundation for this chapter which will focus on the analysis of praise poetry for women traditional leaders. This will be compared to those composed and recited for male leaders. The objective is to investigate the value of the story behind the poetry and at the same time to establish the difference in the poetic language. A comparative approach will be adopted in analysing the texts. The role played by the women in Nguni and African communities will serve as a reflection on women in traditional or in modern environments, deserve to be hailed with the similar praises that male leaders enjoy, in these communities.

We will examine the depiction of traditional women leaders in the praise poetry that at the formal level is composed by male bards. We will also look at the role played by such poetry in assessing the traditional leader's performance in her position. It is anticipated that the said poems will highlight how women in traditional leadership positions were perceived by their communities before the colonialists started to interfere with the ideology that they found prevailing amongst many African communities. It will also be useful to determine people's perceptions of their women leaders during the colonial period. This will be compared with the way they are perceived by their communities in the post-colonial era. The main question emerging is: how true is it that praise poetry that is often composed by a male praise singer who composes and sings praises for a woman leader, reflect certain patriarchal attitudes that communities hold towards women in leadership? Regarding the empowerment of the women of this era, another question is: what is the hurdle that blocks them from participating in the implementation of the government policies that

intend to emancipate them from the bondage of gender inequality? Furthermore, the analysis is intended to confirm the belief that women are worthy and possess all the qualities expected of any leader.

The investigation aims to demystify the belief often used by those who benefit from patriarchy when they discourage a woman from taking a position of power. Deserving women in leadership positions should be encouraged and supported – that is the thrust of this research.

In this study, we will use praise poems contained in published books amongst which there is Nyembezi's (1958) collection of kings' praises titled, *Izibongo zamakhosi*. Cope (1968) has published a collection and makes some analysis of Zulu praise poetry titled, *Izibongo - Zulu Praise Poems*. Vilakati and Msibi (2006) compiled the book *Giya Sigiye*, published in Siswati on the tradition and culture of emaSwati. Labotsibeni's praises used in this study are a combination of Nyembezi's collection, Matsebula's collection and Ginindza's article in which she made an in-depth analysis of these praises. Finally, some of the poems were obtained from researchers' studies. Turner (2003) and Masuku (2005) were used for praises especially those of ordinary people.

Discussions in this chapter will be supported by the womanist approach previously alluded to in chapter 2. It will certainly accord substance to the study of *tibongo* of the Siswati and isiZulu royal women to be analysed.

## **5.2 EMASWATI ROYAL WOMEN**

Swaziland is the home country of most emaSwati. It is one of the few countries in Africa that still boasts of having a sustained monarchy in its leadership. The king of Swaziland always reigns with his mother who is referred to as The Queen Mother and *Indlovukazi* or *Indlovukati*. The term could be loosely translated to mean a 'She elephant', as Ginindza (1996:136) points out. In this study we will use *Indlovukazi* when referring to the Queen Mother.

As has been stated above, the king of eSwatini reigns side by side with his mother. This has been the case since time immemorial. The Indlovukazi is a very significant figure in the leadership. The position of the Queen Mother is clearly described by Matsebula (1972:13) in these words:

The chosen lady assumes the office of indlovukazi. During the minority period of the new king (usually he must be chosen young and unmarried) the late king's mother, that is, the one who was indlovukazi before the king died, becomes the queen regent, to be helped by the late king's senior brother, who must be officially appointed to office by the same royal council.

If the king dies and his successor is still a minor, the chosen Indlovukazi is put on the throne to rule the nation. During that time, she is referred to as the Queen Regent, as she rules the country in consultation with the royal structures set up to run it. However, the procedure of consulting these structures is not unique to her. The reigning king also does not rule as an individual but now and again consults the relevant royal structures for their views.

Under normal circumstances when Indlovukazi is a Queen Regent, her leadership skills are tested not only by the royal family structures but also by the majority of eSwatini who are no strangers to discrimination and subordination of women. There are those who have intentions of taking advantage of the fact that she is a woman who, in their view, will not be as strong as a male leader. She therefore needs to be judicious so as to withstand such opposition. As the most senior National Leader of eSwatini she is also vulnerable to manipulation by the royal members, particularly those who want to pull her down. In her position as regent she represents her minor son. Siswati culture and custom dictates that at the rightful age the successor who had been a minor should be installed as the supreme leader of eSwatini. This was the case when Labotsibeni Mdluli became a Queen Regent, during the years when her son Bhunu, was still a minor. When Bhunu was of age, he was installed as king. Besides her regency during which, she was the supreme leader she continued to be the Queen Mother during the reign of her son.

A womanist would raise the issue that according to the African custom praise singers (*timbongi*) are males, even of a woman leader such as Indlovukazi Labotsibeni. One could argue that when a woman has become a leader of the nation she is perceived as having moved to the male domain. In other words, the Indlovukazi of emaSwati is hailed by praises that are composed and performed by men even when there are many talented women praise singers. This is a practice, which is determined by culture: that, women do not take part in the praising of royal leaders. Even though it is said to be tradition, one cannot avoid thinking that this practice is reinforced by patriarchy since men are the decision makers in most cases in the Siswati community.

This chapter is an attempt to fathom the deeper meaning of praises for Queen Mother Labotsibeni which are the embodiment of her *bona fide* leadership qualities. This analysis is in effect, an attempt to comprehensively externalise the deeper meaning of her praises which in the African context could be regarded as a measurement of male or female leadership qualities. Later in this section we will look at praises that are composed and recited for Indlovukazi LaTfwala, the mother of the current leader of emaSwati, Mswati III.

### **5.2.1 Labotsibeni – Gwamile LaMdluli**

In this section we will pay attention to Labotsibeni who is also known as Gwamile and LaMdluli as she was born of the Mdluli clan. She is one of the female traditional leaders of emaSwati who left an indelible legacy in her country and beyond. After a brief history of this heroine the focus will fall on her *tibongo* that we hope will tell us more about her personality and leadership skills.

#### **5.2.1.1 Brief Historical Background of Labotsibeni**

Labotsibeni was a daughter of Matsanjana, a brother to Chief Mvelase, a well known general of Mswati. She was named Labotsibeni because at the time of

her birth, Labotsibeni's father, Matsanjana was away with one of King Mswati's regiments, attacking a Pedi chief, Tsibeni. LaMabuza, her mother, moved with her children to stay at Ludzidzini where Labotsibeni was exposed to court etiquette and gained an insight into the politics of that time as noted in Kuper (1978:18-19).

It is useful to provide a brief history on the state of affairs in Swaziland, before Indlovukazi Labotsibeni ascended to the throne. She was one of the wives of Mbandzeni. During Mbandzeni's time Swaziland experienced an influx of white people. Mbandzeni tried his best to block this threatening influx but failed. Kuper (1947:24) points out that before Mbandzeni died he mourned the loss of his kingship. It is alleged that just before his death he uttered the words: "The Swazi kingship ends with me." What made King Mbandzeni pessimistic about the future of his dynasty is summarised as follows in Kuper (1947:24):

The history of the concessions in Swaziland is probably without parallel; the king and his council signed away the entire country and all rights over future development. Swazi (people) talk of the 'documents that killed us'. ....Early concessions dealt primarily with land and minerals. Later more especially in the years when a paid and trusted European adviser was in control (1887-9), a prodigious number of industrial monopolies were granted. Some of the land was for grazing, others for leases, and a few outright transfers; the period of use varied from fifty years to as long as grass grows and water runs; the country was not surveyed, and the boundaries were vaguely defined.

Mbandzeni was right to lament about the dark cloud hanging over his kingship. He had made the major blunder of giving away land to the white people. He had not done this deliberately but had been deceived by the whites who took advantage of his illiteracy. Kuper cited by Ginindza (1996:141) shares the same sentiments:

The land issue was complicated by the fact that land grants "dealt with principles of tenure shaped in a foreign culture; leasehold, freehold sale, and private ownership were concepts that did not exist among the Swazi." The money paid was considered as tribute to the king by the

Swazi whereas to the whites it secured them the rights they desired” this conflict of cultures in part if not in a greater extent lay at the root of the land question and to the disadvantage of the Swazi as western principles were subsequently upheld. Loss of the great part of the land undermined the political authority of the Swazi ruler and sovereignty.

According to Kuper (1978:17) Labotsibeni was married to Mbandzeni; her son Bhunu was the heir who would succeed his father as leader. Both supreme leaders of emaSwati were cheated into giving away land as well as rights to the sovereignty of emaSwati. The challenges mentioned above needed a strong leader who would face them with courage and diligence.

A brief background to what preceded the ascendancy of Labotsibeni as Queen Regent will afford a better understanding of her *tibongo* (praise poems/praises). After the death of Mbandzeni King Bhunu began to rule, but only for a short period until he died, leaving his only son, Nkhotfotjeni, a minor. It was unavoidable that Labotsibeni should become Queen Regent. She had become the Queen Mother when her son King Bhunu was installed as king of emaSwati. After the death of King Bhunu in 1899, Labotsibeni became the Queen Regent and served until her minor grandson Nkhotfotjeni reached his majority. She was in this position until 1921 when she handed over the leadership of emaSwati to Nkhotfotjeni who was installed as King Sobhuza II.

It is interesting to observe how the royalty was able to overlook the existing culture and base their choice on their own assessment of the ability of Labotsibeni. According to Siswati culture and customs, a king is chosen after his father's death. This is done, by appointing his mother who then serves as his Queen Mother during his reign. One of the criteria followed is that the future king must be his mother's only child. Ginindza (1996:136) confirms this by stating that:

It is the mother of the king who is chosen amongst the many wives of the deceased king and should normally come from the 'queen-bearing clans'. These are some of the key principles among others, which guide the choice of the Swazi heir to the throne.”

The Mdluli clan, for example, was not a king-bearing clan, even though they were renowned warriors. According to Ginindza (1996:155) it is, therefore, curious to note that although Labotsibeni bore four children, Bhunu, Malunge, Lomvazi and a daughter Tongotongo and did not belong to a king-bearing clan, but she was chosen to be Queen Mother during the reign of her son Bhunu. She definitely did not qualify for this position. However, after the members of the royal house had debated and argued, they concluded that she possessed the qualities that were much needed at that time in the history of the Dlamini kingship. Ginindza (1996:155) further clarifies:

She was chosen because of her outstanding intelligence, ability, character and experience. Without formal education, her wisdom, her perception, her wit and determination were already recognized and respected. ... Labotsibeni's husband, Mbandzeni, had also expressed a wish that Labotsibeni be appointed as *Indlovukazi*. Such deviation from the customary principles says a lot about Labotsibeni and her God given ability.

It must be taken into account that the process of choosing the rightful Queen Mother amongst the other co-wives is also based on her behaviour, including amongst other features her generosity and kindness. This is well stated by Kuper (1947:103) in the words:

Good character usually carries most weight when the legal position is not very clear; bad character on the other hand, may cause a woman to lose the position to which she is entitled by pedigree or mode of marriage.

It has been noted that the young man who becomes the king is not appointed, but his mother is the one who earns it by being a good wife to her in-laws in particular. Bad behaviour committed by his mother may disqualify him from becoming the monarch.

It can be deduced from the information given above that the culture could be overlooked so as to benefit the nation, in terms of the personality of this specific wife to Mbandzeni. The state of affairs in the kingdom at that time was serious as white people were flocking into the kingdom in numbers. Large portions of

land were occupied by them. Even the dignity of the kingship, had been tarnished by the whites who were in the country, but not paying homage to the king. The country was desperate for a leader of special character to successfully lead the country out of that mess. The main challenge that Labotsibeni faced in her governance was that of the land taken away from emaSwati by the white people. They had successfully cheated Mbandzeni into believing that they were temporarily using it. However as time went on they claimed that they had bought the land from him. Her appointment tells us a lot about this woman of substance who was presented to the nation as *Indlovukazi* and Queen Regent of emaSwati on 3 September 1890.

The role of Labotsibeni as the Queen Regent was to preside over the emaSwati nation and all other structures in the royal house that assisted in managing the country. When she took over, she was faced with many challenges. In the eyes of many, emaSwati traditional culture is oppressive and yet it was the very same demonised culture that allowed a woman of virtue to be chosen to perform a noble task. It goes without saying that, she had to consult the various structures involved in the running of the kingdom before announcing her decisions. Fortunately, the royal family and government structures respected and supported her even when they differed from her on some issues. She was a woman of character who always had a clear vision for the future of her country. Great historians such as Kuper (1947 & 1963), Matsebula (1976) and Grotpeter (1975) all concur that Labotsibeni was an outstanding leader who resolved serious issues and brought back the integrity of emaSwati as a nation. It is noteworthy to mention that her kindness and generosity also worked to her advantage.

We will use the womanist approach and focus on *tibongo* that were composed for this outstanding woman during the years of her reign over emaSwati. It should be recalled that the praise singer or *imbongi* does not compose the praises in a vacuum but cannot avoid being influenced by the attitudes and perceptions that his community holds towards the leader. It is general



knowledge that praises highlight the dignity of the leader praised. Praise poetry composed for those in authority plays the significant role of unifying members of the community under their leadership. This form of poetry does not merely plead for acceptance and respect from his or her subjects, but it also enhances courage and self-confidence in the particular leader. It is unfortunate that efforts of getting the names of the *timbongi* (praise singers) who composed praises for this great woman leader of eSwati, Queen Mother Labotsibeni. Even Ginindza (1996:139) uses a version that was recited by Maboya Fakudze of eNkhanini. Fakudze performed the version of praises that Ginindza used for her article. Otherwise, the composers are not known. In the case of the version that I used for this analysis, I combined lines from three versions of Indlovukazi Labotsibeni's praises that are found in different publications. The publications that I used are Ginindza (1969:138-139), Matsebula (1990:25-26) and Nyembezi (1968:156).

#### 5.2.1.2 Critical Analysis of Praises for Labotsibeni

Various versions of *Tibongo taLabotsibeni* have been merged to make one poem that will be used for the purposes of this analysis. This is how the poet perceives this powerful woman of eSwati:

1. *Mlunguti wendlovu kuvaliwe,*
2. *Kuvalwe ngemaphama etibhamu,*

#### **Translation**

The one who peeps through to see an elephant in total cover  
An elephant covered by the back part of guns

At the very beginning of her praises Indlovukazi Labotsibeni is said to be a person who peeps at an elephant that is hidden away from people. An elephant is well known for its large size and for being strong amongst the members of the animal kingdom. Her designation as Indlovukazi places her in the position of being brave and not scared of the male elephant. In these lines Labotsibeni is said to be peeping at an elephant covered by the backs of the guns. In other

words nothing stops her from pursuing her intentions. A gun is associated with war and death. In this poem Labotsibeni is depicted as a person who does not fear even a dangerous male elephant that is covered by weapons. As supreme leader of the country, if it had become necessary for emaSwati to wage war during her reign she would have been the one to make the final decision, in consultation of course. In these two lines, the Queen Mother is projected as a person who does not fear anything that may be of harm to her people. This is a very interesting remark on her behaviour, as she instantly seems to shift into the male domain. Men are traditionally associated with bravery. Here we have a woman leader excelling in displaying her valour and even portrayed as a person who is not scared of war, as is expected of a leader. However, one could raise the argument that Labotsibeni is not actually accepted as a leader as she only peeps through to see the elephant but does not have a close encounter with it. Another meaning that comes to mind is that she could be seen, as manifesting her desire to be in authority even before the royal family had considered her for the position. However, Ginindza (1996:144) links these lines to the time when her son Bhunu was king. She was worried about her son's leadership style. Although she was unhappy, she could not confront him directly. Bhunu on the other hand is said, to have retreated to his distant residence known as Mampondweni. She could only watch him do that, rather than reprimand him or call him to order.

1. *Mkalabhane ongadinwa ngamaveyisi*
2. *Mgwami longavutfwa nasetiko*
3. *Lowehlule timbita tebelungu nemaSwati*
4. *Mtimba longadzabuki yinhlamba yemaSwati*
5. *Njuzalala kaMndindane kaLuvuno*

### **Translation**

You constantly wounded who tires not from blows  
 Mgwami the tough one who does not soften from being cooked  
 You who defeated pots of white people and emaSwati  
 You whose body does not bear scars from insults of emaSwati  
 You the tall one born of Mndindane of Luvuno

These lines highlight Labotsibeni's strength. The verb *kalabha* (scrub) denotes scratching, with the intention to hurt. The name Mkalabhane in this context refers to the fact that she never changed her mind even after insults had been hurled at her by the nation and the royalty. She would not abandon her views but would resolutely face challenges. Her other name, Gwamile, denotes being tough, not responding to the process of cooking which normally softens any type of food. 'Mgwami' is therefore a short form of her full name Gwamile, and is used in this line to highlight the fact that she was unshakable as a leader. According to Ginindza (1996:139) she attained this name from the way she handled the affairs of emaSwati nation as a Queen Mother and as the Queen Regent. She was not easily intimidated. It is for that reason that the idea of not being easily softened is developed in lines 2 and 4 which elaborate that she was not frightened even by the whites who easily intimidated African leaders when they arrived in their territories. Her body is said to have been resistant to the effects of the scars that were made on it by her opponents who insulted her and tried to sway her from her views. According to womanist views, Labotsibeni represents a new breed of women. She is able to rise above all the insults and criticism by the royal family and the Swati nation that were meant to discourage her. Instead of giving up, she remained focused on her objectives in her mind.

EmaSwati men tend to be stubborn and do not easily accept a view expressed by a woman. Dlamini (1995:105) comments about a Siswati woman, particularly a married one:

In marriage the woman forfeits her existence. All her rights disappear and she has to lead an artificial life. She has to pretend to enjoy this life though she is bitter inside. The most important thing about women in marriage is that they have the duty to make it a success so as not to be labeled as failures. ...Swazi society is still very oppressive to women as human beings, which suggests that those who are enlightened still have much to struggle for in order to achieve transformation in this society....

Since this observation was made as recently as 1995, one could imagine the pressure of the cultural and traditional expectations that Labotsibeni was obliged to face during her time. It must be borne in mind that she was married

to the royal family which was a strong custodian of Swazi culture and norms and which expected her to conform. She did not do so. Her height, referred to in the last line above, alludes to the fact that she maintained her “height” in the serious debates which she engineered as a participant. She was always in control and would not be shaken. In these lines we are reminded that she was a descendant of Luvuno, one of her paternal ancestors. In fact, Luvuno also features in her clan praises, which run as follows:

1. Mdluli
2. Bhekiswako
3. Sukuta
4. Luvuno
5. Gembe
6. Mlisane

As seen in this clan praise the *imbongi* saw it befitting to use one of her maiden heroes, which illustrates the fact she was still associated with her maiden family. If one pleads with a woman by using her maiden hero's name found in her clan praises she immediately softens and pays attention to the plea. From knowing the functions of clan praises it becomes clear that the *imbongi* could have been softening Labotsibeni up or was being sarcastic to her. Accordingly, she was expected to accept this part of her praises, as it is still according to emaSwati custom that a woman remains an ambassador of her clan in her marital household. It was in accordance with that custom that Labotsibeni belonged to her paternal lineage of Mdluli even after marriage. This could be the voice of the nation through the *imbongi* to make her change her behaviour as it was alleged to be unbecoming. The good or bad behaviour a woman displays in her marriage is attributed to the type of upbringing that she received from her parents.

