

**THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN XITSONGA LITERATURE WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO SOUTH AFRICAN NOVELS, POEMS AND PROVERBS**

by

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I declare that **THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN XITSONGA LITERATURE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SOUTH AFRICAN NOVELS, POEMS AND PROVERBS** 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.



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SIGNATURE

01 September 2011
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DATE

RIRHANDZU MACHABA

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This thesis is dedicated to my beloved children, Musa and Lectonia

ABSTRACT

The new dawn that brought about democracy in South Africa in 1994 and the social and political experiences have since changed the expectations of women's roles in society. Literature is the important part of this experience because it mirrors and interprets the experience from the point of view of those who write about it. This study, therefore, attempts to examine the image of women in Xitsonga literature, to investigate whether there is a link in the expected cultural roles of *Vatsonga* women and their roles as characters in Xitsonga literature; and whether there is a shift in the way women characters are portrayed to represent the current social and political reality.

The study employs African feminist literary criticism as a tool in critically analysing the various literary genres. It also adopts purposive sampling of Xitsonga novels, poetry and proverbs that have women characters in them and analyse how these women characters have been portrayed. The naming of female characters is examined in relation to their roles in the texts and the titles of the texts are also investigated and critically analysed to establish whether they portray any gender stereotypes. The themes of the selected texts are also examined to establish if there is any gender biasness. Both male and female-authored texts have been investigated to explore whether male authors depict women differently from their female counterparts.

The study concludes that there is gender-biasness in the manner in which women characters are depicted that do not reflect the current political and social order, however, some women authors, unlike their male counterparts do not reflect gender-biasness in their depiction of female characters.

KEY TERMS

Feminism; Womanism; Stiwanism; Motherism; stereotype; gender; novel; poetry; proverb; *Xitsonga* culture; Patriarchy.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
INE	Instituto Nacional de Estatística Mocambique
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context of the study

During revolutions and periods of social change, the rights and freedoms of the disadvantaged become particularly critical issues. Women's rights are also placed high on the global agenda because women are still fighting for their rights – socially, politically and economically.

Women's responsibilities include being mothers, wives and home administrators. In these roles, they undertake all domestic duties including cooking, feeding the family members, keeping the home tidy and above all, childbearing. Women constitute the majority (52%) of the population in South Africa according to the Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) October 2001 Census. They are also responsible for the education of their children, which resonates with Malcolm X's pithy saying: 'If you educate a woman, you educate a nation, if you educate a man, you educate an individual'. The crucial role that women play in their families is summed up in the words: 'Behind every successful man there is a woman'. Kolawole (1997:63) cites a similar proverb in Zimbabwe: '*Musha mukadzi*', which loosely translated means 'Behind the successful family there is a woman'.

In politics, women can collectively exert a strong influence. Chukukere (1995:2-3) writes that in Yoriba (Nigeria), female chiefs wield political, ritual and religious powers over their subjects. Yaa Asantewa, an Ashanti Queen mother in Ghana, was a powerful political figure who is said to have led her people against the British from 1890 to 1901 during Anglo-Ashanti war. In South Africa, female power was demonstrated on 9 August 1957 when thousands of women marched to the Union Buildings protesting against the pass laws. This successful march

inspired the new democratic government in South Africa to declare 9 August, 'women's day'. Yet despite these significant contributions, the status of African women today is still considerably lower than that of their male counterparts.

Stats SA figures reveal that 36% of women are unemployed as compared to 34% of men and that 18% of women have no schooling compared to 13% men (Women and men in South Africa, 2001:3). Despite these disadvantages, more women than men are the breadwinners in their families. A survey of women poverty in 114 developing nations by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), (1998:261) revealed that out of 939 million rural poor people, 565 million were rural poor women. And out of this total number of rural poor women, 16 million were the household heads and looked after 80 million other people.

Evans (1994:2) quotes a well-known feminist postcard on the subject:

Women constitute half the world's population, perform nearly two-thirds of its work hours, receive one-tenth of the world's income and own less than one-hundredth of the world's property.

The present study examines the portrayal of women in Xitsonga literature. But before we proceed further, we need some understanding of the culture and background of the *Vatsonga*, especially the role of a *Mutsonga* woman in society. Such understanding will help explain why *Vatsonga* authors portray women characters in the way they do.

First let us consider the language. Xitsonga is one of the eleven official languages of the Republic of South Africa and is spoken by the *Vatsonga* people.

The number of Xitsonga speaking people in the provinces of South Africa as reflected by Stats SA (Census in Brief, 2001:15) is as follows:

Table 1: Xitsonga speakers by province

Eastern Cape	Free State	Gauteng	Kwazulu-Natal	Limpopo	Mpumalanga	Northern Cape	North West	Western Cape	South Africa
816	8960	505 380	3 289	1 180 611	117 921	397	172 768	2065	1992 207

The *Vatsonga* (1 180 611) are thus found mainly in Limpopo Province. Like the other South African official languages, Xitsonga also has its own radio station (*Munghana Lonene*), which is on air 24 hours a day.

In South Africa, Xitsonga is referred to as a minority language although it is a cross-boarder language spoken in four countries in southern Africa: South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and to a lesser extent Swaziland. In Zimbabwe, the people (the *Shangani*) are found mainly in the Chiredzi district in the Masvingo Province in southern Zimbabwe. Hachipola (1998:22), states that up-to-date figures for any ethnic group in Zimbabwe are not easy to find, but the Chiredzi district in Zimbabwe is said to have a population of about 160 200 (of this figure, . *Shangani* speakers number about 121 800. According to the 1997 Census conducted by the *Instituto Nacional de Estatística* in Mozambique, Xitsonga is spoken by 11% of the total population (13 million) of the country (2001:9), and the figure for Xitsonga – speaking people in Swaziland is given as 19 000¹.

The *Vatsonga* women, pride themselves on their unique traditional attire: a piece of material tied around the shoulder (*nceka*), a skirt called (*xibelana* or *n'wandhindhana*) and a blouse (*yele*). The head scarf (*xichali-duku*) is made of beads and wool. Beads are an integral part of traditional *Vatsonga* attire (Appendix 1).

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org.za>

The *Vatsonga*, like other ethnic groups, have their unique culture and traditions. Xitsonga literature, both oral and written often reflects cultural norms, values and customs which are part of South Africa's social heritage. According to Gaidzanwa (1985:87):

Since people are socialized into their cultures, what they deem relevant, what they focus on, object to and support in literature depends on their culture's expectations to a large extent.

The image of women in Xitsonga literature is in accordance with the expected roles of women in *Vatsonga* society. For example, the proverb '*Wansati a nga na nomu*' (A woman has no mouth) alludes to the fact that women are not permitted to attend *huvo* (the meeting place where issues concerning the running of the homestead and the community are discussed).

In a marriage relationship, a woman is a minor who must submit meekly to her husband and her sole purpose in life is to serve and satisfy him. The husband is the figure of authority in the family - he has to be informed of everything that happens in the family. Nothing is done without his knowledge and consent and his decision is final. There are even strict rules that govern how food is served to the husband. His food is served in a special dish, *Ntabana* and no one else in the family may eat from this dish as it is taboo to use any utensil that is used by the husband (Baloyi, 1992:87).

The woman is regarded as inferior to her husband. Traditional *Vatsonga* women do not eat chicken, eggs and certain parts of domestic animals such as the liver as they are considered the preserve of the husband or father of the family (Mahlangu, 1980:122).

However, in numerous modern *Vatsonga* families, the situation may be changing as many *Vatsonga* women today are professional women who earn income for the family. According to Mahlangu (1980:115):

It is difficult to convince one's wife who is a nurse that she should not eat eggs and liver, for example whilst she knows very well that these foods contain vitamins, proteins, fats and other nutrients necessary for building the body.

Since 1994 after South Africa attained democracy, several important pieces of legislation on customary law, domestic violence, child maintenance and employment equity, which have a direct bearing on the quality of women's lives have been drafted and amended. Such legislation, coupled with other gender equity initiatives have helped foster assertiveness among South African women in general and *Vatsonga* women in particular. Most modern *Vatsonga* women demand to be treated as equals in the marriage relationship and reject domination by their husbands. However, even though some of these women are economically independent, they continue to be bound by traditional norms of subservience in order to preserve their marriages. This conflict is evident in some literary texts that will be analysed in this study.

1.2 Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to examine the portrayal of women in Xitsonga literature. Jones (1989:2) states that it is generally in female writing that women are treated equally and women – related issues analysed objectively. Jones however, does not take into account male novelists such as Nurudin Farah, the Somalian author of *From a crooked Rib*, who writes about life in Somalia from a feminine perspective. In other words, although he is a man, he writes about the plight of women in Somali and their status in the world.

Against this background, the following question can be asked: Is it a fact or an oversimplification to say that male *Vatsonga* authors are biased in their depiction of female characters and that it is only in the texts of female writers that one can find an objective treatment of womanhood and the challenges that women face?