Her behaviour afforded an indication that she was a strong-willed woman who did not allow any force to change her way of thinking. It must also be

remembered, that such statements were intended to prove to the community at large that she was constantly reprimanded for her actions that were not acceptable in the eyes of not just to the royal family alone but they were not accepted to emaSwati at large.

1. *Nhlitiyo lebovu njengeyemamba*
2. *Mamba kayikhonkothwa*
3. *Ikhonkothwa ngabezizwe, nebezizwana*
4. *Mahlasela ngelilanga emakhosi ahlasele ngemphi*

### **Translation**

The one who is red hearted like a mamba snake  
Mamba which is not barked at by your own kind  
It is barked at by strange, powerful and less powerful nations  
You fight the nation by drought while other kings fight by wars

The metaphor of a mamba snake is refers to the perception that she was firm and rigid. It is highly poisonous as mentioned earlier. Enemies of her country could not afford to challenge her. Looking closely at this metaphor it emerges that *imbongi* is using this image so as to place Labotsibeni at the same level as male kings who had ruled the country with wisdom and success. She is projected as a leader who is feared by her enemies. Some commentators may consider this metaphor as cruel criticism, considering the fact that Labotsibeni was a woman leader. Such metaphors of fierce and dangerous animals are often used in praising male leaders to express their might. These kinds of metaphors are normally a preserve of outstanding males and kings. In essence, Labotsibeni occupied that space as she worked tirelessly for the restoration and sustainability of the Dlamini kingship.

Because of Gwamile's unique way of doing things, some members of the royal family and emaSwati nation did not always welcome her. The first three lines above develop the idea of her toughness and rigidity. Ginindza in her article (1996:141) attests that the emaSwati people regarded the British as strange but powerful as a nation. EmaSwati also considered the Boers as a strange, foreign but less powerful as a nation. The first three lines above are, therefore, referring to the fact that Labotsibeni had to face the British as well as the Boer nations.

This was due to the intricate issues of the land that had been given away by her husband Mbandzeni as stated above. Labotsibeni is said to have hated racial inequality and valued human dignity and social justice Ginindza (1996:142). She had the responsibility of solving the complex land issues as a leader who was aware of the value of freedom. Even though the image of a mamba snake, may sound like an exaggeration when applied to Labotsibeni but it is true that she fought and won her battles against her enemies. However, I find it proper and just to liken the two nations that interfered with the freedom of emaSwati to that of dogs that barked at Labotsibeni. That comparison projects the status of the British and the Boers to that of barking dogs because of their condemnable colonialist practices. What was good is that because of her feared power, they could only bark at her and could not bite.

There is a strong belief amongst emaSwati that both the king and the Queen Mother exercise full control over the weather conditions. Ginindza (1996:152) shares these sentiments in her article. She elaborates that emaSwati believe that there is male and female rain that exists in their cosmology. The male rain is that which is stormy, accompanied by lightning that can destroy life, while that which is gentle and down pouring is labelled female. During the time of Labotsibeni's regency, drought resulted in a serious famine across the country. Because of the attitude of the royal family towards her personality, the drought was attributed to her evil nature. The royal household and the nation concluded that because of her fighting attitude she was the one who had stopped rain from falling and thus deliberately brought starvation to the nation, particularly the people who were opposed to her style of reign and views. It is for that reason that the praise singer included the line that alludes to the fact that Labotsibeni fought the nation by allowing drought unlike other kings that engage in a battle. The mystery associated with her power as a Queen Mother to control the weather conditions was used to discredit her leadership skills in this instance. However, it is interesting to note that the poet refers to her as *inkhosi* just like all other male *emakhosi*. That indicates the fact that she was nevertheless,

accepted as the supreme leader of emaSwati and was accorded status similar to that of other kings who had reigned over this nation.

There was nothing new in this negative attitude of emaSwati whose patriarchal bias kept resurfacing in many forms. The accusations were aimed at pulling down this woman in the process of demonstrating the strength that some women possess. She was generally labelled as evil hearted and ruthless in order to portray her as a killer to anyone close to her. This attitude is prevalent whenever a woman leader is strong-willed and is able to stand for what she believes in. This furnishes evidence that the patriarchal community feels challenged when a woman displays such attributes. It fears that she may overthrow the male members from their seats.

In the eyes of a womanist, though, she had remarkable strength and continued to demonstrate her rare leadership skills. In these lines, however, other women are in a way advised not to admire and approve such behaviour. They are discouraged from emulating her.

1. *Wafunga uBusobengwe*
2. *Wafunga uSikhunyane kaBhekiswako*
3. *Zulu lana kuMkhoma*
4. *Lamshiya Mendisi*
5. *Ngamasongo ezinhliziyo*
6. *Avutha umlilo*

### **Translation**

You swore by Busobengwe  
You swore by Sikhunyane of Bhekiswako  
Your rain fell on Mkhoma hills  
And by-passed the Mendisi hills  
Because of your swearing that burns like fire

These lines continue to emphasise the fact that Labotsibeni used her ability to control rain to punish her nation. It is alleged that the rain fell in some areas and left others in a drought. She was alleged to have done this deliberately because

she held a grudge against some people. According to these lines she is alleged to have sworn by her forefathers; Busobengwe, Sikhunyane born of Bhekiswako, which indicates that she was angry and did, what she did to punish those that she had begrudged. The last two lines of the lines above liken her emotions to fire that burns. The fire image highlights the perception that the royal family and some members of the nation had towards her style of governance. Such a statement was included to either warn her to change her way of ruling or to discredit her and make her unpopular.

These attitudes are still common in the communities which believe in patriarchy and want to maintain the status quo. Even today a woman's rise or progress is often not considered as genuine or honest. She is often suspected to have advanced because of conducting an affair with a man in authority or of practising witchcraft. Women should be aware that this is a way of blocking them from rising to higher levels of authority. According to the womanist view these are the challenges that women should heed and be strong enough to aspire to overcome at all costs.

1. *Zitho zimcondo, zimsolotja*
2. *Onganyawo zibovu zinjengezegwalagwala*
3. *Titfo timbhobho njengetendlovu*
4. *Lubhalule emanti labovu*
5. *Unyatsel' iMbabane yadvungana*

### **Translation**

Your thin legs are of beautiful shape  
Your feet are red as those of a lourie bird  
Your legs are as big as those of an elephant  
Lubhalule there the water runs red  
Your step befouled the Mbabane River

In these lines the praise singer decided to focus on Labotsibeni's legs and the discrepancy between their sizes. In one line her legs are described as thin which is not an attractive feature of a Siswati woman. Ginindza (1996:140) asserts that due to Gwamile's frequent travelling throughout the country, and especially to meetings in Mbabane with the colonial administration, the *imbongi*



noted that her legs were thin and of beautiful shape. This description could be interpreted as negative for an African woman and is therefore being used as a statement to blemish her looks. However, this line could also be interpreted as confirming her masculine body as she had already been considered as such, in the lines discussed above. In another line her legs are considered to be as big as those of an elephant. The compositions of these lines may be interpreted as a way of highlighting the controversy that surrounded her life. In line 3 above her legs are being made bigger as credit for her performance in leading the country – she is likened to an elephant whose enormous steps cannot be ignored. While some people were not pleased with her excellence others were firm in support of her leadership. Her feet were described as red because she had to walk up and down on red dust from her palace to the offices of the white men in Mbabane Ginindza (1996:140). These lines further give the audience an idea of how strong she was.

Along the Mbabane River, there was an iron ore mine that had started to operate. Although the mine made revenue for the nation, the river became polluted and the water became rusty. This became an item for use by the *imbongi*. Some explain this as discredit because communities along the river had started blaming her for having given permission for the operation of the mine. On the contrary it may also be seen as being to her credit as her decision to allow the operation of the mine was benefiting citizens of the country, especially those in the neighborhood of the river. Drawing the audience's attention to her legs is a poetic strategy to make the audience realise that whatever she decides on, is of benefit to the nation. Even though at face value it could be interpreted as stating the fact that she was personally responsible for the pollution of the Mbabane River in order to frustrate the communities who used the water. All these may have been attempts of the *imbongi* to be interpreted as if he casts her in a bad light, yet he intended the opposite.

1. *Gijima mgana kaMhlahlo*
2. *Uyobikela bakini ufike uthi:*
3. *"Indlovukazi yakaZombodze ayidli lutho*

4. *Ufice idla izinsiba zezintethe*
5. *AMalangeni akoDlamini*
6. *Asabambe imilomo*
7. *Nezalukazi zikhuza imihlolo*
8. *Ngendlala engavundwa*

## Translation

Run messenger born of Mhlahlo  
 Report to your people that:  
 “The Queen Mother at Zombodze has nothing to eat  
 You found her eating feathers of grasshoppers”  
 The Dlamini, the children of the Sun  
 Are still astonished  
 And old women exclaim in surprise  
 At the famine at which you can bear no guilt

In the lines above the *imbongi* tries to rectify the damage he had done through the false accusations we have already discussed. Here the *imbongi* attests to the fact that everyone should be aware that the Queen Mother was also affected by the drought. The “forerunner” is given an instruction to inform the nation that indeed the Indlovukazi also has nothing to eat. This is commendable as it somewhat exonerates her from a number of the accusations leveled against her earlier on. The hyperbole of “eating feathers” is used to foreground this view. Such extreme weather conditions had surprised the royalty itself as well as elderly members of the Swazi nation who had never experienced it before. Unfortunately, no individual could be blamed for the famine. This change of tone is one of the strategies used by a renowned *imbongi* who ought to be seen as criticising as well as eulogising his subject of praise.

1. *Vika amacebo ala bezizwe nezizwana*
2. *Makhabane longadzinwa ngemaveyisi*
3. *Bebatsi batawumdzindza umkhaba*
4. *BoNkoseluhlaza banaPiti Jubheli*
5. *Tikhundlakhundla tabologwaja ngabologwaja*
6. *Wena owehlula amabandla eNdlovu*

## Translation

Evade the tricks of powerful and less powerful nations  
Makhabane who does not get tired of blows  
They said they were going to thrash your big tummy  
Those were Nkoseluhlaza and Piti Jubheli  
You with multiple places to hide in like a hare  
You who defeated the councillors of the elephant

The *imbongi* seems to have been really surprised by the way in which Labotsibeni was adamant and firm. In the lines quoted above her unyielding nature was not witnessed by ordinary people alone but even by the royal councillors. Other scenarios presented in the lines above, of her uncompromising stance occurred, when she confronted two white men Nkoseluhlaza and Piti Jubhele.

Amongst emaSwati a pot belly is a sign of living the high life and possessing riches. In this line Labotsibeni is assumed to have a pot belly that her enemies wanted to remove by giving her endless challenges. It is clear that Nkoseluhlaza and Piti Jubheli thought they were going to succeed in defeating Labotsibeni who had proven obdurate in her intentions. Ginindza (1996:142) confirms that she made untiring efforts and was determined, regardless of all the difficulties, to regain the rights of her people.

It is stated in the history books amongst whose being Ginindza (1996) that Labotsibeni employed a secretary and had legal advisers. She had realised that under the changed political, social and economic conditions she ought to modify her strategy in fighting her battles. It was for that reason that she became close to an intelligent lawyer, Pixley ka Seme who together with Richard Msimang was amongst the founders of the South African Native Congress in 1912 that was later known as the African National Congress Ginindza (1996:43). Labotsibeni was able to offer financial support to Seme's newspaper called *Abantu Baatho* that was first published in 1912. It was because of this publication that the grievances of emaSwati regarding the concessionaires steadily gained publicity and in this way assisted in building up a case. It was

therefore befitting for the *imbongi* to call Labotsibeni a hare that had many places to hide. It is a credible observation that Labotsibeni deserved after she had displayed her astuteness and rigidity.

In most history books on emaSwati the biggest mistake reported to have been committed by Labotsibeni was, to insist on letting her grand-child Nkhotfotjeni go to Lovedale to further his studies. She did this much against the wish of most members of the royal family as well of the nation. In fact, she had started by opening a national school next to the royal homestead. Even though at that time there were missionary schools that were already operating in the country, she insisted on building a national one. She feared that if she sent her grandson to one of the missionary schools, he would be associated with that particular denomination which would later compromise his neutrality and objectivity as a leader of the Swazi nation. As Ginindza (1996:47) puts it:

The first schools in the country were mission schools operated by different religious denominations. Labotsibeni perceived the different Christian sects as divisive elements of society and competitive in their efforts of winning over souls. She feared division of her people particularly that which would result if a ruler was attached to a particular Christian denomination. She was determined to preserve national unity and hence established a non-denominational school for the education of the young king to be and other leaders.

Labotsibeni also feared indoctrination by that missionary group which would exercise an influence on the future king of emaSwati. The first national school in, which the future king attended and graduated from was a primary school that Labotsibeni opened next to the royal kraal. Labotsibeni's reason for sending Nkhotfotjeni to Lovedale was that he would eventually be king of educated people, so he too needed to be educated. The royalty and the nation feared for the safety of the growing king. Evidence of how she was able to foresee challenges even for her grandson is found when the praise singer created the lines which precede these paragraphs.

1. *Mafunga abocole ngentandane*
2. *Mhla ilishiya lelive*
3. *Mhla bekusola Bekusolisisa*
4. *Bevungama bethi:*
5. *“Uyazifohlozela amazinyane endlovu”*
6. *Sisho ngebelu lukaMavuso*
7. *Ngezwe lengane kaDlamini*
8. *Mhla ifulathela uMdimba*
9. *Iyofunda izikhali zokuhlabana kwelaseLovedale*
10. *Izalukazi zelul’ imichilo*
11. *Kanti uNgwane uyamthandisisa*

### **Translation**

You swore upon the only orphan  
 The day he left the country  
 As they strongly blamed you  
 Amidst rebukes that:  
 “You yourself devour the calves of the elephant”  
 We boast of the descendant of Mavuso  
 The day it turned its back on the Mdimba Mountain  
 Going to learn the spears of victory at Lovedale  
 Old ladies untied their hide skirt ropes  
 Yet you love Ngwane with all your heart

These lines indicate that the royalty and the nation were displeased with Labotsibeni’s decision. However, these people could not openly oppose her as she had already made up her mind. The line in quotation marks is the expression of what the nation accused her for intending to kill the heir apparent and they felt was wrong. She insisted on doing this regardless of the alarm that prevailed amongst the royal members and the nation. This statement was intended to voice the rumour that some of her opponents spread around, so as to increase the support of the group that stood against her leadership.

Another pertinent issue, already mentioned, was that when her son Bhunu took over as king of emaSwati his behaviour and leadership style were not acceptable to his mother, Labotsibeni. Ginindza (1996:144) states that there was tension between the two. Bhunu spent a lot of time hunting in the forests with his regiment, Ingulube. Labotsibeni was opposed to all this because she had already identified many issues that demanded the attention of the supreme

leader of that time, Bhunu. His untimely death left the royal family and the nation suspicious of foul play.

They alleged that Labotsibeni had killed her son Bhunu because she did not approve of his style of governance. The line in quotation marks refers to the allegation that she had first killed Bhunu and was now planning to kill the future king, Nkhotfotjeni. The literal meaning of this line is: 'you are easily biting for yourself the calves of the elephant'. In other words, she was killing the royal offsprings because she had no one to account to. It was not the right time for Nkhotfotjeni to go to Lovedale to further his education. People suspected there were sinister motives behind sending him away from his nation. They felt she did this because she wanted to remain on the throne for life. Labotsibeni was not affected by such unfounded allegations she continued to pursue her dream of sending her grandson to be empowered for his future responsibilities.

She foresaw unavoidable coming changes and could not just sit and watch things go wrong. For example, she could see that the numbers of white people in the country were increasing and that many of her people were being influenced to follow Western ways. This time the *imbongi*, who always acts as the spokesperson of the nation, was expressing the fears and views of emaSwati. Labotsibeni succeeded to persuade the royal councilors to realise how important it was for Nkhotfotjeni to be sent to further his studies. In effect, it was through this adamancy that she was able to shape the future of the young heir who was going to be king of emaSwati. Education was going to make him wiser and better skilled to run a nation that would consist of many educated members.

However, the *imbongi* changes his tone by stating that when Labotsibeni insisted on sending the future king of emaSwati to Lovedale she was clearly showing her love and concern for the nation. It is the emaSwati view found in Matsebula (1972) Kuper (1947) and Ginindza (1996), that Labotsibeni was an

outstanding leader who solved serious problems that would have paralysed the kingship.

She earned these praises because of her stubborn fairness and unparalleled foresight, and became an epitome of democratic values, a role model and a symbol of hope not only for the empowerment of women, but also for their total liberation from oppression and all negative perceptions. Labotsibeni embraced change and declared her willingness to transform eSwatini and be in alignment with the changing social trends. This is a legacy that Labotsibeni left for those who believe in an African woman as a leader and a protector of her children within the context of a family. The major question is whether the later leaders are aware of this prestigious legacy that Labotsibeni left behind.

Labotsibeni's distinctive and exceptional leadership skills are appropriately, summed up in the words of Ginindza (1996:136):

Two factors account for Labotsibeni's achievements: her position as Ndlovukazi and her indomitable character. Both the Swazi and the whites of her time commented on her outstanding intelligence, her mental grip, perception, wit, determination, self-assurance, and energy, her skill in conducting discussions, her shrewd judgment and ability to unravel the most intricate Swazi disputes, her adamancy, indomitability, and her dignity even at old age as well as her powers of rain-making.

The citation highlights the uniqueness of Labotsibeni and her remarkable character that convincingly displayed that she was a woman of exceptional leadership ability.