From a sociological point of view, a study on the depiction of women in literature is needed in order to establish whether such depictions reflect social reality. The sociology of literature holds that literary works cannot exist in isolation from the society that produces them – neither the artist's language nor ideas can be independent of his or her society. Goldman (1977:83) asserts that literature is holistic: It is a social reality that should be seen as a totality because a work of art is composed of parts in a particular relationship to each other to form a larger whole. Goldman's assertion implies that when examining a work of art, it should be borne in mind that the artist's cultural background, his social class, and the mores of his society all influence his art in different ways. It is in this context that this study should be viewed. The experience of South Africa's new democracy has changed the expectations and behaviour of most groups in South African society. Literature is an important part of this experience because it mirrors and interprets the experience from the point of view of those who write about it. This study accordingly, also attempted to establish whether the depiction of women by *Vatsonga* writers has changed to reflect the dynamics of the new social and political order. If the depiction has not changed, it will be interesting to determine why not and, if it has changed, it will also be interesting to determine to what extent this has happened.

From a political perspective, an in-depth study of the images of women in literature has significant relevance for modern politics and democratic governance issues. Women's striving for their own freedom and independence is reflected in how images of women are projected in literature.

According to Gaidzanwa (1985:8):

The struggle for justice can be handicapped if women have a negative image in society. A negative image delegitimises their struggle for fundamental rights and freedoms such as the right to jobs, education, health and other valued goods and services in society.

Efforts are being made globally to promote gender equality and to eliminate gender inequality. However, the hold that tradition has on some African people is so strong that cultural traditions outweigh legislation designed to facilitate gender equity.

The recent case before the Constitutional Court on the chieftaincy dispute in the Valoyi clan (*Vatsonga* clan) in the Tzaneen area illustrates this dilemma **[Appendix 2 (a) and (b)]**. As mentioned above, in Xitsonga traditional society, the man is regarded as superior to his wife; he is the family head, and he alone can achieve the headship of the entire community. No woman, however prominent, is permitted to hold a headship/chieftaincy position in her father's house because of Xitsonga patriachal laws. In this particular court case, the first - born daughter of the chief claimed the chieftaincy title that was given to the chief's younger brother in accordance with the *Vatsonga* indigenous law of inheritance and succession in terms of which the most senior living male among the chief's children inherits the chieftaincy; and, where the chief does not have a son, the chief's brother succeeds him (Hartman, 1981:155). The outcome of the case where the Constitutional judge ruled in favour of the late Chief's daughter has gone a long way towards affirming the status of women and advancing the implementation of the new gender equity laws in the Constitution as well as addressing the gender stereotypes in society.

In examining the image of women in Xitsonga literature, this study also investigated whether there is a link between the expected cultural roles of *Vatsonga* women and their roles as characters in Xitsonga literature; or whether there is a shift in the way women characters are portrayed to represent the current political order.

To achieve the research aim as outlined above, the following questions guided the study:

- Are *Vatsonga* male authors biased in the way they depict female characters in their works?
- Do *Vatsonga* female authors depict women characters differently to the way their male counterparts depict them?
- Does the portrayal of women in Xitsonga literature approximate reality – does it change to reflect the changing social and political order?

1.3 Research problem

The role of the woman in society is not confined only to the lower echelons of political power, in South Africa, for example, the establishment of the Ministry of Women, Children and Persons with Disability was the government's attempt to address gender inequality. Since 1994, when South Africa became a democracy, there has been a positive move in terms of female representivity in the political realm. According to the 2009 statistics (i.e. the time of the writing of this thesis) on women in politics supplied by the Office of the Presidency, out of 36 cabinet ministers, 14 were women and out of 28 deputy ministers, 11 were women. There are also currently five women premiers out of the total number of nine, that is, 55% female representivity. In Liberia, a female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, came to power in 2006 - the first time in the history of the African Continent.

Despite these achievements, women are still fighting for their rightful place politically, economically and socially. Literature perpetuates and portrays a particular view of reality as seen by the writer. In other words, writers promote norms, values and customs they consider important. By the same token, norms and values they do not consider valuable or necessary may be downplayed. Gaidzanwa (1985:87) contends that since people are socialised by their cultures, what they consider relevant and what they focus on, object to and support in literature depends largely on their cultural norms.

At the Beijing World Conference for Women, under the section on 'Women, Culture and Traditional practices', the importance of deconstructing culture for positive gains was stressed as the primary plan of action to achieve gender equality by Hahn (1998:2):

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Cedaw) proceeds from the assumption that all practices that harm women, no matter how deeply they are imbedded in culture, must be eradicated. **Cedaw calls upon governments to work toward transforming not only law, but also culture, in order to achieve gender equity** (Emphasis added).

This globally accepted position means that cultural beliefs and norms have to be revised and deconstructed if any attempt at gender equity is to succeed. The *Vatsonga* oral literature forms are no exception to the above. An example of how women are depicted in some forms of Xitsonga oral literature is observed in one of the Xitsonga proverbs (1970:182), '*Kuwa ro tshwuka ri ni xivungu ndzeni – Nhwana lowo saseka, loko a nga lowi wa loloha kumbe wa yiva, kumbe wa kariha, kumbe u ni mona*' (A red fig does not lack worms inside – a beautiful girl is often lazy, or a witch, or she is addicted to robbing, or ill tempered, or wicked).

Interestingly, this proverb is also found in Shona. Gaidzanwa (1985:11) links the proverb to single women, especially those who have refused to marry or have been unsuccessful in maintaining marriages, widows and single or jilted women. These women's beauty is regarded as the reason for the failure of their marriages. Similarly, Kolawole (1997:64) renders the proverb in the Shona language and its translation as follows: '*Mukadzi munaku kurega kuroya anoba* (A beautiful woman always has a blemish; if she is not a witch, she is a thief). A 'thief' in the sense that she steals other women's husbands.

The images of women in Xitsonga literature have implications for the way women view themselves and are viewed by their society. It is in this context that these implications need to be examined.

1.4 Conclusion

This introductory chapter outlined the context and relevance of the study as well as its aim. It briefly indicated the challenges that women are currently faced with. The link between culture and literature as explained in the chapter confirms the need to examine the depiction of women in literature in general and in Xitsonga in particular.

1.5 Organisation of the thesis

The remainder of the thesis runs from Chapters 2 – 6. The second chapter focuses on the theoretical framework that informs the study, namely, feminist literary criticism and African feminist literary criticism. This chapter also shows that feminism as a theory is broad and explains the rationale behind the choice of the African feminist theoretical approach from among many approaches. Finally, it outlines the research methodology of the study, defines the term 'literature', lists the literature that will be analysed and discusses the limitations of the study.

Chapter 3 deals with the depiction of female characters in novels. In this chapter, female characters are analysed in the works of male as well as female authors. The naming of female characters is examined in relation to their roles in the texts, and the text titles are also critically analysed to establish the presence of gender stereotypes, for example, a novel by a male author, Chauke (1965), entitled *Nkatanga i dlakuta* (My wife is a whore). The themes of the selected texts are also examined for gender bias.

Chapter 4 covers the depiction of female characters in poetry. The themes of selected poems, the naming of female characters and the roles linked to these characters are analysed in female-authored as well as male-authored poems. The poems are also analysed to establish the possible presence of gender stereotypes.

Chapter 5 analyses the portrayal of women in oral literature that is in proverbs. A proverb is defined, and selected proverbs that have a bearing on women are examined to establish the possible presence of gender biasness in the way women and their roles are portrayed.

Chapter 6 contains the conclusion, observations, findings and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

There is a significant body of research on women in literature, and, consequently, a literature review is needed to identify gaps that require further research. This chapter reviews the portrayal of women in African literature broadly, African literature in South Africa and, finally in Xitsonga literature.

2.2 Portrayal of women in African literature

A similar thread seems to run through the characterisation of women in most early African literary works. The first major discussion of women in literature is by Mutiso (1987:3) in his essay *Women in literature* in which he concludes that the most memorable women in African literature are city dwellers with loose morals.

Likewise, Little (1980) in his study, *The sociology of urban women's image in African literature*, portrays women mainly in terms of their relationships with men:

- girlfriends and good time girls;
- wives;
- free women;
- mothers;
- courtesans and prostitutes; and
- political women and workers.

However, not all male writers are biased in their portrayal of female characters in African literature – Nurudin Farah the author of *From a crooked Rib* as indicated in Chapter 1 is a case in point. Furthermore, Jones (1989:2) reveals that:

While it is true that most male writers have not been able to communicate to us how women feel on the burning issues of polygamy, motherhood and relations between the sexes and have simply presented the traditional picture of the woman...It is not true to say that all male writers have been unsympathetic towards women, or have lacked the ability to present truly complex women, or have merely given us stereotypes.