#### 5.2.1.3 Concluding Remarks

It is clear, that culture is likely to be altered particularly by the controlling clan. This may be done for whatever reason that proves to be of significance at that time. Labotsibeni's case demonstrates that indeed we do have African women who possess strong leadership skills and who are dedicated to serve their communities. The discussion gives substance to the fact that a woman can excel in her leadership even in situations where opposition and intimidation

faces her. One other point demonstrated in this discussion is that women should believe in themselves and be goal oriented. Labotsibeni was an excellent icon of transformation in Nguni communities, the African continent and the diaspora. The discussion has also given ample proof that the colonialists partly contributed towards making the African women feel inferior as they were pursuing their strategy of taking Africa into their control. Labotsibeni was able to fight and succeed in the battle against white domination. Even the royal family could not swing Labotsibeni easily. She displayed beyond any doubt that women can excel in leadership as long as they are given a chance to showcase their skills and strength. This is a legacy for current women to take advantage of. Women of this era are often discriminated against by those in power, especially, in leadership positions. In traditional leadership, most women's cases are dismissed by advancing arguments of the prescriptions of traditional customs, cultural practices and ancestral beliefs. Resorting to these prescriptions is a way of trying to maintain the status quo.

Labotsibeni has remained an icon who represents a whole range of people yesterday, today and tomorrow. African women should take advantage of the legacy left by such individual leaders who never succumbed to patriarchy even though they had never been to formal western schools.

## **5.2.2 Ntombi – LaTfwala the Reigning Queen Mother in Swaziland**

In this section, the focus will be placed on the praise poetry that is composed and performed for the current Indlovukazi LaTfwala, mother of the reigning king of Swaziland Mswati III.

### **5.2.2.1 Brief Historical Background of Ntombi LaTfwala**

The current Indlovukazi of emaSwati, Ntombi LaTfwala, was born around 1950. She was widowed, at a very young age. She had been brought to eTjeni royal palace to assist LaMasuku, one of the most loved wives of King Sobhuza II.



While she performed the household chores around eTjeni royal palace, King Sobhuza could not resist her beauty and he decided to make her one of his wives. It is remarkable that she became the mother of the successor to Sobhuza II. There was controversy on the steps taken by the powerful *Liqoqo* at that time. *Liqoqo* as described by Matsebula (1972:17) is a structure that consists of senior members of the royal family, chiefs and advisers, and its duty is to advise the royal family on serious matters like the one of succession. As indicated, the custom dictates that the heir apparent does not assume the position of kingship if he is still a minor. It is expected that his mother takes over as supreme leader of emaSwati until the heir apparent is of age. Queen Mother Ntombi became a Queen Regent between 1983 and 1986. It was in 1986 that the heir apparent came of age and assumed his position. Ntombi as a supreme leader of emaSwati became a famous Indlovukazi whose fame was also known as far as the Western countries. Indlovukazi LaTfwala's name was included in Andy Warhol's Portrait series during her time as one of the four reigning queens in the world as stated in a document from a website [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ntombi\\_of\\_Swaziland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ntombi_of_Swaziland) (2012/01/02).

This was an outstanding form of recognition, which indeed can be considered as following in Labotsibeni's footsteps. Besides being an Indlovukazi she demonstrated being a strong and focused leader, just as Labotsibeni was.

#### 5.2.2.2 Critical Analysis of Praises for Indlovukazi Ntombi LaTfwala

It is significant to note that the researcher deliberately used a version of *tibongo* that were composed by a woman poet, Thembekile Msibi. This was to verify whether the images used by a female poet differ from those employed by a male one in praising Indlovukazi of emaSwati.

For purposes of this study, *tibongo* for Indlovukazi Ntombi will not be analysed line by line, as done with the *tibongo* of Labotsibeni. This approach is adopted for logistical reasons. We will concentrate on the content in terms of some of the

features found in praises, as well as on how they relate to her leadership style and strength. The discussion will be on the praise poem labeled as Annexure 2 at the end of the thesis.

### **(a) Bodily Features**

The composer of these praises, Thembekile Msibi, paid a great deal of attention to the Queen Mother's physical features. In most instances, she uses these to highlight the actions or achievements of the Indlovukazi in praise. The lines below give credence to that view.

1. *Ngculungcul'imehlwangumtjotjovu, nhlangotsi tonkhana*
2. *Abonelela Mkhuluz'ases'amatasata*

#### **Translation**

Big bird with sharp eyes on all sides  
They saved Mkhuluzi who was heavily loaded with work

In the two lines given above, the poet Msibi focuses on the eyes of Indlovukazi Ntombi. Msibi highlights the fact that her eyes are very sharp as she quickly realises when things are going wrong. Msibi refers to the incident when Mkhuluzi was failing to perform his duties due to the overload of work and Indlovukazi decided to call on Lutfo to come and assist. Indlovukazi Ntombi invited Lutfo Dlamini to take responsibility for Philani MaSwati, a structure that takes care of old people and their needs in the country Vilakati & Msibi (2006:78). A person with a sharp eye is ideal in leadership as she is able to identify problems and solve them swiftly before more damage occurs.

1. *Tihlatsi titsi bokoboko tibusheleleti*
2. *Timamatseka timatinyw' amhloph' anjengangcocwane*

#### **Translation**

Your cheeks, incredibly smooth and fleshy  
They smile with a set of teeth that is as white as snow

The two lines above focus on Indlovukazi Ntombi's cheeks that the poet describes as smooth and fleshy. The beauty of an African woman is in having a fuller body. The Indlovukazi is beautiful and she is not thin but also not obese. Msibi further indicates that her face is also decorated by her beautiful set of teeth that are seen when she smiles. The whiteness of her teeth is likened to white snow. In these lines the poet points out that it is Ntombi's beautiful face that attracted Sobhuza II to marry her. Through this marriage she qualified to be Indlovukazi of emaSwati. Thembekile states that her smile made the king smile back as he ended up making an advance towards her. A woman who is always wearing a smile and welcoming to her in-laws most often wins their hearts and becomes appointed as senior wife who bears the successor. The significance of good behavior by a wife to be noticed amongst others, by the royal family and be considered for *bundlovukazi* in the Dlamini Royalty is succinctly given by Kuper (1947:103).

It clearly enunciates one of the criteria that are considered in the process of choosing a Queen Mother amongst the many wives of the king. It is clear that the woman who gets chosen as Indlovukazi earns the title by having been well behaved during her time of being a wife to the deceased king. In other words, Indlovukazi Ntombi did not just become eligible by being married and bearing a son for King Sobhuza II, but she also had to be clear of misbehaviour in a manner that drew the attention of the Dlamini family. The main point stated here is that the character of the mother is vital when the royal council is deliberating on who should become Indlovukazi. Her beauty as stated in the two lines above has to be coupled with being a good wife in the royal kraal.

1. *Nyatsela Ndlovu lemasondvosondvo,*
2. *Wena Mzwilili lowantjilot' enkhundleni kaLobamba*

### **Translation**

Go ahead multi-legged Elephant crush them  
You good voiced songstress who sung at Lobamba Stadium

Msibi in these lines remarks about Indlovukazi Ntombi's legs. Indeed they are fleshy and in proportion with the rest of her body. This poet declares that such legs which resemble those of a multi-legged elephant are an advantage to her. When she walks she stamps the ground with pride and confidence – this is reflected in the sounds '*ngcivi ngcivi*' that are mentioned throughout the poem. The description of her legs here is intended to highlight the fact that she is able to exercise authority in executing her duties as a leader. In Siswati a statement that is often used, to describe a person who is successful in using her power goes as follows: '*unyatsela kuvakale*' which can be loosely translated as 'when she walks everybody pays attention. The walking action of Indlovukazi Ntombi expresses that she is a leader who is sure of what she is doing; no one doubts her authority.

Apart from referring to her pride and confidence the sounds '*ngcivi ngcivi*' also connote that her moves with her thick legs enable her to crush whatever challenge she encounters in her duty as Indlovukazi. In other words, because of her strong personality she is able to cope even in difficult situations. Being in such a position is demanding. It becomes even more so as she may at times differ from her son's views or decisions. While she also has the responsibility of facing the emaSwati nation, she is also affected by what her son may do, especially those actions that the nation does not approve and accept. She remains the pillar of the king's strength as she often advises her son while she also confronts her own role of being the mother of the nation. These traits make her compare positively to Labotsibeni who also was so sure of what she was doing as Indlovukazi.

The lines above also highlight the quality of her voice. Indlovukazi Ntombi also has a sweet voice that is often heard in public when she sings in prayer services held at the royal kraal. Her sweet and strong voice is used to indicate her power and authority. At any rate, she is expected to excel and be above other women in the eyes of the public. The body features reveal her as a suitable and able person for her role as a leader.

## (b) Historical and Cultural Events

1. *LiNyamandze lakaLaSiwela*
2. *Litse dzimu iNyandza*
3. *Kwafutfumal' eMasundvu naZithehlezi,*
4. *ULobamba wabambana, Ludzidzi lwenaba,*
5. *Sagabis' iNgabezweni sasing' iNkoyoyo' umkhanya.*

### Translation

A liNyamandze born by LaSiwela  
She brought a bundle of wood  
That brought warmth to Masundwini as well as Lozithehlezi  
Lobamba held itself and Ludzidzi went larger

In these lines we are told about the most historic occasion in which Ntombi was involved, that of giving birth to a son, Prince Makhosetive who became Mswati III after being crowned as king of emaSwati. Msibi says that the event brought jubilation to eMasundwini, Lozithehlezi, Lobamba, eLudzidzini, eNgabezweni and eNkoyoyo. These are all royal palaces that welcomed the birth of Makhosetive. The first four palaces already existed during the birth of the current King Mswati III. Most of these residences belonged to the previous king Sobhuza II. The other palaces that are mentioned in the lines that follow these were established after Mswati III had become the king. At a deeper spiritual level, these palaces are where the royal ancestors are believed to reside. By giving birth to Prince Makhosetive, Ntombi provided the emaSwati nation with a leader who would perpetuate the dynasty. Indlovukazi Ntombi did this as an ambassador from the Tfwala clan, whose clan praises include Mnyamandze. Her maiden surname is very important in the culture of emaSwati. *Inyandza* is a Siswati word referring to a big bundle of firewood. In these lines, the sound '*dzimu*' signifies the forceful arrival of this particular baby that she gave birth to. It was the birth of Makhosetive that made LaTfwala qualify to be iNdlovukazi. Here we see motherhood as rewarding to Ntombi. Because of her mothering responsibility, she was recognised as a great wife who bore a successor to King Sobhuza II.

From a womanist view, it is a good thing for a woman to produce children and have a family as this guarantees procreation and extension of the clan. In this case, one can see that Indlovukazi Ntombi is in control of emaSwati, which provides strong evidence that having a family does not necessarily prevent a woman from participating in duties outside her home. This can be regarded as a convincing reason why amongst Africans it is not always good to accept theories from the West as some do not apply to the actual life style of Africans. A quotation like the one below becomes relevant to Africans. Kolawole (1997:12-13) expresses this belief:

Some issues that are central to radical feminism underscore the question of cultural relevance. The role of patriarchy as it undermines women's sexuality is dominant in radical feminist discourse. Many such scholars have proposed very overt demonstrations of sexuality and sexual freedom. ... Shalsasmith firestone suggests a neutralization of reproductive role in line with lesbian calls for *in vacuo* reproduction. Others like Marge pierson envision a utopia in which male and female have the option of "agendered" child bearing.

Many African and other Third World women have problems with this orientation. African world-view is predominantly family oriented and this is an aspect of the positive legacy that Blacks in the diaspora have sustained vigorously and self-consciously.

Africans and blacks in the diaspora still recognise the essentialism of a family and child bearing that comes as a result of heterosexual relationships. Africans are still devoted to the concept of experiencing a degree of identity with a particular clan. Here one notices Ntombi benefiting from being a mother of the royal clan. This can be useful in uniting clans into a whole as, for instance, LaTfwala came from another clan to be married into the Dlamini clan, which united the two families and resulted in harmony and peaceful relations. It is out of such a relation that Ntombi was given a chance to demonstrate her God given talent and ability in a leadership role.

1. *Nshivakati lengenamphondvo*
2. *Phondvo lweNdlovu*
3. *Ulwemukele kubabekati Mnengwase*
4. *Banemntfwana Sozisa anguwaseGundvwini*
5. *Bakwembesa lugogo lwengwe lemabalabala.*

## Translation

A cow that does not have horns  
The horn of an elephant  
That you received from Mnengwase  
Accompanied by Prince Sozisa of Gundwini  
They dressed you with a multi-coloured leopard skin

These lines tell us what happened when Ntombi was given her life-long responsibility as an Indlovukazi. Mention is made of Prince Sozisa who served as a senior prince in the royal family at the time of her appointment. The other person mentioned here is Mnengwase, a princess who was involved in putting the new King Mswati III and Indlovukazi into position. She was a sister of the deceased King Sobhuza II. She had the responsibility of making sure that matters were dealt with, in a proper manner after the death of her brother. This illustrates the significance of an aunt in determining crucial issues like those of succession. Her voice was respected in the royal structures. She exercised special powers in her maiden family in the absence of her brother who had successfully led the nation for a long time. She was then responsible for placing the leadership symbol that looks like a feather on Indlovukazi Ntombi's head. It always protrudes from her forehead and no one else uses it. Her involvement in issues of succession could be in keeping with what Cope (1968:19) confirms, as follows:

Outstanding women of the royal family may achieve positions of considerable political influence. The obvious example is Mnkabayi: by her favor men rose and by her disfavor they fell. However, this position was due to the fact that she was Shaka's father's sister. Shaka's mother's brother could never have achieved such a position, for although a male, he was a male from the female line. The patrilineal clan is consciously a most important unit in social structure, for men and women of the same surname (*isibongo*) ....

Cope directs his observation to Mnkabayi of the amaZulu nation who will be discussed in detail in the next section. EmaSwati are no exception to such a practice. In effect, in most African communities the aunt of the leader/heir plays a significant role in choosing the successor. For this reason the royal council of the Dlamini dynasty does not include the women who are married at the royal

palace. What is of importance is that it is the male line that is given recognition to participate in issues such as that of succession. This is also evidence that women do possess the necessary skills to be in leadership of some kind in their families. It is the very culture that is so often condemned, that allows aunts to play roles as decision makers in such crucial matters. Some of the lines taken from Vilakati and Msibi (2006:76) maintain this view:

1. *Mhambi wemkhondvo longatiwa nguletinye tiNdlovu*
2. *Ludvwendvwe lusuk' eHlane*
3. *Wasuyacotfota Nhlandlokati,*
4. *Wadlalisela wasikisa gabazi.*

### **Translation**

The one who travelled on routes not known by other elephants  
The wedding team came from Ehlane  
You gracefully walked the route  
You danced with excellence

Another unique customary practice in which the Queen Mother Ntombi had to take part was to go with *umtsimba* from her place to the royal family so as to complete the process of confirming her as a wife. Most of Sobhuza's wives had not been accompanied by a bridal team, (*umtsimba*) in Siswati, from their parental homes to the royal house. It is stated in Vilakati & Msibi (2006:79) that the bridal team from her parental home was dispatched after her family had received all the *lobola* in 1992. *Lobola* is the cattle that are paid by the groom's family to the family of a bride before she is taken to be fully married to the groom's family. The *umtsimba* was a cultural event that made Ntombi different from the other wives of the late king. During her wedding day she is said to have displayed her dancing skills and gracefulness. There is constant mention of eHlane, her parental home, in her *tibongo*. The bridal team that accompanied her did not consist of her relatives only but it also included members of the community of the eHlane area. People in this area were proud and felt honoured that they had produced an Indlovukazi for the whole country. Accompanying her to her marital home was a prestigious opportunity.



It is also important to indicate that Ehlane is an area which is removed from urban life, and it has wild animals to which at least once a year the reigning king goes to carry out a hunting event of the wild game in the company of his regiment. What is interesting in the constant mention of eHlane is the fact that the Queen Mother is constantly referred to as a unique elephant that one is likely to meet at eHlane. This elephant metaphor places her in a prestigious position, in line with metaphors used for praising male kings. In other words, she enjoys full recognition as a leader, above all the other co-wives.

### **(c) Milestones and Achievements**

1. *Ingucungucu lenjengelunwabu,*
2. *ULomagubudzela lonjengesambane,*
3. *Sigwaca lesihle ngekuhluma tinsiba*
4. *KaChen Bian live lalabamhlophe*
5. *NguMaphunyuphunya bampheka bamtfulula*

#### **Translation**

The one who turns into different colours like a chameleon  
The one who looks down like ant-bear  
A good quail that develops feathers  
Even at the white man's land of Chen Bian  
The one who is cooked several times without being softened

*Uhlabene kulabaSmart boPhathini*  
*Wahlaban' eSingapho neThayiwani,*

#### **Translation**

You came out outstanding in Smart and Phathini's land  
You came out outstanding in Singapore and Taiwan

As a Queen Mother, Ntombi has made trips to countries abroad. In the history of emaSwati she is the first Queen Mother to have flown to countries beyond the oceans. One of the reasons for her travelling to these countries was to seek information on how the morula fruit could be utilised beyond brewing liquor for limited consumption. Another reason stated in her praises was to request donations from some of these countries. It is stated in Vilakati & Msibi (2006:79)

that Indlovukazi Ntombi was able to secure a number of wheel chairs that were given to the disabled emaSwati. Her success in providing help to the people with disabilities amongst emaSwati was a remarkable achievement. On these lines she is also likened to an ant-bear, an animal that does not look straight up but always faces down. Such a metaphor depicts her as a respectful person who does as the Siswati culture and customs dictate to her. The proverb ‘*Sambane simba umgodzi singawulali*’ can be translated as an ant-bear that digs a hole but leaves it to be used by other animals. Such an interpretation would be referring to the fact that she is not selfish. She has acquired skills and is placed in a better position to obtain solutions to the problems of her people. The other interesting animal that she is likened to in the above lines is the quail. The Siswati proverb that declares, ‘*Sigwaca lesihle ngulesikhala sigijima*’, can be translated as, a good quail is the one that runs as it cries. An intriguing feature in these lines is that she is referred to as a unique quail that has developed feathers. The poet in this instance refers to the fact that she has developed skills that have enabled her to seek help even from distant countries. This is a very credible metaphor because she is depicted, as a person who does not just sit and watch her people suffer from hunger, poverty, ill health, unemployment and other issues that bring discomfort to the nation. She takes action, even that of empowering herself with skills that will allow her to be of help to her nation. Those are remarkable leadership qualities. The way Indlovukazi Ntombi positions herself for the future, is practically identical to the way in which Labotsibeni did during her time.

1. *Ngiv’ iNdlovu yemaSwati*
2. *Itsi: ‘Asisakudli yemganu kuphela*
3. *Kepha sesiyakuchobota’*

### **Translation**

I hear the elephant of emaSwati  
Saying we no longer eat you only morula fruits  
But we eat the whole of you

Other trips that she made to countries abroad resulted in success as Indlovukazi was able to start a morula fruit project in the country. In this project, apart from using the morula fruits for making beer *buganu* (morula beer), the pips of the fruits that were usually considered useless are now processed in the factories for making items such as ornamental products and sweets. The image produced by the word *kuchobota* which denotes to crush into brittles above offers a clear description of how the fruit is now utilised up to the very last bit. This is a significant achievement by Indlovukazi as the project brought much needed economic relief and development in the rural areas as well as in the country.

1. *Buhlakani bakho Mhlekezi budide bongcongcoshe bemaSwati*
2. *Baye baphica naLaMvulane acondzisa kaSebenta.*

### **Translation**

Your intelligence has confused even ministers of emaSwati  
Even LaMvulane who was a director for Sebenta was confused

1. *Nani boTembulalave naTebungedzama,*
2. *Tebuswetini naTendlala*
3. *Bayeta boMshamndane, Mdlanyoka - Maphungindlala*

### **Translation**

Even structures looking after HIV/AIDS patients and orphans  
Looking after the Poorest and the Hunger Stricken communities  
The Mshamndanes, Mdlanyoka – who clear hunger, are coming

In these lines various important projects are referred to. Mshamndane is the name of a well known leader who travels all over the country to identify and provide for the poor and hunger stricken emaSwati. HIV/AIDS and poverty are topical issues in Africa. Instead of leaving these projects in the hands of the government, Indlovukazi makes her own contribution as well.

**(d) Important Figures During her Reign and any Interesting Poetic Features**

1. *Tjel' indvuna Jim Gama itsatse umboyi*
2. *Ibabel' esiteshini semabhansi kaManzin' edolobheni.*

**Translation**

Send the *indvuna* Jim Gama with a rod /stick  
He should rush to Manzini bus station

1. *Laseliyayikhuzela lisesicongweni. Makhatsat' eMhlonishwa Dokotela*
2. *Sibusiso Barnabas nente ngamamatseka.*

**Translation**

She then called him to order together with the skilled Prime Minister Doctor  
Sibusiso Barnabas you made me smile

1. *Mlunguza wendlovu kuvaliwe,*
2. *Kuvalwe ngemapham' etibhamu,*
3. *Mtimba longadzabuki tinhlamba temaSwati*

**Translation**

The one who peeps through to see an elephant  
Where the back of guns have been used to close  
The one whose body is not torn by insults from emaSwati

The first set of lines above refer to disciplinary actions that the Queen Mother was obliged to take as some members of the nation were getting out of order. The next set of three lines above is extracted from *tibongo* of Labotsibeni that were discussed in the preceding section. It is not common practice in *tibongo* to incorporate relevant lines from praises of a previous Indlovukazi. Such borrowing is often carried out by poets when praising male kings. The inclusion of some lines taken from Labotsibeni's praises used in Ntombi's *tibongo* therefore has a great deal in it. One reason for this could be that the Msibi wishes that the current Indlovukazi should also show some of the remarkable skills that her remarkable predecessor possessed. This would encourage the current Indlovukazi to work harder to match the level of the Indlovukazi whose *tibongo* are used. The poet could also be informing the nation that the current

Indlovukazi is of the same calibre as Labotsibeni in terms of skills and performance.

The Mdzimba Mountain is mentioned in her *tibongo*. This is the mountain facing Lobamba which is the main palace where the nation converges for national events and ceremonies. This mountain is also significant in that it is the place where kings, Queen Mothers and other members of the royal family are laid to rest. It is for that reason the poet says Ntombi's participation in the Christian prayer services held at the stadium makes the mountain happy, which means the ancestors of previous kings and queen mothers buried in the mountain approve of what she does by hosting Christian prayer services.

Other places of significance to the Dlamini dynasty are: eTjeni, eLudzidzini, eMasundvwini kaLozithehlezi eNgabezweni and eNkoyoyo which are mentioned in the *tibongo* of Her Majesty because they are part of her life and leadership. The Queen Mother whose *tibongo* are under discussion is associated with all royal palaces as she is expected to be overseeing them. By overseeing them it means she is in control of the whole nation as these palaces are the core of emaSwati nation.

In the lines given in this sub-section there are names of important figures of government who had featured during her period of reign. Jim Gama is a senior *indvuna* (headman) of the main royal kraal eLudzidzini. He has a serious responsibility in that he has to make sure there is order and harmony at the royal palaces as well as in the country. Another significant figure named in the lines given in section (c) of this discussion is Mshamndane Sibandze who is in control of distribution of food if there is hunger and famine in different parts of Swaziland. One other individual mentioned in this poem is the Prime Minister Sibusiso Dlamini. He has served as a prime minister for many years as he has displayed dedication, commitment, loyalty and capability as head of the emaSwati government. Msibi also mentions women figures who participate in the governance of emaSwati nation. Msibi has made her praises to be a vessel

of historical events that have taken place during the reign of the subject which make her poem effective and qualifying to be praise poetry.

### **(e) Significant Terms and Poetic Language**

The following are some of the significant terms used in these *tibongo*, which help one to gain a better understanding of the quality of her leadership as depicted in them.

*Indlovu* (elephant) – This is a massive animal whose enormous size distinguishes it as superior to other animals. This term is used repeatedly in the *tibongo* under scrutiny. It is remarkable that Msibi is inclined towards using images often utilised by male poets especially in praising male leaders. The fact that the word *indlovu* which means elephant is used without the female suffix – *kati/kazi* in Siswati and *-kazi* in Zulu – implies that the Queen Mother has been shifted to what is normally regarded as a male domain, being acknowledged as a leader. In essence the women of this world should consider themselves complete beings who are capable of doing anything, including leading a community or nation.

*Ingculungculu* (big bird): This is a large bird that is known for its power, intelligence and the skill it uses in capturing its prey. Because of its size and other qualities this bird is not itself easy to capture. This symbol takes the leadership skills of the Indlovukazi to a high level. This is indeed a strong bird that tactfully attacks its enemy or prey. This is a positive skill for the Indlovukazi. It is such imagery that will compel the community or nation to respect their Indlovukazi because she is trusted as someone that no one can tamper with.

*Nshivakati* (hornless cow): This term originally forms part of the Tfwala clan praises. In this context, it could be referring to the fact that she came to the royal house an ordinary, humble person since the concept refers to a cow that does not have horns. Msibi has deliberately used it to highlight the fact that

although she might have been expected to be a “hornless cow” by virtue of being born in the Tfwala clan, she is now to wear the symbol of supremacy that looks like a horn. The term is used to indicate that her role and position have made her develop a horn which enables her to exercise her authority. This is a symbol of might and of doing well in exercising her powers.

*Ingucungucu* (the one who changes colour and character) and *maphunyuphunyuyu* (the one who cannot be easily caught, due to being slippery): These two terms refer to the behaviour of a trickster, a character that is often encountered in folk tales. These qualities enrich Ntombi’s character as they imply that it is difficult to push her into a tight corner. They refer to that she is capable of changing her mind if it becomes necessary. This character trait is very useful to a leader as it enables her to think on her toes.

*Sikhukhukati* (a hen): A hen is always known for sitting over its eggs to provide the warmth necessary for the chickens to hatch. After they have done so the hen provides for them in terms of food and also protects them from enemies. This is a metaphor that depicts her as a provider, a care-giver, and a protector. These are all character traits that make a woman leader unique, prominent and outstanding. However, they are at times considered to be contributing to the sidelining of women who remain away from the public sphere as they have to look after their children until they are grown. At the end of the day these traits are unique and God given and make a woman leader excel in whatever leadership role she is given. This is the type of leadership that would benefit communities and nations but is doubted in some modern contexts.

*Sihlahla semsinsi* (a lucky-bean tree): *Umsinsi* is often used when describing whether an individual is born in that area or has come to settle there after having grown up elsewhere. In lines 73 and 74 in the praises recorded in annexure 2 she is described as a person who does not look as if she had ever lived anywhere else. This is another positive trait because as a leader she should be able to adapt to and settle in whatever new environment she finds

herself in. This is a skill that women leaders of today should develop as they at times find themselves placed in strange situations.

*Ingwenya* (crocodile): This is a very dangerous reptile that lives in the water. It is not conspicuous when it approaches its victim. It moves with most of its body in the water and looks like a moving log or a rock which enables it to hide until it captures its prey. In this context the analogy is made with reference to Indlovukazi Ntombi who does not talk much but carefully plans her strategy to strike an unsuspecting opponent. It is obvious that strategising is a significant attribute of any leader. Queen Mother Ntombi strategises, plans her intentions before beginning to work on them. This metaphor is in support of the argument that women can be excellent leaders.

In a nutshell, the metaphors used in praising Indlovukazi Ntombi depict her as mighty, dangerous, conscious and vigilant, which place her level of leadership highly. It is not surprising that her performance is compared positively to that of Labotsibeni who left a legacy to be followed not just by emaSwati but by other women leaders from any corner of the world.

#### 5.2.2.3 Concluding Remarks

*Tibongo* that are composed by Thembekile Msibi for Indlovukazi Ntombi are skilfully strung together by a common eccentricity of steadfastness that accentuates the inner resilience with which Ntombi is endowed. There is a marked difference between the praises of a woman leader composed by Thembekile as a woman poet and those composed by a male *imbongi*. In these praises Msibi has, for a greater part of the composition, shifted from the paradigm of looking at Ntombi with a patriarchal eye. This is regardless the fact that Msibi is a product of a patriarchal system. She must be commended for this effort. Msibi focuses on Queen Mother Ntombi's attributes: beauty, strength, thoughtfulness, strategic and protectiveness, as well as on her successes and achievements. The positive comments have the effect of pleasing Indlovukazi



Ntombi's followers so that they respect her as their leader. The role of *tibongo* is to eulogise the subject of praise so that she remains a victor, an achiever, a provider and a person who is held in high esteem by the nation she is supreme leader of.

In the case of the images used it would have enhanced the poet's depiction of the Queen Mother if she had widened her choice to other animals such as the lion, the leopard and others. She was probably restricted by her awareness of how the utterances might be interpreted. If she had used the metaphor of a lion, for example, she might have been accused of undermining or challenging the status of the King who is addressed as the lion and also in words such as: *Ngwenyama, Mbube, Bhubezi*. She appears to be cautious of using other animals like the lion in highlighting the Queen Mother LaTfwala's character and power. However, from a womanist perspective, one could interpret this as unfair discrimination since the Queen Mother as a supreme leader does also deserve to be perceived as a lion in her own way. Such self-censorship by Msibi should not discourage women leaders because they will invariably come across stereotypes that have remained to haunt even a woman who is considered free from masculine control. Patriarchy is not easy to eradicate, since it has been a way of life embedded in the minds of people since time immemorial.

Msibi should have remembered that the composer of *tibongo* has the licence to weave critical comments in a subtle or tactful manner into her poem. *Tibongo* are known for containing corrective elements to guide the leader praised and to give the nation the warning it may need. Even in the case of this poem, Msibi should have used her prerogative to refer to a number of the leader's flaws. This can be due to the fact that she was writing these praises on paper instead of performing it which could possibly lead to her being victimized. This would have given her *tibongo* some punch and reduced the superficiality and artificiality one feels when listening to the poem. No leader of a nation is perfect. Cope (1968:32) and Finnegan (1970:120) point out that the *imbongi* or poet in a sense serves as an intermediary between the traditional leader and his/her

subjects. In the case of this poem, when the poet presents the Queen Mother as a leader to her people in his/her recitation he/she also communicates the opinion of the people to her. Cope (1968:28) explains:

Thus the praise poem contains criticism as well as praise. The special position of a praiser enables him to criticize with impunity certain aspects of the chief's personality or actions, either by overt criticism or covertly by the omission of praise.

These remarks from scholars of the genre should serve as a guide to other women poets who possess the ability of composing praises for their leaders and the necessary love to do so. Her *tibongo* may invite unnecessary criticism from men as they generally consider that women do not have what is necessary to do a job that is often reserved for men, that of being *imbongi*. In a nutshell, Indlovukazi Ntombi's achievements have clearly sent the message of her leadership skills in no uncertain terms.

### **5.3 ROYAL WOMEN OF AMAZULU**

AmaZulu represent another nation in the southern part of Africa that has retained a traditional leadership for a very long time. Even the apartheid regime could not demolish their kingdom. One prominent woman in the history of this nation is Princess Mkabayi who is remembered for her leadership skills. She participated in the building of the amaZulu nation to the size that it is today. The power she displayed during her time cannot be compared to that of any other woman leader in that kingdom. AmaZulu are known to be a nation that holds their culture in high esteem. They are no exception regarding the practice of patriarchy. According to the Zulu culture a woman does not feature in the leadership of the nation. This is totally different from the leadership of emaSwati who always maintain a dual leadership that consists of the King and Indlovukazi. Notably, Mkabayi did not just feature in the governance of amaZulu of that time but she also contributed to major historical events. Nandi also features in the history of amaZulu as the mother of Shaka, who did not just lay a foundation for the growth of this nation but fought, conquered and subjugated

many clans to make one large Zulu kingdom. That is how the KwaZulu nation became so huge with many clans paying allegiance to the amaZulu king. Even today Shaka is known as a hero in the whole world.

### **5.3.1 Mkabayi – Daughter of King Jama**

This section will be dedicated to Mkabayi, a princess who became so noble during her time. Mkabayi is always remembered for the role that she played in the kingship of amaZulu.

#### **5.3.1.1 Brief Historical Background on Mkabayi**

Mkabayi was born a twin daughter of the royal house at Nobamba to King Jama of amaZulu and his chief wife. According to the amaZulu customary practice of that time, the twin who was born first had to be killed. Mkabayi and her sister Mmama were born shortly after the death of Palo, the son of King Jama. Mkabayi was the one destined to be sacrificed to avoid misfortunes in the country. King Jama as a compassionate father could not kill his daughter, so both of them survived, much to the disapproval of the nation. There was a strong belief amongst the Zulu people that the king had been bewitched. As the supreme head of his clan, Jama was looked upon as the custodian of Zulu cultural practices and beliefs. When Mkabayi's mother died without bearing an heir to succeed Jama, both the royal family and the amaZulu clan blamed it on Jama's refusal to follow the custom of killing the first twin.

Most of the family members and the clan at large were aware that Mkabayi should have been killed at infancy, and showed antipathy towards her. Growing up in such an environment made her keep away from people. Ostracising her affected her temperament and she became a grumpy, bad tempered and aloof person. Jama was very fond of his daughter especially because she showed an interest in and enthusiasm for the running of the affairs of the clan. Mkabayi was

drawn closer to the affairs of her people as she constantly witnessed how her father worked and handled matters brought to him by members of his clan.

As she grew up she became aware that the nation yearned for an heir who would succeed her father. She then wooed Mthaniya for her rather reluctant father. Masuku (2005:133) explains that Jama married Mthaniya who indeed bore the long awaited heir. Mthaniya's son was named Senzangakhona which meant well done. This was Jama's acknowledgement that Mkabayi had done the right thing by courting Mthaniya for him. Mkabayi had started displaying her concern over matters that worried the clan. This won Mkabayi the affection of the amaZulu as a clan. At the time Jama had also married an already pregnant Thonga woman who bore Sojiyisa. The clan had feared that Sojiyisa would grab the amaZulu throne after the death of Jama. The birth of Senzangakhona therefore assured the amaZulu clan that the throne was safe, as it would be inherited by the rightful heir.

Jama died in about 1781 when his heir apparent, Senzangakhona, was still a minor. As stated in Turner (2003:211):

Women in Zulu society at that time of Mkabayi normally played no role in the running of the clan. The exception would have been a small group of royal dignitaries, among whom Mkabayi's prominence and power as she matured, was unrivalled.

Mkabayi convincingly displayed her capability, power and her God given talent of leading her father's clan as a regent for the young Senzangakhona. This was despite the fact that most members of her royalty and the clan were deeply rooted in patriarchal beliefs. Mkabayi imposed herself as regent of the Zulu clan during the minority of the heir apparent, Senzangakhona. Cope (1968:170) comments that the regency gave Mkabayi a taste of the political power that she enjoyed all her life. As much as some members of the royalty and the clan were initially opposed to her regency, they later succumbed to her domineering character and allowed her to reign with the assistance of her cousin, Mudli, who was assigned the responsibility of commanding the army. It cannot be doubted

that Mkabayi displayed exceptional leadership skills to her people as she remained focused on her responsibility and mandate. She became the first woman to lead the amaZulu clan. Up to now there has been no other woman leader of theirs whose abilities could match those of Mkabayi. She displayed a strong vision for expanding the amaZulu clan from what it was at the time of her father. When Senzangakhona was of age, Mkabayi gave way to him to be enthroned as the supreme leader of the amaZulu clan.

Mkabayi felt such great love and passion for her people that she opted to remain unmarried. Although these were times when Africa had not been in contact with feminist thinking she avoided commitment and domination by a husband who would have derailed her focus. She resided at ebaQulusini military kraal and continued to be part of the administration of her clan, as a mentor and counsellor to her brother, King Senzangakhona.

On Mkabayi's ability to safeguard her dream Masuku (2005:133) succinctly affirms:

Her unscrupulousness shocked the nation once again when she instructed her army to destroy the powerful Sojiyisa, who posed a threat to Senzangakhona's reign. She was dubbed a blood-thirsty despot and a terrible woman of antiquity, whose primary aim was the continuance of the Zulu nation and its traditions.

She tirelessly protected what she thought was good for the amaZulu clan. She displayed great ability in thinking and making calculated strategies. Both her clan and its neighbours admired the way she relentlessly stood for what she believed in. Regrettably, Senzangakhona did not reign for long as he died at a relatively young age. During the period preceding the installation of his son Shaka as king, Mkabayi again took over the responsibility of leading the clan as a regent. This lasted until Shaka claimed his rightful position of succeeding his father. Mkabayi was in full support of his ascending to the throne and she proclaimed him the supreme leader of the amaZulu clan. Both Masuku (2005) and Turner (2003) concur with these facts.

After Shaka had ascended the throne, he did not depend much on consultations. Mkabayi who had already gained much experience in running the affairs of her people was unhappy with Shaka's leadership style.