Jones cites writers like Wole Soyinka, Sembene Ousmane and Ngugi wa Thiongo as outstanding in their depiction of women who are resourceful, determined and resilient and who, when necessary, break through the barriers imposed by tradition on their sex, and take their stand by their men. While in detention and writing *Devil on the cross*, Ngugi (1981:10), for instance, highlights in his prison diary the importance he accords to his heroine, Jacinta Wariinga by asserting that:

Because the women are the most oppressed and exploited section of the entire working class. I will create a picture of a strong determined woman with a will to resist and to struggle against the conditions of her present being.

In her study, *Images of women in Zimbabwean literature*, Gaidzanwa (1985) examines the dominant images of black women as found in Shona, Ndebele and English literature by black writers in Zimbabwe. Her findings reveal positive as well as negative images of women in the literature. She also records the ways in which some male authors have more positive images of women than some female authors.

2.3 Portrayal of women in African literature in South Africa

Several studies have been conducted on the depiction of literary female characters in languages other than Xitsonga. For instance, in her work, *Perceived oppression of women in Zulu folklore: A feminist critique*, Masuku (2005) looks at the perceived oppression of women in Zulu folklore. In her methodology, she uses diverse approaches rather than confining herself to a single feminist theory. Her approach is similar to mine in this study in that it is a multifaceted approach. The difference, however, is that her approach puts more emphasis on Western feminism whereas in my study emphasis is on the African feminism. Her study also focuses entirely on folktales while my study focuses on both oral and modern literature. Her study demonstrates that various stereotypes are attached to women in folktales. The images are a woman as a labourer, a witch, the femme-fatale, a bold and the daring woman, a woman who rebels against her culture, a barren woman, and a woman who perseveres in marriage and is rewarded for her perseverance. Masuku is the first researcher to examine the image of women in various isiZulu oral literary works including folklore.

In his work, *A feminist critique of the images of women in the prose works of selected Xhosa writers (1909-1980)*, Mtuze (1990) examines the images of women as reflected in the works of selected writers from the earliest isiXhosa literature to that at the beginning of the eighties. He also observes, like Masuku (1997), that the first female writers confirm rather than refute, as one may have expected, popular female stereotypes. Mtuze's work is confined to the prose works of isiXhosa authors - it would have been interesting to read his findings on the portrayal of women in the oral forms of isiXhosa literature. He employs feminist criticism in examining these literary works, and his findings reveal that stereotyping as a social phenomenon and construct has its roots in the pre-literate era. In other words, it is not something brought about by education or modern life. According to him, stereotyping is universal as it transcends racial

and national barriers, and affects women similarly in various countries and communities. Mtuze (1990:141) concludes his study with the following thought:

What has, however, come out very clearly from the study is that the women's position has undergone, for better or for worse, a tremendous change over the past few decades. Despite the strides that women have made in various walks of life, negative stereotypes continue to thwart their progress and to undermine their achievements in various subtle ways.

Prior to the study cited on page 14, Masuku (1997) undertook a study, *Images of women in some Zulu literary works: A feminist critique* in which she applied a feminist approach in examining the stereotypes by isiZulu authors. Her findings were that these authors employ various stereotypes in their depiction of female characters and that, interestingly, the female authors use virtually the same images as their male counterparts, namely that of a woman as a witch, a femme-fatale, a Delilah, a submissive and naïve being and also as a materialistic being. Masuku believes that male and female writers should view women more positively and that this ideal can be achieved only if they become progressive feminists, committed to a just society.

Dlamini's study (1995), *Voicing their perceptions: A review of Swazi women folk songs* focuses on oral literature, yet she considers only one genre, namely folksongs. She applies a feminist approach to reveal women's protest against the oppressive cultural rules and norms of Siswati. The folksongs are used as a channel to express the dissatisfaction with the prevailing injustices against women.

Mawela (1994) in her study on *The depiction of women characters in Selected Venda Novels* examines the portrayal of women by Tshivenda authors. Two

contrasting images emerge from her observations, namely that of a traditional Tshivenda woman who is submissive and conforms to the rules of the Tshivenda culture and that of a modern woman who is assertive and challenges oppressive social norms and discriminatory practices. Like all the researchers cited above, with the exception of Dlamini and Masuku, Mawela focuses on written literature.

2.4 Feminism in Xitsonga literature

The depiction of African women in African literature has been studied by several scholars; however, as mentioned earlier, few studies have been done on Xitsonga literature in this regard. Mathye (2003) in her work, *The image of women in selected Tsonga novels* employs the feminist approach in examining the extent to which portrayals of *Vatsonga* women in literary works accurately represent the nature and role of women in *Vatsonga* society. She also examines whether there is any difference in the portrayal of women characters in the novels authored by male writers and by female writers. Her findings indicate that *Vatsonga* society is patriarchal and that the selected novelists depict female characters against the backdrop of patriarchal cultural, traditional, social and ideological norms that lead to the oppression of women. She also finds that male authors reflect a bias in favour of patriarchy by depicting female characters who cling to traditionalism whereas female writers undermine patriarchy by portraying characters who resist traditional values.

Mathye's work (referred to above) is confined to analyses of written literature encompassing six male-authored and four female-authored novels. These selected novels were all published before the democratic era in South Africa ranging from 1930s (when the first written novel, *Sasavona* by Marivate was published in Xitsonga) to 1991.

It is important to note that African communities do not form a single small cultural entity and that cultural identity does not necessarily imply homogeneity.

Although the findings on other African languages reveal similar trends in the literary depiction of women, these findings cannot summarily be generalised to include Xitsonga literature. Regarding Xitsonga, the only study that has been conducted so far is the ten novel analysed by Mathye (above). No study in any other genre or oral literature has been conducted. The present study is therefore the first to incorporate both oral and written literature. Whether Xitsonga literature portrays women in a similar stereotypical way as revealed above has still to be determined.

2.5 Research methodology

To achieve the aims and objectives of the study, the feminist literary criticism will be the tool employed to analyse the female characters as portrayed in Xitsonga literature.

Women have been at the centre of various studies in various disciplines such as, developmental studies, gender studies, literature etc. and the study on the role or portrayal of women in any discipline is a very daunting task. This is observed in the lack of universally accepted definition for 'feminism' which forms the basis of all women studies. Evans (1994:10) illustrates this complication in her introductory part of analysing the term 'feminist literary criticism' by indicating that:

I shall not begin, as I probably should, by offering to define my terms. Instead I shall acknowledge that I have brought together three concepts admitted on all sides to be well-nigh indefinable. Or if they are definable, they are so only by reference to a particular thinker's usage.

Humm (1986: x) also contends that the term 'feminist literary criticism' is problematic as the meaning is not always the same in different countries or even

within one country. Adding to the complexity of defining the term, Ruthven (1984:4) maintains that:

'Feminist literary criticism' is a familiar enough term: we use it all the time, but what does it mean? Each of its constituent words is highly problematic, for instance, to which of the many feminisms, ancient and modern, does 'feminist' refer? What does the word 'literary' mean, now that literature is said to be no longer the generic term for a diversity of texts bonded into a canon by an elusive property called 'literariness'...And for 'criticism', is the word being used in the older sense of a variety of discursive practices subservient to the elucidation and evaluation of works of literature? Or is it used in a newer sense...

Ruthven's view is supported by Mitchel and Oakley (1986:9) who shy away from giving a precise definition of feminism indicating that offering a definition of the concept has become an obstacle to understating feminism in its diversity and its differences. They, however, suggest what they call a 'base-line' definition which they believe can be shared by feminists. In this regard, they suggest that:

Many would agree that at the very least a feminist is someone who holds that women suffer discrimination because of their sex, that they have specific needs which remain negated and unsatisfied, and that the satisfaction of these needs would require a radical change in the social, economic and political order.

These authors conclude by saying that beyond this definition, issues pertaining to feminism become increasingly complex.

The above discussion reveals that feminist theory covers a wide field of research. There are numerous disciplines covering women studies and also numerous scholars of feminism and feminist literary criticism. Accordingly, this study did not attempt an exhaustive examination of feminism but, rather, synoptically reviewed the literature on Western and African literary criticisms. It employed a feminist literary criticism approach that focused on the analysis of female characters and how their roles in society are portrayed in literature. Kolodny in Brown and Olson (1978:37) offers the following broad definition of feminist literary criticism:

Feminist literary criticism covers various contexts and a variety of activities, including any criticism written by a woman, no matter what the subject; any criticism written by a woman about a man's book from a "feminist" perspective; and any criticism written by a woman about a woman's book or about female authors in general.

The definition encompasses the scope of this study as the analysis of women's images was done looking at male as well as female *Xitsonga* authors. Donovan (1989:14) maintains that feminist literary criticism has three distinct subdivisions, each with its own target, (1) analyses of the "image of women"; (2) an examination of existing criticism of female authors; (3) a "prescriptive" criticism that attempts to set standards for literature that is "good" from a feminist point of view. The first subdivision (above) was the focus of this study.

As mentioned earlier, Western as well as African feminist literary criticisms were used in the study to analyse the image of women in *Xitsonga* literature. However, it should be pointed out that while Western feminist critical thought was useful in analysing some of the more universal female myths, not everything found in the *Xitsonga* context fitted into the Western mould. Accordingly, African feminist

critical thought was applied as a way of taking cognisance of the contextual dynamics.

2.6 Western feminist theory

The previous section outlined the methodology adopted for the present study. In the following sections, various approaches to feminist theories are considered. Jaggar (1994:2) equates feminism with the different social movements dedicated to ending the subordination of women; whereas Jaggar and Rothenberg (1993: xvii) see feminist theories as tools designed for the purpose of understanding women's subordination in order to end it. These differing views highlight the difficulty of reaching a united definition of feminist theory. The focus should therefore be shifted from a fixed stable entity called feminism to a possibility of a multiple feminisms. This suggestion is summed up by Ryan (1988:1) who maintains that:

Such a suggestion arises from a number of sources; the difficulty experienced in summarizing feminist critical theory; the inability to find a definition which encompasses feminism's diversities and divergences; the reluctance to limit feminism to a single category; an unwillingness to confine it to a totalizing theory; and finally a tendency to regard women as having a multiple rather than single identities.

Three broad theories of feminism can thus be identified: liberal, socialist/marxist and radical feminist theories.

2.6.1 *Liberal feminist theory*

According to the liberal theories that developed from the 17th century onwards, individuals have a right to own property, sell their labour and go about their lives within a legal framework that protects them from interference by governments or other individuals. Individuals also have a right to choose their own representatives to govern them (Bryson, 1999:10). Early liberal democratic theorists argued that these rights could not be extended to women as women were biologically incapable of full development of reason.

From the early years of liberalism, women argued that they were inherently just as intelligent and rational as men and that, if they appeared inferior, this was a result of their upbringing and lack of education. These ideas were further extended in the 20th century when feminists insisted that women should be entitled to participate in politics and receive paid employment whether or not they chose to get married and have children. This view is dealt with by Friedan in his book, (1963), *The feminine mystique*.

Whelehan (1995:27) maintains that feminists with a liberal perspective 'tend not to identify their position as 'political' but rather as a sensible, moderate and reasonable claim for formal sexual equality'.

2.6.2 *Socialist/Marxist feminist theory*

Socialist/Marxist feminists argue that it is impossible to isolate gender equality issues from the class society in which they occur. Socialism covers a wide range of political theories and practices from reformist social democracy to revolutionary Marxist communism. Despite their profound differences, those theories share a general belief that unrestricted capitalism is oppressive for most men and women. They also see collective class interests rather than individual rights as the proper primary focus of political concern (Bryson, 1999:16).

Socialism, like liberalism, promises equal rights and opportunities to all individuals; unlike liberalism, however, it stresses economic and social rights and freedom from exploitation, and prioritises the interests of working class people. Consequently, it is of more relevance to 'ordinary people' than the formal legal rights offered by liberalism. Social feminists believe that it is only in the context of a general movement to economic equality that the needs of all groups of women, rather than those of an elite minority, can be met.

Socialist thinking also advocates the abolition or reduction of the division of labour. It is argued that, rather than specialising in one limited task, workers should be enabled to express themselves in a whole range of ways, so that work becomes a form of human fulfillment rather than alienation and degradation (Bryson, 1999:17). In some early socialist thought, the opposition to the division of labour included that between women and men. This general idea ties in with recent feminist analyses, which holds that women should be enabled to do 'men's work'; that men should develop their caring and nurturing qualities through participation in family life and childrearing; that sexuality should be liberated from gender stereotypes; and that ascribed and limited gender roles should be ended. For instance, women can now do physically demanding work such as driving tractors, bricklaying, and men in South Africa have recently been entitled to paternity leave to help look after newborn babies.

2.6.3 Radical feminist theory

Radical feminism argues against liberalism that women's liberation cannot be achieved by a theory and practice which make provisions for the rights of abstract individuals, irrespective of social class and gender relations. Also, according to radical feminists neither capitalism nor any other economic system is the cause of female oppression, nor do they believe that female oppression will disappear as a result of a purely economic revolution (Ruthven, 1984:22).

Contrary to Marxism, radical feminism regards women's oppression as the primary and most fundamental form of oppression and gender is seen as a core system of male domination in all social organisations. The term used to signify this universal system of male domination is 'patriarchy'. While both radical and socialist forms of feminism use the term, in radical feminism, it refers to a system of domination that has pervaded all aspects of culture throughout history (Ashton and Whitting, 1987:9). Patriarchy in radical feminist discourse refers to the common oppression of women without regard to history, culture, class or radical differences. Radical feminists believe that patriarchy can be avoided only through the total withdrawal from the world of men-'separatism'.

Radical feminists strive for women's autonomy in the areas of sexuality and procreation, particularly in what they call 'forced motherhood' and 'sexual slavery' (Ashton and Whitting, 1987:13).

Radical feminist critics argue that the stress on women's status as victims feeds into a false and politically dangerous view of women as essentially good and men as essentially bad. It ignores the fact that many women do have a significant amount of political and economic power and that many men are oppressed, and it falsely attributes virtues to women and vices to men despite innumerable examples of aggressive women and caring men (Bryson, 1999:29). This, according to Bryson, produces a false view of men as 'the enemy' suggesting that they cannot be trusted as fathers, friends, sexual partners or political allies; lesbian separatism therefore becomes the only feasible option for feminists both as a political strategy and as a life-style choice.

As can be seen in the discussions above, the feminist claim that women should have the same rights and freedoms as men has been raised mainly in western societies. Although many of the theories discussed here complement each other, they also oppose each other, for example the demands for individual rights and for more collectivist and/or contextualised approaches. Some African

women scholars were not happy with these theories which prompted them to come up with alternative theories as discussed below.

Although it is known that black, working class women face particular problems, no debates have been held on the implications of their specific social and economic status. Consequently, in this study, African feminist theories took precedence over Western feminist theories as the latter stress women's shared experiences while the African theories stress the importance of difference and diversity. This approach will be explained in detail under African feminist theory in section 2.7 below.

2.7 African feminist theory

This section explores the different feminist theories that African women have advanced in order to redefine their roles in the struggle against gender inequalities. The discussion then leads to the feminist theory that was employed in the present study and the rationale behind the adoption of this theory. Many Western feminists believe they share a bond of sisterhood with black women, yet black women's triple oppression by class, race and gender places them in a far worse situation than that experienced by white women (Cooper, 1992:77). Consequently, Western feminism in the past did not match the perceived needs of the black community, which led to black scholars searching for an alternative description of feminism. Arndt (2001:12) maintains that there is and must be a diversity of feminisms responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women and defined by them for themselves. Some writers who have rejected feminism and denied being feminists include Ama Ata Aidoo, Bessie Head, Miriama Ba, Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta. In an interview with Arndt, Emecheta (2001:11), a Nigerian scholar, qualifies her relation to feminism in the following terms:

I am a feminist with a small 'f'. I love men, and good men are the salt of the earth. But to tell me 'that we should abolish marriage like the capital 'F' (feminist) women who say women should live together and all that, I say No. Personally, I'd like to see the ideal happy marriage. But if it doesn't work, for goodness sake, call it off.

Emecheta highlights some of the issues in West feminism she considers irrelevant to an African world-view. Similarly, Ama Ata Aidoo, (in Arndt 2001:13), a West African writer from Ghana, touches on the centrality of the family:

Feminism. You know how we feel about that embarrassing western philosophy? The destroyer of homes. Imported mainly from America to ruin nice African homes.

Hudson-Weems (2001:24), a Nobel Prize-winning author from Columbia, emphasises the power to define oneself:

Definitions belong to the definers not to the defined, historically. So it is up to us to define ourselves. If we don't someone else will and they will do it miserably.

She argues that the African woman cannot settle for labels and definitions that have nothing to do with the African culture and experience.

In an interview with Arndt (2001:18), Flora Nwapa, a West African writer from Nigeria, and the first African woman to publish a novel, was indignant at being constantly 'accused' of being a feminist just because she wrote about women. At best, she said she could identify with Alice Walker's womanism, which was

introduced in 1983 as an alternative concept to feminism in an African context. According to Walker² (2002:37):

Feminism is the political theory that struggles to free all women; women of colour, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women-as well as white, economically privileged, heterosexual women. Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement.

Walker advances the concept 'womanism' as Black women's identity and commitment to gender issues. According to her, womanism is to feminism 'as purple to lavender'. Kolawole (1997:21) however, argues that this distinction is not clear as one can easily confuse the two colours. In her definition of womanism, Walker says a womanist is 'committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female'. She implies that womanists are concerned with overcoming not only sexist discrimination, but also discrimination based on people's racial or socio-economic identity.