Shaka is one of the best known African rulers. Mkabayi's ambition and dream of growing the amaZulu nation was gradually realised when Shaka conquered and subjugated many clans under his leadership. A number of them ended up being part of the amaZulu nation. Some clans survived by eluding the attacks of Shaka and ended up settling in new areas. However, even though Shaka worked towards Mkabayi's ambition of creating a bigger nation, he failed to impress his aunt. She was dissatisfied with the way he was doing things. To that view Turner (2003:212) remarks:

Shaka, on his ascendancy, appears to have ruled his people without much recourse to anyone for advice. This seems to be one of the major reasons why Mkabayi plotted against him and was instrumental in bringing about his death in 1828 at the hands of his brother, Dingane, whom she favoured. Again after the death of Shaka, and before Dingane was officially installed as king, Mkabayi stepped into the breach as regent. With Dingane on the throne, Mkabayi again came to the fore as a royal advisor, and she was put in charge of the Ihlaba of Nobamba regiment.

This confirms the fact that Mkabayi always believed in what she considered to be the best for her clan. Her plot to have Shaka eliminated to give way to Dingane illustrates her skills of being tactical and strategic in maintaining her participation in the leadership of her clan. This quotation also drives home the key dedication of all her life, to serving her people.

Stuart as cited by Turner (2003:212) explains that when the Zulu army was to depart to carry out an invasion, it would not leave without going to ebaQulusini for an inspection by her. It is further said that Mkabayi imitated a military commander as she would dress in men's regimental regalia and hold a spear and a shield in her hands while walking between the rows, i.e. inspecting the army about to be sent to war. Such behaviour and dress code emulate the main

character in a folktale titled “*Isalukazi namasi*”. In this tale the old woman would dress in her son-in-law’s regalia, sit on his chair and imitate how he ate *amasi* (cuddled milk). *Amasi* was a dish that was a prerogative of the man in the amaZulu culture. Mkabayi’s way of challenging the custom was by dressing in men’s regalia which was a sign of being defiant to being perceived as a woman. This gives credence to the fact that what the West would consider feminist protests are not new in the African culture but have existed for centuries. It is reported that after Dingane’s death her power and influence gradually faded away. She is said to have died a lonely death.

Mkabayi, who miraculously escaped being killed at birth, grew up to be a most powerful woman in running the leadership of her amaZulu clan. Mkabayi installed kings and removed them as she felt necessary. She did all that in the interest of her father’s nation. In fact, the amaZulu kingdom as it is today owes gratitude to her for her strong personality. Of course Mkabayi is sometimes criticised for her plot to kill a mighty and ambitious leader, Shaka, who aspired to enlarge the amaZulu kingdom beyond the known geographical boundaries. Mkabayi indeed left footprints that will never be erased in the history of amaZulu. Such a legacy should inspire women who are struggling to succeed in their modernised leadership roles.

It is befitting to call her a “maker of kings” as stated by Turner (2003:213). In the same vein, Cope (1968:170) regards it as relevant to refer to her as ‘The little mouse that started the runs at Mandelata’; see line 23 in annexure 3. Mkabayi significantly influenced the course of the history of amaZulu.

#### 5.3.1.2 Critical Analysis of Praises for Mkabayi

Let us look at the praises that the praise singer composed for Mkabayi. Due to the fact that these praises were composed far back, it has been impossible to trace the name of the *imbongi* who composed these praises.

1. *USoqili!*
2. *Iqili lakwaHoshoza*
3. *Elidl' umuntu limyenga ngendaba*
4. *Lidl' ubhedu ngasezinyangeni,*
5. *Ladl' uMkhongoyiyana ngasemaNgadini*
6. *Ladl, uBheje ngasezanuseni*

## Translation

Father of guile!  
 Cunning one of the Hoshoza people,  
 Who devours a person tempting him with a story,  
 She killed Bhedu amongst the medicine men,  
 And destroyed Mkhongoyiyana amongst the Mngadis,  
 And killed Bheje amongst the diviners,

In her praises, Mkabayi is introduced by being called Soqili, i.e. 'Father of guile'. Such a salutation means she is given the status of a man. The morpheme 'So-' is commonly known to refer to concepts such as 'father of', or 'owner of'. In the next line the poet highlights her astuteness. Masuku (2009:125) observes that this salutation is used for males and thus it transports her from the subservient and negligible status of a woman, to being a 'prince' and a father figure who commands undivided respect. This notion is further developed in line 3 which gives details of her stoutness. She is said to have 'devoured' people while tempting them with a story. This implies Mkabayi was a strategic person in launching attacks and always made well calculated decisions. The image of devouring a person gives the information that she was responsible for killing some people. Of course, some of those that she 'devoured' are mentioned in lines 4, 5 and 6 of her praises above. These lines can be seen to be questioning the common view that women do not fight wars and also do not go out to hunt. The poet who composed praises for Mkabayi could not align himself with that perception. Mkabayi did not need to go to the battlefield to be recognised as a heroine. Lines 3 to 6 are structured in the manner in which praises for kings are arranged when listing enemies or leaders that the leader has conquered. The issue of Mkabayi's power to destroy people is developed further in the lines as seen below.



1. *UBhuku lukaMenzi,*
2. *Olubamb' abantu lwabenela*
3. *Ngibone ngoNohela kaMlilo, umlil' ovuth' intaba zonke,*
4. *Ngoba lumbambe wanyamalala*

## **Translation**

Morass of Menzi

That sucked the people and killed them off;  
I saw by Nohela son of Mlilo, the fire-that-burns-on-every-hill,  
For it caught him and he disappeared.

In line 1 Mkabayi is likened to a morass that Msimang (1991:66) considers to be a significant metaphor as she was indeed a powerful and dangerous woman. She was responsible for the killing of kings and ordinary people but displayed an illusory appearance. Mkabayi was said to be withdrawn and an introvert. Her presence was inviting but she was responsible for the death of many of her victims. Considering the fact that she had enticed Mbopha and Mhlangana into the plot to kill Shaka, it becomes bad that Mbopha died without getting what Mkabayi had promised to him. Her style of attacking her victims was very cunning as she connived and plotted behind their backs. Cope (1968:7) has this to say about her act of killing Shaka:

According to tradition, it was Mnkabayi, the formidable aunt who had supported his original claim, who now inspired the plot to overthrow him. She entered into conspiracy with Shaka's brothers, Dingane and Mhlangana, and with his personal servant Mbopha, and so the assassination was accomplished...

It needed a woman with unique and extraordinary expertise to overthrow a mighty conqueror like Shaka whose conquests have been acclaimed by so many commentators. Shaka had successfully introduced new battle strategies and revolutionised fighting skills of amaZulu. He did not condone cowardice. All this contributed to producing a powerful army. In spite of his excellence Mkabayi brought him down. Mkabayi is known to have kept her mind focused in the strategies of her planned actions.

All this reinforces the view that a leader does not need to be physically strong in order to be labelled a hero. Mkabayi's intelligence and her strong personality earned her these lines which laud her leadership qualities.

It is true that not every person is born a leader, but gender should not be used to discredit and discourage women from participating in leadership. Just like successful male leaders, some women are able to stand turbulent and challenging phases that any leader, regardless of gender, may be confronted with.

Masuku (2009:126) gives us an interesting perspective when she alludes:

Mkabayi assumed powerful attributes that are normally associated with men, thereby contradicting the stereotype that women are always docile and submissive. She was a brave, quick thinking woman who was prepared to take risks. .... Mkabayi lived in a male-dominated and cut-throat environment where her decisions were questioned with cynicism because of her gender. She lived in an environment where men were supposed to rule the country and the women obey rules. Hence, as a survival skill, she resorted to shrewdness, plotting and conniving tactics to secure her position as the ruler of an empire as big as the Zulu nation.

It is for this reason that she must be applauded for the remarkable leadership skills that are referred to in her praises. It is also worth noting that the praise singer or poet who composed these praises was a male whose perception could not escape the influence of the patriarchal ideology that prevailed. He would not merely have been flattering this outstanding woman leader.

Zondi (2006:36) observes that the heroic actions which are stated from the beginning of the praises up to line 8 of Annexure 3:

...suggest that Mkabayi stopped at nothing to accomplish whatever she considered valuable for the nation. While these achievements would be regarded as compliments if attained by a man, *imbongi* quickly labels that as trickery, '*Soqili*'. Being a mastermind behind removing important people (medicine men, chiefs and diviners) shows the unprecedented quality that Mkabayi possessed.

It is true that such a perception by *imbongi* displays the power of the domination of women by men. Jefferson and Robey cited by Dlamini (1995:49) confirm this view:

...patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women in order, precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for 'femininity' are natural. Thus a woman who refuses to conform can be labelled both infeminine and unnatural.

It is therefore, purely a result of patriarchy that such an achiever would attract these negative comments from the poet. We reiterate that a praise poet is considered as a spokesperson of the community; thus his views are those of the latter.

1. *Inkom' ekhal' eSangoyana,*
2. *Yakhal' umlomo wayo wabhoboz' izulu,*
3. *Iye yezwiwa nguGwabalanda*
4. *Ezalwa nguMndaba kwaKhumalo.*

### **Translation**

Beast that lows at Sangoyana,  
It lowed and its voice pierced the sky,  
Until it was heard by Gwabalanda,  
Son of Mndaba of the Khumalo clan,

Lines 1 to 4 above liken Mkabayi to a cow that lowed at Sangoyana and whose voice pierced the sky. This metaphor depicts Mkabayi as a leader who exercised a strong control over the people around her and alludes to the fact that they also respected her. The fact that her voice was able to 'pierce' the sky means whatever she said was forceful and could not be ignored. If that voice could pierce something as far away as the sky, this implies that her authority and influence were far reaching. She was in command of every person at all levels as her authority was respected not just by her royal family but by all amaZulu.

The feminist movement would question the image of a cow used to refer to Mkabayi. A cow is a tame or domesticated animal. Nowhere is it said that this particular cow possesses horns. If indeed, it has no horns it would be unable to fight and defeat other cattle or its enemies. That image and the ambiguity thereof may have been created deliberately to drive home the patriarchal belief that a woman belongs to her home or house. The other disturbing image here is the voice of the cow being able to pierce the sky. This may be interpreted to mean that Mkabayi as a woman in leadership had too little to do herself and could only survive by using her voice and giving instructions. The image may be interpreted as questioning her physical strength as a woman and emphasise the idea that a more suitable person for leadership would be a male.

It is worth noting that a cow or beast amongst African communities during this time was a symbol of wealth among other things. The fact that Mkabayi is likened to a cow can be interpreted to mean that she was treasured by her royal family as well as the amaZulu tribe in its entirety. A man who possessed many cattle was respected by both the members of the community and its leaders. For this reason when there was war between two nations, the defeated leader's cattle would be taken away by the conqueror. A girl's father would consider the size of the father of his prospective son-in-law's herd of cattle before deciding to give his daughter to him to marry. Cattle guaranteed the girl's father that his daughter would be materially protected. The metaphor used for Mkabayi in this line drives home the idea that Mkabayi was a major asset to the amaZulu kingdom as well as to amaZulu nation that benefited from her leadership. Apart from this Mkabayi provided amaZulu with the leaders she considered suitable for his father's great nation.

The image may further suggest that there was no need to blame her for not bringing cattle to her family in the form of *lobola* by refusing to be married because she herself was as precious as a cow. Yet another interpretation of this line, especially the use of a cow as an image, would be that the *imbongi* implies

that Mkabayi was still seen as a woman first, before her outstanding deeds could be acknowledged.

1. *Intomb' ethombe yom' umlomo.*
2. *Zase ziyihlab' imithanti ezawonina.*

### **Translation**

Maid that matured and her mouth dried up,  
And then they criticized her, those of her mothers,

Lines 1 and 2 were composed during a period when girls were prepared only for marriage. It therefore did not come as a surprise that her decision not to marry met with such strong criticism from the poet who serves as the spokesman of his community. One could in a way take these two lines to be questioning her decision that demonstrated a deviation from the known and respected customs. Her obdurate personality was the driving force behind this decision. It must have been a challenge for the royal family and the amaZulu community, more particularly because Mkabayi was already in the glare of publicity. The two lines that Cope (1968:172) describes as extremely obscure can be taken as the voice of the community regarding this intolerable conduct as well as expressing a warning to other girls not to follow Mkabayi's example.

Her decision to avoid marriage would also reinforce the feminist view that marriage and family allow domination over women by men as the former remain occupied in doing domestic duties while men are able to participate in public life. Men are also alleged to be responsible for the absence of women in higher positions in the workplace and the public domain. The type of feminist dogma displayed by Mkabayi is in line with what Phillips (1987:68) elucidates:

It is the freedom to decide her own destiny, freedom from sex determined roles, freedom from society's oppressive restrictions; freedom to express her thoughts fully and convert them freely into action. Feminism demands the acceptance of a woman's right to individual conscience and judgement. It postulates that woman's essential worth stems from her common humanity and does not depend on other relationships of life.

Mkabayi decided to accord herself freedom in the various spheres of life as mentioned in the quotation above. In her praises she is portrayed as a woman who believed in her thoughts and would freely put her views into action. It would be appropriate to affirm that Mkabayi emerges as a major proto-feminist even though she had never been in contact with the advocates of this movement.

1. *UMthobela-bantu izinyoni,*
2. *Bayazibamba usezibuka ngamehlo*

### **Translation**

She who shoots down birds for her people  
As they catch them she is simply watching on

In lines 1 and 2 she is described as a person who allayed people's anxiety. By the time they caught the bird she would be merely looking on with her eyes. Stated differently, she would not be panicking any more as she would have sorted out whatever would have been bringing anxiety to others. These two lines could also be interpreted as referring to Mkabayi's ability to be strategic and intelligent: in other words, by the time she was putting her thoughts into action she would be confident that she would succeed.

1. *Uvula-bangene-ngawo-onk'- amasango,*
2. *Abanikazimuzi bangene ngezintuba.*

### **Translation**

The opener so that people may enter through all gates,  
The owners of the home enter by the narrow side-gates.

In lines 1 and 2 the poet depicts Mkabayi as the one who opened all the main gates for people to enter. However, the owners of the home are said to have entered by the narrow side-gates. Such an elaborate description of her actions could be referring to the fact that she masterminded succession to the throne from the time when she acted as a regent. When Senzangakhona was of age she left the seat for her brother to take over. This on its own indicated that she was not power hungry but wished to protect the interests of amaZulu nation.

It was unfortunate that Senzangakhona did not reign for long but died prematurely, leaving the chieftaincy vacant. Even though Mkabayi acted as a regent again, she was responsible for making Shaka take over the reins. When she felt she could not approve of Shaka's leadership she removed him and replaced him with Dingane. It is, therefore, true that she made it possible for various leaders to take over the leadership of amaZulu nation. The kings whom she enabled to succeed one another are considered to be 'the owners of the home' because they were male. One might consider such a statement as discriminatory and sexist because, although she did so many good things for her father's nation, as a woman, she remained an outsider. As a girl, Mkabayi was destined to leave her parental home and move to a marital home; thus her involvement in issues of succession at her parental home was not welcomed.

1. *UMncindela kaNobiya,*
2. *UMhlathuz' uzawugcwal' emini.*

### **Translation**

Sipper for others of the venom of the cobra,  
The Mhlathuzi River will flood at midday.

Lines 1 and 2 indicate that she would prefer to deal with the dangerous situations herself instead of exposing other people to them. She is also portrayed as a person with mood swings. The image of the uMhlathuzi River flooding at midday has much to do with her furious temper. Of course, she never sought any advice when she was provoked: she took what she thought were appropriate actions.

1. *Imbibakazan' eyaqamb' imingqa kwaMalandela,*
2. *Yathi ngabakwaMalandela,*
3. *Ithi yikhona bezoqananaza ngazo zonk' izindlela.*

### **Translation**

Little mouse that opened new paths in the land of Malandela  
And called them the people of Malandela  
Who would thereby walk along all the paths.

Her willingness to make sacrifices is further stated in lines 1 to 3 of her praises. Here she is portrayed as an individual who initiated routes that ended up being used by the nation of Malandela. Indeed she arranged for her father to marry Mthaniya who gave birth to Senzangakhona, who became the successor to his father Jama. The nation benefited from her strategy as she predisposed it for its future.

With regard to line 1 Masuku (2005:129) proposes that the image of the small rat (*imbibakazana*) to which Mkabayi is likened, refers to the fact that she operated in secret and that her movements were not conspicuous. Masuku (*op cit*) further explains that this image depicts her as a person who concealed her true colours and preferred to operate in secrecy. Zondi (2006:37) has this to say about this image:

Thus, Mkabayi is presented as not only a mouse but a rather diminutive version thereof. How convenient of the *imbongi* to 'remember' that Mkabayi was in fact a woman and not a man! While the mouse is already such a small animal in comparison to other animals that royal men are likened to, it is further reduced through the use of a diminutive.

The image used in these lines is rather demeaning to Mkabayi who displayed such immense talent and commitment. The image is insulting to Mkabayi and all women in that they are portrayed as little rats regardless of their capability to excel in their performance. It is difficult to understand why Mkabayi would be likened to a small rat in a community which also uses proverbs that affirm women and endorse their ability. A good example would be the one that declares that, '*Intandane enhle ngumakhothwa unina*', (a good orphan is the one licked by her/his mother) as discussed in chapter 3 above. Proverbs are considered to reflect the wisdom of the elderly and the past generations of the community. It is confirmed that the royalty and the community did not approve her involvement in the leadership of amaZulu nation. Mkabayi's personality was a challenge to the normal and accepted woman's character. The negative attitude emanates from the fear that she would set an unacceptable precedent. Patriarchy that promoted the domination of women by men was the strong



driving force behind such a perception expressed in this *imbongi's* composition. As stated, he in fact enjoys the status of being an historian and a mouthpiece of his community and has the liberty of criticizing the leader with impunity.

Ramphela and Boonzaier in Dlamini (1995:13) describe the male dominance prevalent in African societies as follows:

There is a widespread ideology of male dominance amongst Africans which emphasizes the idea that women pass through the control of different men throughout their lives. It is a system of control that stretches from the cradle to the grave. The father's control operates up to the time of marriage, at which point it passes over to the husband. In cases of children born to single women, the mother's father and brothers assume control. Widowed women fall under the control of a designated brother-in-law who assumes the responsibility of his late brother, including fathering the children for him. This system confers the status of perpetual minor on African women...

Today's woman ought to be mindful of such forms of male domination. It is important to note that patriarchy does not affect the illiterate communities only. In fact, it becomes even more difficult to eradicate in the so-called "modern" generation. Mkabayi was indeed a strong and powerful woman and never allowed even the poet to pull her down. She remained focussed and continued to ignore the opposition that she faced in her life. Zondi (2006:36) affirms that:

Mkabayi used her intellectual faculties to accomplish what was thought to belong to the male sphere. The skill she demonstrated in her ploys empowered her despite the odds against which she was working. While she dominated the scene, she realised that in a male-dominated society, it was a matter of brain over brawn; with that kind of attitude she became an outstanding woman of her times.