Interestingly, Ogunyemi, a Nigerian literary critic, coined the term womanism independently of Walker. While Walker (2002:38) emphasises feminism as a white women's movement, a representative of womanism is a 'Black feminist or feminist of colour' that is only Black women can be womanists and she also denies that black men could become active as womanists. Unlike Walker, however, Ogunyemi (1985/86:71) describes African womanism as 'expanded feminism':

A 'womanist' will recognize that along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must additionally

² Arndt, S 2002. *African gender trouble and African Womanism: An interview with Chikwenye Ogunyemi and Wajira Muthoni*. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. Vol. 25 no. 25. Chicago: The University of Chicago.

incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic and political considerations into her philosophy.

Ogunyemi (1985/86:71) further contends that womanism differs from radical feminism but shares similarities with Marxist feminism:

Unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand. It is also interested in communal well-being, thus extending its ideology towards a Marxist praxis.

She also excludes White as well as African American women from her ideology' and dissociates herself explicitly from Walker (Ogunyemi, 2005:73):

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.

Another difference with Walker is in her attitude towards lesbian love. While Walker stresses that womanists love other women-'sexually and/or non-sexually', Ogunyemi argues that her African womanism rejects lesbian love. Her attitude towards lesbian love is however, not representative of all African women as some Africans do practice lesbianism.

In the 1990's, Hudson-Weems (2001:186) introduced Africana womanism as an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. Her disapproval of white Western Feminism is more radical than that of Walker and Ogunyemi:

Africana women and men dismiss the primacy of gender issues in their reality, and thus dismiss the feminist movement as a viable framework for their chief concerns. Instead, they hold to the opinion that those Africana women who embrace the feminist movement are mere assimilationists or sellouts who, in the final analysis, have no true commitment to their culture or their people, particularly as it relates to the historical and current collective struggle of Africana women and men.

For Hudson-Weems, neither the term African feminism nor Black feminism is appropriate. Africana womanism is not Black feminism, African feminism, or Walker's womanism that some African women have come to embrace. Regarding the word 'Africana', Hudson-Weems (2001:186) argues that it 'identifies the ethnicity of the woman being considered, and this reference to her ethnicity, establishing her cultural identity, relates directly to her ancestry and land base Africa.

Hudson-Weems (2001:187) goes on to list a total of eighteen characteristics of an Africana womanist: she is (1) a self namer; (2) a self-definer; (3) family centred; (4) genuine in sisterhood; (5) strong; (6) in concert with male in struggle; (9) a flexible role-player; (10) respected; (11) recognized; (12) spiritual; (13) male compatible; (14) respectful of elders; (15) adaptable; (16) ambitious; (17) mothering; and (18) nurturing.

The characterisation of an African womanist as someone who practices genuine sisterhood, struggles in cooperation with men and is 'male compatible' suggests that Hudson-Weems believes that only women may be Africana womanists. Interestingly, Hudson-Weems' Africana womanism focuses on mothering, that is, including what Ogunyemi deplors as lacking in Walker's concept.

Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:10), a Nigerian Marxist literary critic, proposes another concept, she refers to as 'stiwanism'.

STIWA is my acronym for Social Transformation Including women in Africa...This new term 'STIWA' allows me to discuss the needs of African women today in the tradition of the spaces and strategies provided in our indigenous cultures for the social being of women...'STIWA' is about the inclusion of African women in the contemporary social and political transformation of Africa. I am sure there will be few African men who will oppose the concept of including women in the social transformation of Africa, which is really the issue. Women have to participate as co-partners in social transformation.

Ogundipe-Leslie's stiwanism, like Ogunyemi's African womanism, is a concept that relates to African women only and thus excludes white and African American women. Stiwanism is also distinguished from feminism:

The creation of the new word is to deflect energies from constantly having to respond to charges of imitating western feminism...This new term describes my agenda for women in Africa without having to answer charges of imitativeness or having to constantly define our agenda on the African continent in relation to other feminisms, in particular, while Euro-American feminisms which are unfortunately, under siege by everyone. (Ogundipe – Leslie, 1994:10)

Ogundipe-Leslie does not say whether or not men may be stiwanist although her ideology states the necessity of cooperation between men and women.

Kolawole (1997:26) discusses the African American and African alternative concepts to feminism considered above and develops her own concept of womanism. In her definition, she, like Ogunyemi and Ogundipe-Leslie maintains that womanists are African women:

Any African woman who has the consciousness to situate the struggle within African cultural realities by working for a total and robust self-retrieval of the African woman is an African or Africana womanist.

When saying '[a]ny African woman...' in her definition, Kolawole implies that men cannot be womanists. Like African American and African alternative concepts, Kolawole's womanism is clearly distinguished from white Western feminism.

Acholonu's (1991:61) concept of 'motherism' must also be mentioned as it was developed as an alternative to feminism. According to Acholonu,, motherism denotes motherhood, nature and nurture. Contrary to other scholars discussed before, Acholomu argues that both men as well as women can be motherists, and she states what is crucial about motherists:

[Motherists] are concerned about the menace of wars around the globe racism, malnutrition, political and economic exploitation, hunger and starvation, child abuse and morality, drug addiction, proliferation of broken homes and homelessness around the world, the degradation of the environment and the depletion of the ozone layer through pollution.

Acholonu's motherism sounds like Ogundipe-Leslie's stiwanism in that both focus on social transformation at the personal, national and international levels. But contrary to all the above scholars, including Ogundipe-Leslie, gender hierarchy is not an issue for her. She maintains that in traditional African societies, women were in no way disadvantaged in respect to men. According to her, the idea that women are inferior to men was first imported to Africa through Western and Arabian colonialism and as a result of Christianity and Islam. Yaa Asantewa, an Ashanti Queen mother in Ghana as mentioned in Chapter one and Queen Modjadji of the Balobedu in Modjadji who were very successful rulers concur with this assertion. Walker, Hudson-Weems, Ogunyemi, Kolawole and Ogundipe-Leslie argue that the gender issue should be discussed only in the context of other problems of political relevance, but in Acholonu's concept of motherism, the gender issue does not play any role at all.

All this leaves one in a dilemma: if one wishes to use a term other than 'feminism' for the African context, what term should one use? Arndt (2002:65) exposes this dilemma when she says that among Africans it still remains controversial whether a terminological distinction is necessary or not. She further exposes the dilemma by quoting Nnaemeka who was the convener and organiser of the Black women's conference in 1992 in Nsukka. In her closing remarks, Nnaemeka is cited by Arndt (2002:66) as follows:

Aidoo's paper touched on many issues related to the African woman. Feminism was at best, peripheral to her presentation. However, during the question-and-answer session, the first and only question that dominated the discussion came from an African American who urged other participant's to abandon 'feminism'...and embrace African womanism'...Different configurations of groups with opposing and sometimes unclear allegiances evolved. The womanists, feminists,

and Africana womanists battled for authenticity, legitimacy, and supremacy while the majority of African women were caught in the middle watching in utter amazement...Aidoo's important paper on African women was hijacked, renamed and left undiscussed.

In light of the above, it is important to note that while Western feminist critical theory served a useful purpose in the study in analysing some of the more universal myths about women, not everything found in the Xitsonga context will fit into Western ideology. As mentioned earlier, Arndt (2002:69) maintains that there is and must be a diversity of feminisms, responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women and Kolodny (in Abel, 1982:159) reconciles the different analytical methodologies that can be applied to any text by pointing out that feminist literary criticism can be refined to suit specific needs.

In addition to the Western feminist critical theory, this study relied on African feminist literary criticism theory. The African perspective was therefore constantly borne in mind as any theory should take cognisance of contextual dynamics. Emecheta (1984:95) argues in this vein: 'Being a woman and African born, I see things through an African woman's eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know...If I am now a feminist I am an African feminist.'

Boyce - Davies and Graves (1986:12) in turn, describe African feminist criticism as follows:

This criticism therefore, is both textual and contextual criticism: textual in that close reading of texts using the literary establishment's critical tools is indicated; contextual as it realizes that analysing a text without

some consideration of the world with which it has a material relationship is of little social value.

Lockett's (1990:1 – 21) distinction of the different types of feminisms in South Africa indicates that feminist ideologies are capable of adaptation to suit the cultural needs of different groups of women. This view is supported by Marsden (1994:8) who argues that critics should take contexts into account when evaluating black writing and adopt a critical ideology that is compatible with the intention of the writer.

2.8 Scope

Some scholars define literature as 'everything in print', namely (Allan 1991:692; Hunks 1979:858). However, Shipley (1970:20) argues that the traditional definitions of literature are misleading as they limit the term to written or printed literature. The present study used the term to encompass both oral and written works of art. The concept is applied in a broader way, similarly to the way that Roberts (2003:9) describes it, when he says: "Technically, anything spoken or written down is literature". He thus illustrates this broader meaning by including both written (modern) and oral (traditional) literature. Finnegan (1970:375-376) also distinguishes between literature that is written down and oral literature: "The written African literature is correctly defined as modern written literature in recognition that Africa has a long and distinguished oral literary tradition referred to as oral literature."