Accordingly, because of her strong personality she became an epitome of democratic values for women, a role model and a symbol of hope, not only for the empowerment of women, but also for their total liberation from all negative perceptions and oppression. This is a legacy that she left for those who believe

in an African woman as a leader and a protector of what is treasured and is close to her heart. Her biggest achievements were that of defying customary practices for a worthy cause as well as that of demanding respect at all costs.

From the discussion above on Labotsibeni of emaSwati, there is a common trend that connects Mkabayi to Labotsibeni; excellence in their leadership skills, demonstrating wisdom, strength, focus, dedication and commitment in attending to issues pertaining to the kingship and the nations they led. While on the one hand Labotsibeni had attained power because of being married to the Dlamini royal family, Mkabayi on the other hand, was born in the amaZulu royal family. Another difference would be that while Mkabayi was groomed by her father, Labotsibeni was groomed by LaZidze who was also an outstanding Indlovukazi of emaSwati during the years Labotsibeni was growing up. She benefitted from the fact that she grew up residing in the royal kraal. Both these immensely skilled women, Mkabayi and Labotsibeni, dedicated all their lives to looking after the nations they led.

#### 5.3.1.3 Concluding Remarks

Mkabayi is another remarkable individual who sacrificed all her life to taking care of her father's nation. She emerges victorious in many instances during her participation in leading amaZulu. Her perception of the world and leadership of women is very close to that of Labotsibeni of emaSwati discussed earlier in this research. She successfully moved, and remained, in the male domain since what she was doing was the prerogative of men and no woman could ordinarily be this brave to challenge this stereotypical perception of women amongst amaZulu.

### 5.3.2 Nandi - Mother of Shaka

#### 5.3.2.1 Brief Historical Background on Nandi

Nandi was the mother of Shaka, the famous king of amaZulu. A daughter of a significant chief, Makhedama kaMgabhi (alias Mbengi) of Nguga at Elangeni, she was born in about 1764. Her mother was Mfunda who was a daughter of Qwabe. Some sources maintain that she was a daughter of Bhebhe who died while she was still young. According to these sources she later stayed with her uncle Mbengi.

Nandi was attracted to Senzangakhona after hearing glowing reports about the handsome young chief. She then arranged for an intimate meeting with Senzangakhona. The result of the meeting was evident after three months when Nandi realised that she was pregnant. While girls in the Zulu culture and custom were forbidden from showing her feelings to the man they love, men were the ones who could initiate a relationship. This was the tradition that was followed when they were being brought up. Her daring to seduce Senzangakhona shows that Nandi was a strong ambitious woman who was determined to get what was best for her. Such a move depicts her as an assertive young woman of courage and audacity. The realization that she had fallen pregnant must have affected her emotionally. She had committed an act against the Zulu customs and practices that never allowed girls to fall pregnant before marriage. It must have been an embarrassment to her relatives and her acquaintances. Masuku (2005) and Tunner (2003) concur on the historical facts given about Nandi in this section.

Her family sent someone to report this matter to the co-regent, Mudli. His response was that the girl was harbouring an intestinal beetle, *ishaka*, regarded as a common cause of the suppression of menstruation. To prove them wrong, she gave birth to a son. Again someone had to be sent to Senzangakhona's royal family to report the birth of his son - Shaka.

Nandi was fetched from her home to join the other wives of Senzangakhona. There was no ceremony or feasting as is normally the case when a girl is marrying, let alone the fact that she is marrying the chief of a clan. Her reluctance in going to the royal house was a premonition of the fact that she would be unwelcome and scorned by the co-wives. This ill-treatment negatively affected her relationship with the marital family. Mkabi, one of Senzangakhona's wives, was the only person who cared for and protected Nandi. She was housed at eSiklebheni by Mkabi who showed compassion and love for her. While staying with Mkabi she was blessed with a daughter by the name of Nomcoba.

As years passed by, the love she felt for the chief faded away. Obviously, issues like falling pregnant before marriage must have caused her stress as well as temperamental changes to her emotions. She became ill-tempered and argumentative, which led to her being expelled by Senzangakhona; she went back to Mbengi at eLangeni. Unfortunately, according to the Nguni custom once a girl is married, she is considered to have gone away for life from her original home. If she happens to return home she and her children are ostracised. This is what Nandi and her children experienced. Shaka therefore had a very despondent childhood. He and his mother were constantly teased and even the clan did not accept them.

According to Masuku (2005:145) things changed for the better after Nandi had decided to relocate to a better place where she could feed her children as they grew. She went to live as a subject of the King Phakathwayo where she met and wedded Gendeyane. In that marriage she was blessed with a son, Ngwadi. For some time life at Gendeyane's house was normal for Nandi and her children. Later on, however, Nandi and her children realised that there was no peace in her marital home and they were not accepted. She was obliged to make another move and sought refuge with her father's sister among the Mthethwas.

Turner (op. cit.) further explains that this is where Nandi and her children were accepted and treated well. Shaka became close to Dingiswayo who taught him how to be a great warrior. It was through Dingiswayo that Shaka was able to claim his birthright after his father's death. His aunt Mkabayi also approved his being the rightful successor to Senzangakhona. On ascending to the throne Shaka was able to create a unified amaZulu nation after conquering many chieftaincies in the surrounding areas. His new skill of fighting in wars enabled him to enlarge the amaZulu nation and his area of jurisdiction since other clans were subjugated and brought under amaZulu. He built his headquarters at Bulawayo where, his mother governed as Queen Mother. It was during this time that Nandi was held in great awe by the people at large, as Masuku (2005:146) observes.

### 5.3.2.2 Critical Analysis of Praise Poetry for Nandi

Like Mkabayi, *imbongi* introduces Nandi as a father of troubles as evident in these lines.

1. *USomqeni,*
2. *UMathanga kawahlangani,*
3. *Ahlangana ngokubon'umyeni,*

#### **Translation**

Father of troubles!  
She whose thighs do not meet,  
They only meet on seeing the husband.

This is expressed by the first word used to introduce her, *i.e.* Somqeni. The use of the male prefix 'So-' highlights the fact that Nandi is an owner of trouble. The use of 'So-' may have been interpreted as mockery yet in fact it places this assertive woman in the so called male domain. Immediately in line 2 the poet describes her as a woman who experiences difficulties with regard to sexual matters. He says her thighs are never together unless she sees a man. This is derogatory as it portrays her as a sex maniac. Cope (1968:174), however, accepts this line as a reference to her physical body – she had widely spaced

thighs. A young woman with such unattractive features might run short of admirers. However, we also realise that the poet is voicing the concept that regardless of her unattractive legs and thighs she knew what she wanted and also knew how to obtain it.

1. *UGedegede lwasenhla nenkundla*

**Translation**

Loud-voiced one from the upper part of court

This line reveals the fact that she showed no respect. Nguni culture demands that a woman should not use a loud voice when talking, especially in the presence of her husband, men and her in-laws. The fact that Nandi is said to have used a loud voice means that she presented herself as an impolite Zulu woman. According to this line she did not mind the venue and context where she could raise her voice. What is clear in this line is the fact that she went against the prescriptions of Zulu culture and custom. Talking loudly could only be done by men. *Inkundla* (the court) in this context is the place where the chief and his councillors (all men) sit to discuss issues of governance and sometimes cases concerning the community members. This area is sacred and women do not share it with men unless they are invited to be there. Nandi declared openly to everybody that she would not allow herself to be controlled by customs and cultural practices that in fact were part of the domination by men. This meant she did not feel bound by the Zulu norms and cultural practices. She chose to do this even though such behaviour risked her marriage and embarrassed her family.

1. *UPhoko phalala kuMaqhwakazi,*
2. *Angibonang' uphoko ukuphalala,*

**Translation**

She who rushed out to Maqhwakazi,  
I did not see the millet rush out.

In these lines, Nandi is described as a person without a fixed base in that she kept moving from one place to another. As stated in the brief history, indeed she did not settle for long in any particular place. One significant locality, that *imbongi* mentions in the lines above, is that of Maqhwakazi. According to Cope (1968:174), this is a hill at Eshowe. The image of a hill may in this case illustrate the status and dignity that Nandi brought to the royal house. It must be borne in mind that a hill is an elevated place: anyone who is placed on or descends from there is respected. Nandi's affair with Senzangakhona indeed brought a significant figure to the amaZulu royalty. Shaka, who expanded and unified the amaZulu nation and its jurisdiction to be what it is today, would not have been born if it were not for Nandi's assertiveness. Her family knew nothing about the affair until she became pregnant. In support of this view Cope (op. cit.) offers an alternative interpretation of these lines as meaning that as a person Nandi matured on the hill Maqhwakazi. Turner (2003:223) affirms that Maqhwakazi hill is the place where Nandi first met Senzangakhona.

Indeed in a patriarchal community like amaZulu her move to invite the chief meant she was not a proper young woman as she broke the customs of the Zulu people. Her 'misbehaviour' had resulted in her falling pregnant. These are the two 'sins' she committed, described by Turner (2003:223):

Her initial sojourn on the hill Maqhwakazi (her reported first meeting place with Senzangakhona), eventually resulted in her rejection by various Zulu clans due to her position of unmarried mother and in her subsequently moving about from place to place in the years that followed.

The quote emphasises the notion that Nandi was rejected by many amaZulu. Her move towards Senzangakhona and her falling pregnant were considered as, taboo by amaZulu. In essence, though, Nandi was displaying her independence and would not be trapped in the claws of patriarchy. It is unfortunate that the community could not stand what they thought was not proper.

It is astonishing, that even though the young chief, Senzangakhona was attracted to Nandi, which is evidenced by the birth of Shaka, because of the patriarchal system nothing is said about *his* breaking the amaZulu custom by engaging in a sexual activity with Nandi. Senzangakhona was a custodian of the amaZulu culture and custom but he went against its norms and impregnated Nandi. Although Senzangakhona was also ought to be blamed but he escaped without any criticism, because of being a man. It must be stated that both Turner (2003) and Masuku (2005) argue patriarchal tendencies caused *imbongi* to depict Nandi using negative images as a misfit in her society. Certainly, she became a misfit but she in the end made a strong statement.

1. *UMboni wamabhuzenge uSontanti.*
2. *USontanti onjengowakwaGwazana.*

### **Translation**

She who sees confusion, Sontanti,  
Sontanti who is like the daughter of Gwazana;

In these two lines the poet has composed a commendable structural pattern. The oblique linking used does not merely elevate the form of the poem, but also foregrounds the concept of *ukuntanta* (to float). We note the use of the prefix 'so'; as in the earlier discussion the prefix denotes that she is the 'father' of floating, who roams about without any purpose. In reality, Nandi was looking for a better life in all the places that she went to. Nandi knew what was good for her and her children, but *imbongi* represents the view of the audience with the intention of tarnishing her personality as amaZulu customs prescribed that a woman should be patient in her marriage; hence there are many proverbs that state this view. Patriarchy displays a very strong way of controlling women and ends up shaping the culture and norms of a community. According to its thinking she is expected to remain in one place even if she is uncomfortable. Maybe this is in keeping with the Siswati philosophy that says '*Umendvo uyancengwa*', loosely translated as marriage is to be begged. Women are put under pressure and forced to understand how societal norms dictate that they must be the one who compromises in marriage.



*'Libanjwa lishisa'* is another proverb that emphasises that, no matter how difficult it is in one's marriage, she has to exercise patience and perseverance. Notably, such statements are not, directed to men, but are uttered to make women feel guilty, whenever they think of moving out of a marriage. Such proverbs were earlier discussed in, chapter 3 of this study. The poet, who is also a product of patriarchy, would not be an exception. While he is seen to, be discouraging other young girls he, is in fact foregrounding the fact that Nandi was versatile and keen to settle in one family, yet her way of looking at life could not allow her to settle for less. She always knew what she wanted in life and was determined to obtain it.

The fact that Nandi is depicted as an individual who sees confusion, does mean her views were not regarded as reliable. The poet's view was strongly influenced by the community's patriarchal perceptions. According to the poet, it was a mistake for Senzangakhona as a leader of amaZulu to have fallen in love with such a woman. In other words, Nandi would not have been able to sustain her marriage to Senzangakhona, as she had already been pre-judged and, seen as, unsuitable to, be a royal wife. It does not come as a surprise therefore that her marriage to the amaZulu chief was short lived.

1. *USontanti kayidl' inkom' ensizwana*
2. *Udl' ubisi lwenkom' enezimpondo,*
3. *Ukwesab' abayisengayo.*

Sontanti does not partake of a little hornless cow,  
She drinks the milk of a cow with horns,  
For fear of those who milk it.

While the linking pattern continues in these lines, a new idea is introduced that of Nandi being a person who does not eat the meat of a little hornless cow; she prefers to drink milk from a cow with horns. It is clear that here the poet is touching on Nandi's preference to be involved with Senzangakhona who was indeed a large cow with horns because of his status. Masuku (2005:150) observes that the poet's use of the word *'ukudla'* (to eat) conveys multiple meanings such as to have sexual intercourse, to eat or drink, conquer, capture,

achieve, annihilate, stab and many others. Masuku (op. cit.) further explains that in this instance the bard could be saying that Nandi was not interested in having an affair merely with an ordinary young man but she was looking for the best male. It may also mean that she did not flirt with anyone who was not of a high status. Masuku (op. cit.) considers this as a shrewd reference to Nandi's burning ambition. This event occurred at the beginning of her life. In agreement, Cope (1968:174) observes concisely that this stanza refers to the fact that Nandi was ambitious. She did not want to be involved with an insignificant commoner as a husband. For her to be criticised for her ambitiousness indicates that women in this community are not free to make their own choices. This could be in keeping with what Dlamini (1995:86) believes when she asserts that women irrespective of age and creed are subservient to men, '*bantfwana*', meaning that they are children. Again, the poet highlights the fact that Nandi was looking for a man whom she would love and who had to be a man of dignity. It was for this reason that she did not wait until Senzangakhona proposed. Nandi was very confident of her womanhood. Her assertion caused her all the agony that she underwent later on since in her community's eyes she performed disreputable actions. This perception that Nandi received from the community made her an outcast in her own community.

In the context of black culture a womanist scholar, Ogunyemi (1985:72) believes that:

A black woman is not powerless in the black world as the white woman is in the white world; the black woman, less protected than her white counterpart has to grow independent. After each mental upheaval, the black woman knows in her subconscious mind that she must survive because she has other people without resources depending on her. In a positive about-face she usually recovers through a superhuman effort.

This is typical of the black woman who believes in protecting her children even if their father is alive and working. In other words, Nandi was the only one charged with the responsibility of looking after her children. She was ostracised for what was her personal responsibility that of protecting her children by

searching for what was best for them. It is worth reiterating that norms and cultural practices are not rigid but change with the times. While boys and men could, and are still made to pay some money or cattle as punishment for impregnating a girl before marriage, the woman involved carries the blame that leaves an indelible dent on her being for the rest of her life. It is important to consider that rules and laws are there to be broken. Nevertheless, the punishment that Nandi receives is far too harsh, as praises exist even long after the death of the individual praised.

1. *Intombi kaMbengi weNguga kaSoyengwase kaMaqamande,*
2. *UXebe woMhlathuze*

### **Translation**

The daughter of Mbengi of the Nguga kraal, son of Soyengwase son of Maqamande,  
Whore of the Mhlathuze Valley.

The tone of the first line above is positive in that it describes her birth lineage. This is normal for praises and in effect, it is necessary information as it gives the lineage of the individual praised. The second line comes with a most derogatory name as she is called uXebe, a whore or flirt. According to the poet she is given this as her personal name; hence it starts with a capital letter 'X'. She was labelled a whore for, amongst other incidents, her alleged affair with Phakathwayo, one of Shaka's archrivals and the paramount chief of the area in which she stayed with her husband Gendeyana. This is an act, alleged to have annoyed Shaka as stated in Masuku (*ibid*).

1. *Mfazi oNtongande zingamadoda*
2. *Uyishaye yenyus' iSabiza*

### **Translation**

Woman whose long staves are like those of men  
Who struck it and it went up the Sabiza River.

Her physical structure in the above lines is used to describe her and her physical looks are compared to those of a man. Much as the poet here refers to

Nandi's physical looks it does appear that he is commenting on her exceptional character as like that of men. This could be interpreted as a satiric expression targeting her personality in that she is said to behave like men, justified by her 'long staves'. Flyn as cited by Masuku (op.cit.) makes this comment about Nandi's physical appearance and character:

She was said to have been(a) masculine and savage woman, ever quarrelling with,(whom) that so enraging her husband, that he was compelled to exercise some salutary authority and reprimand her for the impropriety of her conduct.

Her temper was an issue worth commenting on as she could not control it. Turner (1990:44) affirms that she is reported to have struck one of Senzangakhona's senior councillors in the face out of rage: one of the reasons she was banished from the royal kraal. Such temper and rage can only be acceptable if, they are enacted by men, as per the customs of amaZulu. Nandi demonstrated that she would make a very outstanding leader of a community. As a liberated woman, there was no reason for her not to allow her emotions to show. Dlamini (1995:31) elucidates that:

a Swati woman is expected to follow whatever instruction she is given by her in-laws without fail. Whatever ill-treatment she receives from her in-laws should not prevent her from showing respect and obedience.

Even though the statement refers to emaSwati women, the same is expected of women amongst amaZulu, particularly in marriage. Respect, especially for her in-laws, is a priority for an African woman, for her to remain in her marriage. Dlamini (op. cit.) further explains that whatever mistake she makes in her in-laws' house is taken advantage of and blown out of proportion. I beg to agree with this view as, many male leaders have done unacceptable and horrible things out of rage, but they are never expelled. It is vital to look at the traumatic experiences that Nandi went through in her life before we can blame her for her uncontrollable rage. That does not in any way, condone her outbursts of temper and rage.

1. *Obengabafana baseNguga*
2. *Abeza beluhayizana.*

### **Translation**

She who was with boys of Nguga,  
Who came in a small group.