This present study adopted purposive sampling method in respect of *Xitsonga* novels, poetry and proverbs containing female characters and analysed the portrayal of these characters. According to Majchrzak, (1984:15) "Purposive sampling is a non-probability method which is based on the judgement of the researcher regarding the characteristics of a sample". However, in order to clarify the image of these female characters, it was necessary in the study also to

investigate how they are portrayed in relation to their male counterparts in the selected texts. In the African tradition in general and the Xitsonga tradition in particular, the ideal woman is expected to marry and bear children. Thus a woman is generally defined in terms of her relationship with her husband and other men.

Tables 2, 3 and 4 below illustrate respectively the sampled novels, poems and sources from which the proverbs were selected

2.8.1 Novels

Table 2: Sampled novel

Title	Translation	Author	Year of publication
<i>Nkatanga i Dlakuta</i>	My wife is a whore	M.S. Chauke	1965
<i>N'wananga</i>	My child	G.S. Shabangu	1997
<i>Vutomi i Vhilwa</i>	Life is a wheel	N.R. Mgiba	1995
<i>Manyunyuyu ya Xitsotso</i>	Pride like an insect	H. Khosa	1979
<i>Ximitantsengele</i>	He who swallows a fruit seed	R.H. Mashele	1986
<i>Xihangalasa</i>	The scatterer	K.R. Makhubele	1996
<i>Vurhena Byakwe</i>	His Strength	H.S. Mnisi	1978

2.8.2 Poetry

Table 3: Sampled poems

Poem	Translation	Author	Year of publication
<i>Wansati</i>	Woman	B.H.M. Mashele	1982
<i>Vavasati</i>	Women	S.J. Malungana	2006
<i>Wansati i Gumba</i>	A woman is a stork	M.M. Marhanele	1983
<i>Nkata Xithicarana</i> <i>I wansati</i> <i>U nga Tshembi</i> <i>Wansati</i>	The wife of a young teacher It is a woman Never trust a woman	G.J. Maphalakasi T.M. Rikhotso J.M. Magaisa	1983
<i>Vavasati</i>	Women	G.J. Maphalakasi	1976
<i>Kuwa ro Tshwuka</i>	A red fig	C.D.M. Shilote	1982
<i>Wansati</i>	Woman	C. Phephenyane	1976
<i>Wansati Lonene</i>	A good woman	J.E. Risiba	2000
<i>Diakuta</i>	A whore	A.V. Mudau	1990
<i>N'wambhuri</i> ³	Pretty woman	A.V. Mudau	1990
<i>N'wananga</i>	My child	A.V. Mudau	1990
<i>Swi Dzudzekile</i> <i>i Mberha</i>	It fell off it is dew	A.V. Mudau	1990

³ In this context, the class 1a prefix *n'wa-* is prefixed to personify a noun 'mbhuri' (a beautiful woman) as a way of emphasising the highest level of beauty that the woman possess. *Baumbach EJM, 1987. Analytical Tsonga Grammar. University of South Africa. Pretoria: Sigma Press.*

2.8.3 Proverbs

Table 4: Sources of sampled proverbs

Title	Translation	Author	Year of publication
<i>Vutlhari bya Vatsonga (Machangana)</i>	Wisdom of the Vatsonga (Shangaans)	H.P. Junod & A.A. Jaques	1970
<i>Tinhlanga ta Mfuwo wa Rixaka</i>	Reeds of the culture of a nation	S. J. Malungana	2006

2.9 Limitations of the study

The texts were selected purposively. In other words, the resaearcher, in her selection of works that she considered relevant to the study, might have missed some works that contained female characters.

Another limitation is that this study was confined to South Africa, although *Xitsonga* is a cross-border language spoken also in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Swaziland. It would be interesting to compare how the authors in these countries portray women. However, because of space constraints and its main aim, this study could not compare the depiction of women in all the countries where *Xitsonga* is spoken.

CHAPTER 3

3. THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN NOVELS

Introduction

This chapter examines the depiction of female characters in Xitsonga novels by male as well as female authors. The naming of female characters is looked at in relation to their roles in the texts, and some text titles are analysed to establish whether they portray gender stereotypes. The themes of the selected texts are also investigated to determine if there is any gender bias.

Table 2 above shows the selected novels: *Nkatanga i dlakuta*, *N'wananga*, *Vutomi i vhilwa*, *Manyunyu ya Xitsotso*, *Ximitantsengele*, *Xihangalasa*, and *Vurhena Byakwe*. This chapter contains a summary of each novel, an analysis of each novel and a summary of the depiction of female characters.

3.1 NKATANGA I DLAKUTA

(i) Summary of the novel

The novel is about Tsatsawani, a woman with loose morals. During her early years at school, she back-chatted the teachers and fought with other learners, eventually leading to her expulsion. Tsatsawani later seduced Basambilu's husband (Risimati) and secretly left with him for Johannesburg where he worked. While in Johannesburg with Risimati, Tsatsawani started a business selling liquor from her home. She started a fiery love affair with one of her regular customers, Mokapela and increasingly neglected Risimati who suddenly fell ill. She did not bother to take him to hospital or cook healthy meals for him. When she realised his health was deteriorating rapidly, she left him and went to stay with Mokapela. Risimati returned home to his parents and his wife, Basambilu,

who welcomed him back and took care of him while he recuperated from his illness. Basambilu means, 'she who has a pure heart' in Xitsonga.

The novel ends with Tsatsawani leaving Mokapela, and going to live with another man in Bechuanaland.

(ii) Analysis of the novel

The title of the novel '*Nkatanga i dlakuta*' means 'My wife is a whore'. The title obviously refers to Tsatsawani, a female character portrayed as a whore because of her multiple male partners – an illustration of a gender stereotype in the title of the novel. The men with whom she falls in love are not equally criticised. She is a 'whore' while the behaviour of her male partners (even those that cheat on their wives) is tolerated by the author. Such double standards have also been observed by Gaidzanwa (1985:11) in Zimbabwean literature:

The expectation of fidelity from sons and husbands is taxing on women in a way that it is not for men since men are not penalized for adultery as strictly as women are.

In Xitsonga culture, women (unlike men) are not allowed to have multiple partners hence the author's referral to Tsatsawani as a whore. like men sometimes do. It is regarded as immoral for a woman to have more than one partner hence the author's referral to Tsatsawani as a whore. As mentioned earlier (p. 4) what authors object to and what they support in literature depends largely on how they have been socialized within their cultures.

Tsatsawani's loose morals are highlighted in the following words:

Vaka yena va n'wi tshikisile xikolo loko a ha ri eka ntlawa wa vunharhu; va n'wi xavela na xitlhekutani ku a ta tshika tirhoko, vaku hi tona ti n'wi endlaka dlakuta.

Her family withdrew her from school when she was doing her third grade; and bought her a traditional skirt (xitlhekutani) so that she could stop wearing dresses as they attributed her loose morality to wearing dresses.

The above extract suggests cultural conflict. The fact that Tsatsawani's parents stopped her from wearing dresses (a symbol of Western culture) and bought her a 'xitlhekutani' (a symbol of African and in this case, Xitsonga culture) symbolises the rejection of Western culture which they associated with moral degeneration. The early missionaries in the Vatsonga community introduced education and Christianity that clashed with some Xitsonga cultural practices such as, ancestor worship. At school girls were expected to wear dresses and not their traditional attire and they also had to be given 'Christian or school' names in addition to their African names. The practice of 'Christian' names extended even beyond the school environment. Appendix 3 (Motorbike licence issued in 1966), shows that pre-democracy driver's licences also required a Christian name.

In her analysis of Western influences on the Zulu system of personal naming, Dickens (1985:67) cites the Canon Law 761 governing baptisms in Catholic churches that states:

Pastors shall see to it that the person baptized is not given a name that is alien to the Christian sense (a sensu christiano alienum). Pastors should see to it that a christian name is given to the person baptized; but if

they are not able to prevail in this matter, they should add to the name chosen by the parents the name of a saint and record both names in the baptismal register. The church has always upheld the pious custom of bestowing a Christian name on the baptized.

The actions of Tsatsawani's parents can thus be regarded as rejection of Western culture, particularly as they attributed her behaviour to her acceptance of Western norms. The unacceptability of these norms is seen in the author's reference to the following proverb:

N'wana a a lo tsema mubya. (Lit. The child has broken the sling skin, i.e. The child is out of control, it broke the sling when it was rocked in it).

The proverb refers to a child whose parents have tried everything to guide and influence their child's behaviour to no avail. It refers to parents who have lost hope.