The last two lines of her praises provide information on how she was brought to the royal kraal. It is said, she was accompanied by a group of men from Nguga, where she hailed from, to be quietly accepted as Senzangakhona's third wife. This, according to Masuku (2005:153) was due to the fact that, she had already committed a sin by becoming pregnant. Therefore, Nandi's marriage to Senzangakhona could not, be conducted in, the normal majestic way. Her choice to give in to erotic desires came at a costly price. The fact that Nandi was brought to her marital home by, a small group of boys in a manner that differed from the other wives' arrivals could have been interpreted as indicating that she was indeed special and did not need a celebration when brought to Senzangakhona's home. Again, there was nothing seen to be wrong with Senzangakhona who was responsible for Nandi's pregnancy. Nkumane (1999:162) remarks about women's failure to adhere to the norms and practices:

In traditional African societies, the role of each citizen is to perpetuate the status quo, to assume responsibility for the continuity of the clan, to work within the tradition and to maintain a closed society. Each member of the society has his or her mission, which has to be fulfilled to ensure prosperity and survival. There is no room for change in the attitudes for girls. Freedom to choose one's destiny is characteristic of individualism, a concept, which is not found in most African cultures.

It is for that reason that women who show individuality are immediately called to order, not by men alone but by women as well who are also products of patriarchy. Masuku (2005:153) shares the above sentiments. It is a fact that Nandi had a unique perception of life. She freed herself from the pressure to be regarded as an acceptable woman in society. It is very hard to oppose patriarchy as it is sugar-coated, and made to appear as traditional culture and

customary practices. African tradition does not allow any challenge to traditional customs and cultural practices, as it is alleged the ancestors instituted them. Therefore, whoever attempts to question these is, ridiculed and made to, move away from her deviation that may cause harm to the whole community. In this way women remain in bondage to male domination and subjugation. In this analysis we are made to see that the *imbongi* might seem to be siding with known perceptions about women, but is in fact telling the truth that people refuse to see in a roundabout way.

Nandi broke almost every rule in the book and did this for a particular purpose. By her own volition, risking the dignity of all women, she brings forth a child who becomes a hero. In essence the hero behind Shaka is his mother.

#### 5.3.2.3 Concluding Remarks

Traditional leadership is one of those institutions that have always been retained in the hands of men and are not easily challenged because any woman who tends to illustrate leadership skills is ostracised by the whole community who cannot stand the 'anger' of their ancestors. The question that remains unanswered is how true these allegations are. Surely, it is still surprising that Nandi's praises never touch on her contribution of bringing Shaka to this world who ended up a strong conqueror and unified the amaZulu nation and made it to be such a strong nation. Nandi was a mother of a noble, brave man whose name is in the annals of the world for the might he displayed. Nandi's position of Queen Mother deserved acknowledgement in her praises. This displays the fact that the amaZulu community was bitter towards her and could not forgive her. It is for this reason that the *imbongi* also speaks in parables to make his audience hear what they want to hear about this 'misfit' in amaZulu society. He too is avoiding being seen as a person encouraging such 'bad' behaviour as that of Nandi. However, the *imbongi* did not forget about the issues worth foregrounding in her personality. If African tradition has in its history failed to stop strong women like Nandi from making their choices about being erotic,

impolite and unrelenting in marriage, it may be concluded, that, such excuses as punishment by the ancestors are tricks to maintain the status quo. It therefore remains in the hands of women to either fight for their liberation or remain silent in the very oppressing set-ups and environments.

#### **5.4 CONCLUSION**

If some women in African history have stood in the face of being ostracised by their communities, surely they make credible examples for the woman of the present era. In the African womanist view recognition of a family is the cornerstone. A total of three out of four of the women discussed above achieved positions of authority because of the family they were in. The exception is Mkabayi who did not want to leave her parental home for the sake of taking care of her father's nation, amaZulu. It is clear, though, that she was not opposed to a family as a structure that allows succession to continue without deviation from the original leader. This is evident in her many acts, in particular the initiative she took of finding a wife for her father. It also remains to be explained as to what it is that entails leadership, particularly in the present modern world.

As stated above the women discussed were all very powerful and determined to do anything that they felt they could do as women. The most exceptional of the praises discussed above are those compiled by Thembekile Msibi, a woman, who was a Siswati lecturer at a teacher's college, in Swaziland at the time of composing these praises. She has enabled us to learn about the perceptions and views of a woman *imbongi* evident in her composition about the excellence of a woman in traditional leadership.

In this analysis it has emerged clearly that the power of women leaders as exhibited in praise poetry makes a mockery of the perception that women cannot lead. It is also clear that there is so much talent, energy and experience that are left untapped by sidelining women. Both modern and traditional women

would benefit greatly from using the four women discussed above as their role models. These women sacrificed many things to make the statement that women can lead with great success. In that manner, these heroines left a legacy that dictates in no uncertain terms that African women should take cognisance of their God given abilities, their being strategic, focussed and the gift of multi-tasking yet remaining care givers.

If the history and praises of these significant women were to be included in the school curriculum this would improve the discernment of women in all aspects of life. It would bring a transformed view to the mind of the growing child. This should bring back the self-confidence of the growing girls who need to be future leaders, and lead to improved respect for mothers and grandmothers. There is dire need to transform the mind of a human being, demonstrating that culture can be reconstructed if there is cooperation amongst the community members. If culture in some instances, have been altered to benefit communities, the same can be done to eradicate patriarchy which is responsible for the male-centredness of structures and social arrangements. Fighting patriarchy is a challenging task as it has existed in communities for years, facing minimal opposition or none at all.



## CHAPTER 6

### GENERAL CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research has been a revealing experiential journey, especially when one begins to consider that the issue of gender inequality has been deliberated in many forums around the world. It has been in circulation for some years. The scholars whose works have been consulted express concern over gender oppression and perception, and some ideas as to how the society could be, transformed. It is interesting that some scholars seem to suggest that culture, which is, manipulated is, the tool that used to dominate women. As a result the youth with a western influence especially, are sceptical about its own culture.

The societal biasness against women was, tested in this study against an appropriate theoretical framework that is feminism. Of all the scholars, Walker (1983) went further to suggest womanism, which she feels, would accurately address black women's preoccupation. Much as it was originally meant to address issues experienced by Black American women, some African scholars amongst whom we may cite Ogunyemi (1985), Hudson-Weems (1990) further improved the black American womanism to suit the diverse nature of cultures, lifestyle issues, perceptions, situations and oppression that the woman of the African continent is facing in her life.

It is a fact that womanism has also been scrutinized by different African scholars who continue to push their way towards understanding the African woman and her nature of oppression. These debates, over which scholars are engaged in, aims at addressing the nature of oppression that an African woman endures. Such deliberations are further revealing as to which aspects of life do African women value, and would not be in a position to accept losing as Africans. It was through such debates that the researcher was able to analyse her data with a clear understanding of what an African woman embraces. There

was also orality and performance that were brought into the study as oral literature texts are realised through performance. They were useful in understanding the praise poetry in particular composed on women in leadership as mirrors of their ability and acceptability.

Data on proverbial and idiomatic expressions that marginalize women in the Nguni poetic forms from different resources proved to be a relevant vehicle for Nguni culture and more importantly have an element of sustaining patriarchy. Of optimal observation is the fact that while there are proverbs and idiomatic expressions that endorse patriarchal attitudes, it was however, observed that there are some of proverbs that empower women. There are those that express the trust that Nguni people have in a woman. While proverbs have been seen to be extremely dynamic, it became significant to examine them within their functional context. Without the context, the meaning and functionality of the proverb is drastically compromised.

Proverbs on marriage are very resourceful in that they reveal how significant this phenomenon is to the Nguni communities. There are proverbs and proverbial sayings that are meant to keep informing and reminding the girl about her being temporal at her father's house. This of course is expressed in a very subtly manner. It is that, intricacy that is found to be the driving force behind emotional subjugation, which causes many women never to challenge the status quo. Proverbs about how important it is for her to find someone whom she will spend the rest of her life with are used so that she realises that, it is an unavoidable destiny for every girl. Some proverbial statements emphasise that if she is not married her life will be lonely, miserable and worthless. The more she sees her peers getting married the more she feels the need as the encouraging words come from all angles. She eventually succumbs to the demand of society.

Most Nguni modern women in particular associate Nguni culture with gender inequality and end up having a negative attitude towards their culture that ought

to define who they are, and which is supposedly the very element that would give them confidence and assertiveness. It is strongly believed that this kind of investigation will not only create a better understanding of their cultures but will further empower them with skills of how to defend themselves from abuse which they may find themselves faced with either at work, in their communities or within the family.

It therefore became necessary to undertake such an investigation that has created a better understanding of African culture to the modern woman. Such a study will enable the woman who is not in contact with her cultures to be in a better understanding when it comes to the difference between oppression that is rooted in her culture and oppression that is inherent in foreign cultures. This study would also enable both the traditional and modern women to raise their voice whenever they encounter a suffocating and discriminating situation.

This study has an overarching effect of empowering women to be mentally strong and unashamedly and unwaveringly challenge leadership positions as it is their right to do so, be it traditional or modern leadership positions.

In this study it, has been, demonstrated that proverbs and proverbial sayings have been faked as a powerful instrument of keeping women occupied with house chores while the men enjoy the limelight in the public domain. This does not in any way suggest that women want to abandon their household chores. It is hoped that, this endeavour illustrates to both modern and traditional women as to what extent do proverbs and proverbial expressions shape their way of thinking. The study also reveals how, women are perceived by society in, the different contexts of African lifestyle.

Praise poems make a significant impact on this study. The content of most praise poetry for women leaders gives a clear idea that once a woman is in leadership she is, despised and criticized in a manner that would discourage other women from following her example. In praises, culture is again misused to scare women and make them realise that if they aspire for leadership they will

be perceived as evil witches, undeserving and not good enough for their duties. However, an argument may arise that the perceptions that are authenticated by some of the praises are a result of how women present themselves in life. It should be borne in mind that an *imbongi* is an intelligent person who may be making statements that are contrary to what the woman leader is so as to be accepted as a good spokesperson of his community. In this study, this was very clear when it came to a woman *imbongi* whose compositions portrayed a woman leader in a positive manner.

This study is a further revelation that even in traditional contexts and institutions there are women who are prepared to face the struggle and stumbling blocks placed before them towards achieving leadership positions. The most fantastic detection of this study has been to come across evidence of women who are brave enough to serve their communities as traditional leaders. A good example of such a woman leader was the case of Mkabayi of the amaZulu who regardless of her devotion towards taking care of the Zulu nation, she stood steadfast against vulgarly and intimidating phrases from her community. Some of those phrases were derogatory so as to emphasise the fact that amaZulu do not accept such, and no woman should consider following in her steps. There has been an observation that the constitution of the country is in most cases deliberately ignored when traditional leadership matters in the provinces are tabled for deliberations, leaving women outside. This is a further indictment on the misrepresentation and manipulation of culture to be seen as a domain of men.

One of the highlights in this study is the concept of *lobola*, regarded as a family building block and its manipulation to enhance the image of men. Arguments were advanced regarding the original refute in, the labelling of this custom 'a bride price'. In the African custom no one can ever be equivalent to a price that *lobola* is, alleged to be. It is indeed, a controversial argument because if the newly wedded wife does not bear children, traditionally an *inhlanti* - literal meaning (a fish) who may be her younger sister or her brother's daughter

comes to join her in her marriage. However, one cannot brush away the view that *lobola* is not originally meant to be a purchase price but has a deeper cultural connotation.

The groom's family offers *lobola* as a gesture of saying thank you for giving us your girl. The mother has to do the spadework of grooming the girl and make her a good product for marriage. The imbalance of material distribution comes out clearly during the time when *lobola* is to be, given by the groom's family. In this instance, men are the sole beneficiaries. There are some instances, in which men may not have contributed in the upbringing of the girl. The custom however, dictates that it has to be men of that family who officiate in the process of *lobola* negotiations. It is evident that this custom provides for prejudice upon women, purely based on their sexual orientation. There are cases where the father receives the *lobola* and decides to use it as he wishes, particularly in cases where the father has more than one wife. When the wedding ceremony has to be prepared for, the mother will foot the bill on her own and nothing will come from the head of the family. In that way, the *lobola* custom becomes unfair and exploiting to women. This is regardless of the fact that, the one who receives the *lobola* cattle or money is, expected to take the responsibility and finance the wedding ceremony as prescribed by the custom.

In instances where the mother of the bride is single, she contacts her brothers and relatives from her family to come and officiate in the process of negotiations. The money ought to be received by the mother's brother even though he will later be expected to pass it on to his sister, as she still has to prepare for the wedding ceremony.

This discussion does indicate that if any government is serious with implementing the policies asserting and protecting women there should be some assistance that could be provided in the form of workshops for the black women who have been subjugated by proverbs and other figurative statements with subtle intentions. It is interesting to note that, it is this very language that

has psychologically pushed the women to accept the subordinate position, albeit out of respect. For instance, her psychological reluctance towards occupying higher positions in the public domain is often pre-determined by, the type of shaping and condition that has been done to make her content in servitude to men. This observation could, be accurately, summed up in the words of Hussein (2009:105) that explains as follows:

The most important idea, however, is that in Africa, proverbs about women are not neutral and they are systematically used to perpetuate domination, inferiorization, exploitation, pathologization, infantilization, and exclusion of women, Furthermore, to understand the meaning of a sexist proverb and why it is used, one should look further and see the complex relationships between text discourse, intertextuality, and context. In so doing, one can easily see the ideological foundations of the regime of power / knowledge depicted in the proverbs.

The quotation above vividly portrays the power of language as a tool to manipulate situations. Innocent as it is supposed, in the hands of a psychopath, language could be destructive. Although *imbongi* could be referred to as good custodians of language, they could not be absolutely exonerated from composing proverbs. It is noteworthy, to state the fact that besides shaping the philosophy of the people the use of proverbs and negative praises for women display that those citizens of a community who have a good command of language and of being *imbongi* are responsible in shaping the minds of those they want to keep inferior. Furthermore, discriminating language and expressions are not just used by men only but by women as well. That could be justified as normal as these women are also products of patriarchy and in some cases are not even aware of the discriminatory nature of their linguistic expressions and practices.

The fact that there are some proverbs that affirm women is not by mistake but it reveals that women have been in leadership positions in the past. History of the African people bears testimony to this view. Chapter five of this study discusses at length the subject of women leadership. The praise poetry analysed in this study reveals in no uncertain terms the incredible leadership role, played by

women in the traditional background. It has also been exposed that the implausible role of women in leadership positions still continues to benefit communities who are giving women a chance of displaying their skills in the modern era. What proverbs articulate becomes an ideology and philosophy of that community and is inadvertently a *sine qua non* of the nature of the culture of the people.

This reflective perspective of women leadership in Nguni poetic forms has demonstrated that women have convincingly displayed their ability on improvising praise poetry. Their participation as professional *timbongi* of royal leaders is yet to be given attention by the gender activists who have interest in traditional lore. At the present moment there has not been visible activism as women are sidelined and ignored if not told that culture does not allow women to become praise singers for royal leaders.

Western ideologies have become a heritage in the African thinking, but this has not changed the values of Africanism. A good example as shown in this study is the concept of child bearing. To African women, this is a necessity, not a choice. It must be emphasised that an African woman would never consider the western idea of not bearing children as a choice. The exception is Mkabayi who refused to be married. It is clear though that she was not against a family structure in the community. That is why she took the trouble of getting a wife for her father. It also remains to be explained as to what it is, that entails leadership, particularly in the present modern world where women are so skilled.

It may be, suggested to have scholars from other language groups put together research groupings for comparing the different South African cultures. That research would present findings that would either confirm or refute the fact African women can make excellent leaders. Such a study would also reveal the existence of gender inequality that prejudice women and make them anecdotal in being leaders. Such a research would contribute towards improving the battle

against gender inequality in both modern and traditional communities. It would enable the gender activists to understand gender inequality as inherent in the different cultures.

Another interesting endeavour would be to pay attention to modern literature of indigenous languages and assess how they proliferate or lower the degree of gender inequality in African communities, especially when it comes to issues of societal leadership. It would also be advisable to have outreach projects that would not just investigate the role played by the Constitution, various policies and organs of state in the fight against gender inequality and patriarchy, but will also educate citizens about their rights. That would shed some light in assessing whether the presence or absence of these protective organs of state have any impact in the reduction of gender inequality in South African communities.

What is of great significance in this study is that it is not just the men who should be transformed but also the very women who are made to fear leadership positions. The women who stood against accepting manipulated culture and norms and displayed how capable women could be, should be included in the curriculum taught at schools so as to shape the mindset of the boy and girl as they grow. Women are to thoroughly understand their cultures and be able to identify elements of culture that are used to scare them from aspiring for leadership positions particularly in traditional contexts. That would be the beginning of a new era in the lives of men and women in Africa and the diaspora. A remedy for these discrepancies would be to work on the transformation of attitudes of both men and women in communities.



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## APPENDIX FOR ALL THE PRAISES

### ANNEXURE 1

#### **TIBONGO TENDLOVUKAZI LABOTSIBENI**

1. *Mlunguti wendlovu kuvaliwe,*
2. *Kuvalwe ngemaphama etibhamu,*
3. *Mkalabhane ongadinwa ngamaveyisi,*
4. *Mgwami longavutfwa nasetiko,*
5. *Lowehlule timbita tebelungu nemaSwati.*
6. *Mzimba kawudabuki ngenhlamba yamadoda,*
7. *Mtimba longadzabuki yinhamba yemaSwati,*
8. *Njuzalala kaMndindane, kaLuvuno,*
9. *Nhlitiyo lebovu njengeyemamba,*
10. *Mamba kayikhonkothwa,*
11. *Ikhonkothwa ngabezizwe, nebezizwana.*
12. *Mahlasela ngelilanga emakhosi ahlasele ngemphi.*
13. *Zitho zimcondo, zimsolotja*
14. *Onganyawo zibovu Zinjengezegwalagwala*
15. *Titfo timbhobho njengetendlovu*
16. *Lubhalule emanti labovu*
17. *Unyatsel' iMbabane yadvungana*
18. *Gijima mgana kaMhlahlo*
19. *Uyobikela bakini ufike uthi:*
20. *"Indlovukazi yakaZombodze ayidli lutho*
21. *Ufice idla izinsiba zezintethe"*
22. *AMalangenani akoDlamini,*
23. *Asabambe imilomo.*
24. *Nezalukazi zikhuza imihlolo.*
25. *Ngendlala engavundwa,*
26. *Nto kaMndzindzane,*
27. *Sisho ngebelu kaMavuso.*
28. *Abamba izindlela,*
29. *Bekuvungama bethi:*
30. *"Uyazifohlozela amazinyane eNdlovu"*
31. *Mafunga abocole ngentandane,*
32. *Mhla ifulathele uMdimba,*
33. *Iyofunda izikhali zokuhlabana kulaseLovedale.*
34. *Izalukazi zelul'imichilo,*
35. *Kanti uNgwane uyamthandisisa*
36. *Wafunga uBusobengwe,*
37. *Wafunga uSikhunyane kaBhekiswako.*
38. *Zulu lana kuMkhoma,*
39. *Lamshiya Mendisi,*
40. *Ngamasongo ezinhliziyiyo,*
41. *Avutha umlilo.*
42. *Vika amacebo ala bezizwe nezizwana*



43. *Makhabane longadzinwa ngemaveyisi,*
44. *Bebatsi batawumdzindza umkhaba*
45. *BoNkoseluhlaza banaPiti Jubheli*
46. *Tikhundlakhundla tabologwaja ngabologwaja*
47. *Ngezwe lengane kaDlamini,*
48. *Esanda kuwela,*
49. *Wena owehlula amabandla eNdlovu,*
50. *Mhla bekusola bekusolisisa.*
51. *Nkhosi!*
52. *Ndlovukazi!*

**3 Versions by: Maboya Fakudze of Nkhanini - from Ginindza (139)**

**Nyembezi (1968) and Matsebula (1990)**

**TRANSLATION**

**THE PRAISES OF QUEEN MOTHER LABOTSIBENI**

1. The one who peeps through to see an elephant in total cover
2. An elephant covered by the back part of guns
3. You constantly wounded who tires not from blows
4. Mgwami the tough one who does not soften from being cooked
5. You who defeated pots of white people and emaSwati
6. You whose body does not bear scars from insults of emaSwati
7. You the tall one born of, of Mndindane of Luvuno
8. The one who is red hearted like a mamba snake
9. Mamba which is not barked at by your own kind
10. It is barked at by strange, powerful and less powerful nations
11. You fight the nation by drought while other kings fight by wars
12. Lubhalule there the water runs red
13. Your legs are as big as those of an elephant
14. Your feet are red as those of a lourie
15. Your thin legs are of beautiful shape
16. Your step befouled the Mbabane River
17. Run messenger born of Mhlahlo
18. Report to your people that:
19. "The Queen at Zombodze has nothing to eat
20. You found her eating feathers of grasshoppers"
21. The Dlamini, the children of the Sun
22. Are still astonished
23. And old women exclaim in surprise
24. At the famine at which you can bear no guilt
25. We boast of the descendant of Mavuso
26. Leaving the country
27. Amidst rebukes that:
28. "You yourself devour the calves of the elephant"

29. You swore upon the only orphan
30. The day it turned its back on the Mdimba mountains
31. Going to learn the spears of victory at Lovedale
32. Old women unknotted their traditional skirts' belts
33. Yet you truly loved the people of Ngwane
34. You swore by Busobengwe
35. You swore by Sikhunyane of Bhekiswako
36. Your rain fell on Mkhoma hills
37. And by-passed the Mendisi hills
38. Because of grudges that burn like fire
39. Evade the tricks of powerful and less powerful nations
40. Makhabane who does not get tired of torture
41. They said they were going to thrash your big tummy
42. Those were Nkoseluhlaza and Piti Jubheli
43. You with multiple places to hide in like a hare
44. Regarding the land of the child of Dlamini
45. That has recently crossed the seas (borders)
46. You who defeated the councillors of the Elephant
47. The day they accused and rebuked you
48. Hail ruler!
49. Great She Elephant!

## ANNEXURE 2

### **TIBONGO TANTOMBI – LATFWALA INDLOVUKAZI LEBUSAKO**

1. *INdlovu lemasondvosondvo yavel' eHlane,*
2. *Umhlaba watamatama.*
3. *Sikhukhukati simaphikophiko*
4. *Sifukamela tinkhulungwane ngetinkhulungwane temantjwele.*
5. *Ngculungcul'imehlwangumtjotjovu, nhlangotsi tonkhana,*
6. *Abonelela Mkhuluz'ases'amatasata.*
7. *Was'umbit'uyasabela Luffo,*
8. *Banemanga bats' "akunalutfo"*
9. *Lukhona luffo.*
  
10. *Wena lubele loludze lweManyamandze,*
11. *Ngekumunyisa labetiyetile nalabaluphele.*
12. *Uhlasele ngaPhilan'eSwatini.*
13. *UnguLomagiga liguma lihhadlatwe tikhova.*
14. *Washon'eNingizimu neNyakatfo*
15. *EMphumalanga neNshonalanga.*
16. *Ngwane watfokomala.*
  
17. *Ngitsi ganu ganu ngetinganu yePhez' ukomkhono,*
18. *Ngiv' iNdlovu yemaSwati,*

19. *Itsi: 'Asisakudli yemganu kuphela,*
20. *Kepha sesiyakuchobota'.*
21. *Sikuchobote kaMshwala,*
22. *Sakuchobot'eLubonjeni,*
23. *Sabona Malindz'atala timfihlo,*
24. *Timfihlo tini leti?*
25. *Timfihlo temaSwati,*
26. *Timfihlo tetimonyomonyo,*
27. *Timfihlo letinandzinandzi.*
  
28. *Ingucungucu lenjengelunwabu,*
29. *ULomagubudzela lonjengesambane,*
30. *Sigwaca lesihle ngekuhluma tinsiba,*
31. *KaChen Bian live lalabamhlophe.*
32. *NguMaphunyuphunyubampheka bamtfulula,*
33. *Ngetigozwana nangembiz' enkulu.*
  
34. *Buhlakani bakho Mhlekezi budide bongcongcoshe bemaSwati,*
35. *Baye baphica naLaMvulane acondzisa kaSebenta.*
36. *Uhlabene kulabaSmart boPhathini,*
37. *Wahlaban' eSingapho neThayiwani,*
38. *Watsi "Mr President"*
39. *Kwadvuma: Mu...hle...kazi!!!*
  
40. *Tihlatsi titsi bokoboko tibushелеleti,*
41. *Timamatseka timatinyw' amhloph' anjengangcocwane,*
42. *Tamamatseka esibuyen' eTjeni*
43. *Kwaye kwamamatseka iNkhweletjeni,*
44. *KaNgwane kababe Mahlokohla.*
  
45. *Lutsango lwakaNgwane,*
46. *Nginikeni lifahlawane.*
47. *LiNyamandze lakaLaSiwela,*
48. *Litse dzimu iNyandza!*
49. *Kwafutfumal' eMasundvu naZithehlezi,*
50. *ULobamba wabambana, Ludzidzi lwenaba,*
51. *Sagabis' iNgabezweni sasing' iNkoyoyo' umkhanya.*
52. *Nkhomo katingeni edamu tiyacabelana,*
53. *Nshivakati lengenamphondvo,*
54. *Phondvo lweNdlovu.*
55. *Ulwemukele kubabekati Mnengwase,*
56. *BaneMntfwana Sozisa anguwaseGundvwini,*
57. *Bakwembesa lugogo lwengwe lemabalabala.*
  
58. *Mhambi wemkhondvo longatiwa nguletinye tiNdlovu,*
59. *Ludvwendvwe lusuk' eHlane*
60. *Wasuyacotfota Nhlandlokati,*
61. *Wadlalisela wasikisa gabazi.*

62. *Tandla teNdlovu mine ngiyatesaba,*
63. *Ngekugamula tisibekela imilomo*
64. *Yetingwenya,*
65. *Titawubhash' emaviyo ngemaviyo*
66. *Neticheme ngeticheme.*
67. *Nani boTembulalave naTebungedzama,*
68. *Tebusweti naTendlala,*
69. *Bayeta boMshamndane, Mdlanyoka – Maphungindlala.*
70. *Iyeta iNdlovu lemasondvosondvo*
71. *Uyeta uLomasitila Lomangcivitakhweshe.*
  
72. *Utawutsi ngcivi, ngcivi!!, siti!! siti!! Kuyawunetsetela.*
  
73. *Sihlahla semnsinsi*
74. *Sihlum' ekhatsi eLudzidzini*
75. *Tjel' indvuna Jim Gama itsatse umboyi*
76. *Ibabel' esiteshini semabhansi kaManzin' edolobheni.*
77. *Tigi taMhlekazi tibugidzigidzi tiv' emakhulwin' etinkhulungwane*
78. *Tiviwe lijaha limachuzuchuzu ladzabulemakhanga netilwandle,*
79. *Laseliyayikhuzela lisesicongweni. Makhatsat' eMhlonishwa  
Dokotela*
80. *Sibusiso Barnabas nente ngamamatseka.*
81. *Ngabona ESRA na NDS bajjimeta*
82. *Bonkhabave naNhlokodolobha bahlalelana*
83. *Ntju...ngantjuza ngakhandza Mankayane amomotseka iNgwenya  
icobodzisile*
84. *Dokotela Mhlonishwa wayibamba ngemsila Yaguc' iGSP.*
  
85. *Acucumuk' emaMelika naMhlaba.*
  
86. *Nyatsela Ndlovu lemasondvosondvo,*
87. *Wena Mzwilili lowantjilot' enkhundleni kaLobamba,*
88. *Avuma ngemadvol' emaKhrist' ahlokoma*
89. *Tintsaba teMdzimba tetsaba.*
90. *Betsaba boMgwami longavutfwa nasetiko,*
91. *Mlunguza wendlovu kuvaliwe,*
92. *Kuvalwe ngemapham' etibhamu,*
93. *Mtimba longadzabuki tinhlamba temaSwati*
94. *Tikhundlakhundla tabologwaja ngabologwaja*
95. *Ngcivita Ndlovu lemasondvosondvo*
96. *Utsi Ngcivi...! Ngcivi...!*
97. *Umhlab' unetsetele.*
98. *Nkhosi!!! Ndlovukazi!! Mhlekaazi!!*

**(Thembekile Msibi-LaMagagula)**

## TRANSLATION

### PRAISES FOR NTOMBI – LATFWALA THE REIGNING QUEEN MOTHER

1. Elephant with many legs that came from Hlane,
2. The world started shaking.
3. Hen that has many wings,
4. That protects thousands and thousands of chickens,
5. Big bird with sharp eyes on all sides,
6. They saved Mkhuluzi who was heavily loaded and busy
7. You then called upon Lutfo and he responded
8. They are telling lies when they say Lutfo has nothing
9. There is something
  
10. You long breasted of Manyamandze
11. You breastfeed the handicapped and the aged
12. You fought with Philan' eSwatini
13. You the one who prepares a windbreaker that is demolished by owls
14. You went South and North
15. As well as East and West
16. The whole country was protected
17. I say you who is not lazy see what we do with morula seeds
18. I hear the elephant of emaSwati
19. Saying we no longer eat you only morula fruits
20. But we eat the whole of you
21. We ate the whole of you at Mshwala
22. We ate the whole of you at Lubombo
23. We saw Malindza giving birth to secrets
24. What secrets are these?
25. These are Siswati secrets
26. Secrets of skin beauty products
27. Secrets of tasty juices
  
28. The one who turns into different colors like a chameleon
29. The one who looks down like an ant-bear
30. A good quail that develops feathers
31. Even at the white man's land of Chen Bian
32. The one who is cooked several times without being softened
33. Using small pots and a big claypot
  
34. Your intelligence has confused even ministers of emaSwati
35. Even LaMvulane who was a director for Sebenta was confused
36. You came out outstanding in Smart and Phathini's land
37. You came out outstanding in Singapore and Taiwan

38. You said “*Mengameli*”
39. There was thunder of: “The Beautiful One!!!”
  
40. Your cheeks, incredibly smooth and fleshy,
41. They smile with a set of teeth that is as white as snow,
42. They smiled behind the wind-breaker at eTjeni,
43. They made Nkhweletjeni smile back,
44. In kaNgwane of our father Mahlokohla.
  
45. Women folk of Swaziland
46. Bring me my ankle rattles (*emafahlawane*)
47. A liNyamandze born by LaSiwela
48. She brought a bundle of wood
49. That brought warmth to Masundvwini as well as Lozithehlezi
50. Lobamba held itself and Ludzidzi went larger
51. We were proud of Ngabezweni and looked down upon Nkoyoyo
  
52. Cattle that do not get into the deep tank because of their big horns
53. A cow that does not have horns
54. The horn of an elephant
55. That you received from Mnengwase
56. Accompanied by Prince Sozisa of Gundvwini
57. They dressed you with a skin of a multi-colored leopard
  
58. The one who travelled on routes not known by other elephants
59. The wedding team came from Ehlane
60. You gracefully walked the route
61. You danced with excellence
  
62. I am afraid of the hands of an elephant
63. They cut and cover mouths
64. of crocodiles
65. That would have chunked groups and groups
66. That would chunk groups and groups
67. Even structures looking after HIV/AIDS patients and orphans
68. Looking after the Poorest and the Hunger Stricken communities
69. The Mshamndane’s, Mdlanyoka – who clear hunger are coming
70. The multi-legged elephant is coming
70. She is coming with her crushing skills, she will crush and move back.
  
71. She will go *ngcivi ngcivi*, crush crush no one will be satisfied
  
72. The lucky-bean plant
73. It grew up within Ludzidzini
74. Send the *indvuna* Jim Gama with a rod /stick
75. He should rush to Manzini bus station
76. Her steps are thousands more than hundreds of millions

77. They were heard by a man with degrees who flew far abroad
78. She then called him to order together with the skilled Prime minister  
Doctor
79. Sibusiso Barnabas you made me smile
80. I saw ESRA and NDS trying to fight
81. The central town and capital town were closer
82. I quickly rushed to Mankayane and saw it smiling, the Crocodile  
looking down
83. Honourable Doctor caught the GSP with its tail and it surrendered
84. Americans and United Nations grumbled
  
85. Go ahead multi-legged Elephant crush them
86. You good voiced songstress who sung at Lobamba Stadium
87. Christians prayed and hailed at you your Highness
88. Mdzimba mountains were happy
89. BoMgwami who is not softened by being cooked
90. The one who peeps through to see an elephant
91. Where the back of guns have been used to close
92. The one whose body is not torn by insults from emaSwati
93. Intelligent one who is here and there
94. You go Crush...! Crush...!
95. The world will feel good
96. Your Highness!!! Ndlovukazi!!

**(Thembekile Msibi-LaMagagula)**

### **ANNEXURE 3**

#### ***IZIBONGO ZIKAMKABAYI***

1. *USoqili!*
2. *Iqili lakwaHoshoza*
3. *Elidl' umuntu limyenga ngendaba*
4. *Lidl' ubhedu ngasezinyangeni,*
5. *Ladl' uMkhongoyiyana ngasemaNgadini*
6. *Ladl, uBheje ngasezanuseni*
7. *UBhuku lukaMenzi,*
8. *Olubamb' abantu lwabenela*
9. *Ngibone ngoNohela kaMlilo, umlil' ovuth' intaba zonke,*
10. *Ngoba lumbambe wanyamalala*
11. *Inkom' ekhal' eSangoyana,*
12. *Yakhal' umlomo wayo wabhoboz' izulu,*
13. *Iye yezwiwa nguGwabalanda*
14. *Ezalwa nguMndaba kwaKhumalo.*
15. *Intomb' ethombe yom' umlomo.*
16. *Zase ziyihlab' imithanti ezawonina.*

17. *UMthobela-bantu izinyoni,*
18. *Bayazibamba usezibuka ngamehlo*
19. *Uvula-bangene-ngawo-onk'- amasango,*
20. *Abanikazimuzi bangene ngezintuba.*
21. *UMncindela kaNobiya,*
22. *UMhlathuz' uzawugcwal' emini.*
23. *Imbibakazan' eyaqamb' imingqa kwaMalandela,*
24. *Yathi ngabakwaMalandela,*
25. *Ithi yikhona bezoqananaza ngazo zonk' izindlela.*

## TRANSLATION

### PRAISE POEM OF MKABAYI

1. Father of guile!
2. Cunning one of the Hoshoba people,
3. Who devours a person tempting him with a story,
4. She killed Bhedu amongst the medicine men,
5. And destroyed Mkhongoyiyana amongst the Mngadis,
6. And killed Bheje amongst the diviners,
7. Morass of Menzi
8. That sucked the people and killed them off;
9. I saw by Nohela son of Mlilo, the fire-that-burns-on-every-hill,
10. For it caught him and he disappeared.
11. Beast that lows at Sangoyana,
12. It lowed and its voice pierced the sky,
13. Until it was heard by Gwabalanda,
14. Son of Mndaba of the Khumalo clan,
15. Maid that matured and her mouth dried up,
16. And then they criticized her, those of her mothers,
17. She who shoots down birds for her people
18. As they catch them she is simply watching on
19. The opener so that people may enter through all gates
20. The owners of the home enter by the narrow side-gates.
21. Sipper for others of the venom of the cobra,
22. The Mhlathuzi River will flood at midday.
23. Little mouse that opened new paths in the land of Malandela
24. And called them the people of Malandela
25. Who would thereby walk along all the paths.

Cope (1968:172) and Turner (2003:214)



## ANNEXURE 4

### IZIBONGO ZIKANANDI - UNINA KASHAKA

4. *USomqeni,*
5. *UMathanga kawahlangani,*
6. *Ahlangana ngokubon'umyeni,*
7. *UGedegede lwasenhla nenkundla.*
8. *UPhoko phalala kuMaqhwakazi,*
9. *Angibonang' uphoko ukuphalala,*
10. *UMboni wamabhuzenge uSontanti.*
11. *USontanti onjengowakwaGwazana.*
12. *USontanti kayidl' inkom' ensizwana*
13. *Udl' ubisi lwenkom' enezimpondo,*
14. *Ukwesab' abayisengayo.*
15. *Intombi kaMbengi weNguga kaSoyengwase kaMaqamande,*
16. *UXebe woMhlathuze*
17. *Mfazi oNtongande zingamadoda*
18. *Uyishaye yenyus' iSabiza*
19. *UMathanga kawahlangani,*
20. *Ahlangana ngokubon' indoda.*
21. *Obengabafana baseNguga*
22. *Abeza beluhayizana.*

## TRANSLATION

### PRAISE POEM OF NANDI

1. Father of troubles!
2. She whose thighs do not meet,
3. They only meet on seeing the husband.
4. Loud-voiced one from the upper part of court.
5. She who rushed out to Maqhwakazi,
6. I did not see the millet rush out.
7. She who sees confusion, Sontanti,
8. Sontanti who is like the daughter of Gwazana;
9. Sontanti does not partake of a little hornless cow,
10. She drinks the milk of a cow with horns,
11. For fear of those who milk it.
12. The daughter of Mbengi of the Nguga kraal, son of Soyengwase son of Maqamande.
13. Whore of the Mhlathuze Valley
14. Woman whose long staves are like those of men
15. Who struck it and it went up the Sabiza River.
16. She whose thighs do not meet,
17. They only meet on seeing a husband.
18. She who was with boys of Nguga,
19. Who came in a small group.

Cope (1968) & Turner (2003)