The author compares Tsatsawani to Basambilu, who is portrayed as a beautiful and principled woman who eventually marries Risenga. Basambilu's beauty is expressed in the following lines:

*Etikweni hinkwaro ra ka Kutama a ku ri hava
nhwanyana loyi a a sasekile ku kota yena.*

In the whole village of Kutama, there was no woman as beautiful as her.

As already mentioned, the name Basambilu means 'she who has a pure heart' and thus suggests that her beauty is both internal and external. Tsatsawani, on

the other hand, is portrayed as a woman with internal as well as external flaws, namely being a whore and having large breasts:

*Xifuva xakwe a xi tele swinene, lexi a xi lava ku onha
hileswi mavele ya kona a ya kule ngopfu, ya lava ni ku
hundza n'winyi wa wona.*

Her chest was too full, the only bad thing was that the breasts were nearly larger than the person herself.

There are certain features that are characteristic of beauty and maturity in the African culture. One of these features is the size of breasts. In Tsatsawani's case, the author emphasises that her breasts were over-size, contrary to how he describes Basambilu, about whom he says:

*Exifuveni mavele a ya ha lo yima kahle, xifuva xi tele.
Tinhlungu ta mavele ya kona wonge tingo boxa yele
loko a yi ambele.*

In her chest the breasts were still nicely pointed, the chest was full. The nipples were so sharp and pointed as if they could protrude through the traditional blouse (yele) when wearing it.

The difference in the outward appearance of the two women causes jealousy and envy in Tsatsawani who is considered less beautiful than Basambilu:

*A teka xivoni le henhla ka khumbhi a tilangutisa. A
kuma leswo kunene a a nga sasekanga tani hi
Basambilu. Leswi swi tlhavile Tsatsawani ngopfu, a rila
a tlhela a etlela hi mbhikwani.*

She took a mirror on top of the wall and looked at herself. She found that indeed she wasn't as beautiful as Basambilu. This hurt her so much that she cried uncontrollably until she fell asleep.

The author thus touches on the issue of jealousy among women. The fact that Tsatsawani compares her outward beauty with another woman's and even cries uncontrollably about it illustrates her anger that Basambilu may get married before she does. It is also not surprising that the author raises the issue of external beauty as he has been socialized in a community where breast size is a beauty feature in a *Mutsonga* woman. The women are so preoccupied with beautifying themselves that they compete with each other with the ultimate aim of winning a husband. The men are consequently warned about being deceived by a woman's beauty. A well-known Xitsonga proverb holds that a beautiful woman always has a blemish.

Another major theme in the novel is the expectation of industriousness in women. In the Xitsonga tradition, a good wife is expected to be hardworking and to look after the husband and the in-laws. This is a gender stereotype. Basow (1992:12) discusses the consequence of gender stereotyping:

Gender stereotypes are powerful forces of social control. People can either conform to them and be socially acceptable but restricted, or they can rebel and face the consequences of being socially unacceptable.

That industriousness is expected of Basambilu as a bride. This is evident during the marriage negotiations between the families of Basambilu and Risenga.

Risenga's negotiators say the following to Basambilu's family:

Risenga u ri u lava wo ta n'wi kela mati na ku n'wi swekela.

Risenga says he wants somebody to fetch water and cook for him.

The implication is that the primary reason for Risenga wanting to get married is to have someone who will take care of the household chores.

In Xitsonga culture, a woman may not cohabit before the man pays her dowry. It is also crucial for a woman to get married once she reaches maturity:

Nhwanyana loko a kala a yimberwa u lava ku tekiwa. Lava manguva lava vona swo nyanya. Tithugamama na tona ti lava ku ya evukatini. Loko nhwanyana o tshama malembe mambirhi a yimeriwile, kambe a nga si vutiwa, u twa mbilu ku vava. A swi hlamarisi loko se Tsatsawani a anakanya hi ta ku tlhaka; a a ri wa masiku.

Once a girl goes to initiation school, she wants to be married. It is even worse nowadays. The adolescent ones also want to get married. It becomes very hurtful for a woman to stay for two years without getting married after having gone through initiation. It is not surprising that Tsatsawani was starting to think about cohabiting, she was getting old.

The above extract shows that wifehood is important in Xitsonga culture. Single women are accordingly preoccupied with finding men to marry. Tsatsawani becomes so desperate that she flaunts convention by accompanying Risenga to Johannesburg and staying with him before marrying him. She does this in an attempt to gain social legitimacy. She also proposes to Risenga, which is taboo in Xitsonga culture. Her defiance of Xitsonga cultural norms accords with the Liberal Feminist perspective. Although portrayed as sexually irresponsible, the author uses Tsatsawani to confront patriarchal view that women should be submissive. Liberal Feminists believe that personal rights should predominate over social good. In Xitsonga culture, women are socialised to play the 'hunted' party in romantic relationships. Tsatsawani in her desperation to get married defies all cultural conventions when she says to Risenga:

Mina kambe ndza ku lava; ku lovola a swi karhati, swi ta vonaka endzhaku. A ndzi tiyimisele ku ku tlhakela, kambe loko ndzi twa leswaku u ta vuya hi Gudu-Furayideni, hiloko ndzi ku ndzi ta tlhela na wena loko u tlhelela eJoni.

I love you; paying lobola is not a problem, we will work that out later. I was prepared to co-habit with you, but when I heard that you'll be coming back on Good Friday, I decided that I'll rather go back with you to Johannesburg.

To underline the unacceptability of Tsatsawani's behaviour, the author uses the following metaphor:

Hi kona Tsatsawani a fambile, ku tlhaka leswi, dyambu xi te hosi!

That was Tsatsawani's departure, to cohabit with
Risenga in full daylight!

The author uses the metaphor 'in full daylight' to illustrate Tsatsawani's shocking behavior. It would have been better had she acted in the dark when nobody could see her, but to do that in full view of everyone was an embarrassment of the highest order.

N'wa-Bennie (Tsatsawani's grandmother) is also shocked by Tsatsawani's behavior:

*U tshama u n'wi vona kwihi n'wana wa Mutsonga a
tlhaka wena?*

Where on earth have you ever seen a Mutsonga girl co-
habiting with a man?

The extract shows that Tsatsawani's conduct is unusual and is considered taboo in Xitsonga culture. The role of a grandmother is to teach the bride the Xitsonga customs relating to marriage (ku *laya*) before she goes to the groom's family.

Tsatsawani is also portrayed as unfaithful. When in Johannesburg with Risenga, she has several love affairs with men who come to buy liquor at her home. The first man she gets involved with is the wealthy Sibiya. Tsatsawani proclaims:

*Mawaku loko a ndzi lo tekiwa hi wanuna wo tani hi
Sibiya. Swikhwama swa yena hinkwaswo swi lo mpha
hi mali.*

I wish I had been married by a man like Sibiya. His
pockets are full of money.

Moved by a desire for Sibiya's wealth, Tsatsawani ends up seducing and having an affair with him. The author thus promotes the stereotype of women as gold-diggers.

Tsatsawani is also selfish and insensitive. When she receives letters from Risenga's wife (Basambilu) and his family, she reads, tears them up and burns them without Risenga's knowledge. She is portrayed as cruel and disrespectful to her 'husband'. Risenga confides in his friends about Tsatsawani's abusiveness:

*I vhiki leri nga hela laha a nga lo ndzi khoma a ndzi caca,
a ndzi hluvula buruku ndzi sala ndzi ri tani!*

It is only last week when she held me and shouted
insults at me; she took off my pants and left me naked!

'Leaving somebody naked' is an idiomatic expression meaning the worst verbal attack on a person. Through this expression, the author reveals Tsatsawani's wicked nature. In Xitsonga culture, a man is the head of a family and has to be respected, and once again, Tsatsawani defies Xitsonga convention. Gezani, (Risenga's friend) says:

*Mina a ndzi fumiwi hi wansati. Endlwini ya mina hi mina
vasa, ku hava vasa wun'wana.*

I will never be governed by a woman. In my house, I am
the only head, there is no other head.

When Tsatsawani realizes that Risenga's illness is getting worse, she abandons him for Mokapela, and Risenga returns to his wife Basambilu. Throughout, Basambilu's 'respect' and 'dignity' are compared with Tsatsawani's loose

morality. The author expresses a stereotype that Gaidzanwa (1985:31) describes as follows:

The women who are idealized are those who are obedient to their husbands even if the husbands are wrong and unreasonable. They are women who do not complain when they are badly treated. They patiently wait for their husbands to recognize their virtue and they may actually shield their husbands from the consequences of unreasonable or cruel behaviour.

This accords with Mtuze's (1990:36) observations about women in general:

Society expects them to exercise patience while men can sometimes do as they please. Taboos and social norms seem to be one-sided or partisan when it comes to certain actions.

The author explicitly approves of Basambilu's behaviour as outlined in the extract above and despises Tsatsawani's conduct by elaborating on her loose morals. The last paragraph of the novel reads as follows:

Tsatsawani a nga tshamanga eka Mokapela, u hundzele mahlweni. A a lava ku hlanganisa vavanuna hinkwavo. Sweswi ndzi twa va ku u le ka Mangwalo, eBechuanaland. Timhaka ta dlakuta a ti ndlhali! Loko Risenga a khumbhula Tsatsawani, u dzinginisa na nhloko a ku: A ndzi yengiwile hi Dlakuta". Hi wona makumu.

Tsatsawani didn't stay long with Mokapela, she moved on. She wanted to have every man for herself. We now hear rumours that she is at Mangwalo, in Bechuanaland. When Risenga thinks about Tsatsawani, he even shakes his head and says: "I was deceived by a whore." This is the end.

This conclusion illustrates the author's sympathy for Risenga as though Risenga had no control over his life - he claimed to have been deceived by the 'wicked' woman. Risimati's story ends sympathetically, while Tsatsawani's ends with an image of continued adultery. Tsatsawani's not staying long with Mokapela and the rumours of her moving to Bechuanaland imply that she would travel the world to satisfy her lustful desires. The author leaves no room for the reader to sympathise with Tsatsawani, rather he suggests that Tsatsawani is a hopeless woman determined to continue living the life of a whore.

The author attempts to justify Risenga's conduct, but he makes no attempt to explore the reasons for Tsatsawani's behavior, for instance, societal pressure to get married, which leads her to seek a husband at all costs. To him she is just evil and deserves no sympathy, thus revealing the gender bias in his portrayal of his characters.

(iii) Summary of the depiction of women characters

The author uses the images of an unfaithful wife, a whore, and industriousness as key to wifedom, as well as the gold-digging stereotype. In his stereotypical images of women, he depicts Tsatsawani as a whore whose behaviour is condemned, and, on the other hand, he depicts Basambilu as a saint. Basambilu's submissive behaviour to her husband is approved as it is in line with societal expectations of how a woman should behave towards her husband. The

author approves of her taking responsibility of her husband's unfaithfulness. Conversely, Tsatsawani is condemned for her unconventional behaviour.

3.2 VUTOMI I VHILWA

(I) Summary of the novel

Vutomi i vhilwa (Life is a wheel) was awarded the first prize in the 1991 *Xitsonga* literary awards. It is about a woman, Mariya and her three children, Tomasi (son), Thokozile (daughter) and Dudu (daughter). Mariya lived with her daughters because Tomasi had left the family as he did not approve of his mother and sisters' behaviour.

Mariya was herself promiscuous and encouraged her daughters to have affairs with different men as long as they were wealthy. Dudu's promiscuity led to her contracting HIV/AIDS while Thokozile was involved in a fatal accident with a married man. He died but she survived the accident; however, her legs had to be amputated and her eyes removed. Mariya was devastated as it meant that there would be no bread winner in the family. To make matters worse, their house caught fire and burnt to the ground. The three women were now jobless and homeless, (the punishment for their 'evil' deeds) and had no choice but to beseech Tomasi for help. They asked his forgiveness for having ill-treated him and also apologised for their behaviour. Tomasi accepted their apology and allowed them to stay with him.

(ii) Analysis of the novel

The three female characters in the novel are Mariya and her two daughters, namely, Thokozile and Dudu.

Mariya is portrayed as a very aggressive widow who quarrels with everyone who sets foot in her house including her own son Tomasi. Tomasi attributes his sisters' behaviour to a lack of proper guidance and upbringing from Mariya. In *Xitsonga* culture, (see page 2), the man is regarded as the head of the family. The author highlights this cultural element by portraying Mariya as a widow who fails in her role as the head of the family. Tomasi says in this regard:

Vamakwerhu va onhiwa hi mhani. Hi yena a pfumelelaka muti lowuya wu va ndhawu ya majaha ni vavanuna yo dzumba eka yona. Xichavo, ku xiximeka ni ndzhuti swi etlerile na tatana.

My sisters are misled by my mother. She is the one who allows that home to be turned into a relaxing place for boys and men. Respect and dignity were buried with my father.

Mariya is thus portrayed as a mother who has failed dismally in the upbringing of her children.

The impression is created that the passing away (absence) of the father figure (head of the family) is the key factor in the the lack of discipline and morality in the family.

Mariya is depicted as wicked with no redeeming features. When Tomasi visits her, she scolds him and refers to his wife as a witch:

Ndzi ku lombela tindlewe, ta wena u lo ti siya na ye noyi luya wa wena a ku arisaka ni ku ta pfuxela vatswari va wena. A ndzi ri se mana wa wena hi yena, mina a ndza ha ri nchumu.

Why should I lend you my ears, did you leave yours with that witch of yours who even prohibits you from visiting your parents, by the way, she is now your mother, I no longer feature in your life.

Mariya hates her daughter-in-law for no reason and blames her for Tomasi's decision to leave home. She also refers to her as 'goya' (wild cat), a symbol for a homeless and unnurtured person. Mariya's behavior is contrary to the cultural norms regulating a widow's behaviour. A widow, as a sign of respect to her deceased husband, is expected to be submissive, respectful and not to argue with anyone until the mourning period of a year has elapsed. Mariya defies all these conventions. Tomasi highlights the role his deceased father would have played in bringing dignity to the family and contrasts the characters of his mother and father:

A ndzi tshembhi leswaku loko tatana a va ha hanya a va ta swi pfumela leswi u swi endlaka. Wena un'wana ni un'wana loyi a taka laha kaya i mukon'wana.

I do not believe my father would allow what you are doing if he was still alive. Every man who comes to your home is your son-in-law.

The author uses different characters to drive home the negative consequences of the absence of a father. Firstly, this is expressed by Tomasi, and secondly, by one of Mariya's neighbours (Mathebula) in referring to Mariya's behaviour:

Vhele loko xihlungwa xa muti xi kala xi hahluka, ndyangu a wa ha tiyi...wansati luya ndza n'wi tiva, u bole miehleketo. Sweswi u ngo to na ku u fika, o

*mpfhumpfha a vuya, a ku hluvula hi nhlambha u sala u
lo dzhwambu.*

Once the head of the family passes away, the family can no longer be intact. I know that woman, her mind is rotten. You will find that on arrival to her home, she strips you naked with her vulgar words.

The author repeatedly makes the point that a woman cannot single-handedly bring up children and perpetuates the stereotype that to be fully functional a woman needs a man or a husband. It is culturally unacceptable for a woman to be by herself, even after the death of her husband. In *Xitsonga* culture, once a woman's husband dies, she is inherited by her late husband's brother as a wife. It is therefore most unusual for a woman to raise a family alone, hence this kind of portrayal of Mariya by the author.

In addition to pronouncements on Mariya's behaviour by the two characters mentioned above, the author adds his own pronouncement:

*Ndyangu wa Zitha lowu ekusunguleni a wu ri na
xindzhuti, wu xiximiwa hi mani na mani wu hundzukile
xihlekiso hikwalaho ka madlakuta ya vana va yena na
mana wa vona wo rhandza ku tshovela laha a nga
rimangiki kona.*

Zitha's family that used to be so dignified and respected by everyone has turned into a laughing stock because of his daughters who have turned into whores and their mother who likes reaping where she did not sow.

By contrasting Mariya and her daughters with Zitha (their late father), the author highlights the void left by Zitha in the family. To illustrate the difference that Zitha's death brought to the family, the author compares a family that used to be 'dignified and respected' with one that is now a 'laughing stock' of the community, Mariya is also portrayed as extremely aggressive, arrogant, a liar and disrespectful. Her aggressiveness is expressed metaphorically:

Ngwenya-nkelenge xiwutla ni mindzheko.

Deceitful crocodile, who seizes even the calabashes
(tied to poles for drawing water.) Meaning: a very
violent person.

Mariya encourages her daughters to be gold-diggers, a common stereotype of single women. Her daughters must only have wealthy girlfriends:

*Vakon'wana va mina hinkwavo i swigwili lero ku hava
loyi a taka laha kaya ximandla-mandla.*

All my son-in-laws are wealthy; therefore no one comes
to my home empty-handed.

Mariya's pressure and negative influence on her children leads Dudu (her last born daughter) to have an affair with a married business man. Mariya's evil nature is illustrated in the following words:

*Mariya a a kucetela vana va yena ku hanya tani hi
swiharhi leswaku a ta kuma mali.*

Mariya influenced her children to live like animals so
that she could benefit financially.

The author compares the behaviour of Mariya's daughters to that of animals. He also refers to the daughters as *madlakuta* (whores) for which conduct they are punished at the end of the novel.

The author uses strong words and metaphors in this novel to illustrate his disapproval of the behaviour of the female characters. Dudu and Thokozile are blamed for the love affairs they engage in, but no blame is placed on the men for their extramarital affairs. Hlatshwayo's wife beats Dudu up for the affair and also dismisses her, but we do not hear of her confronting her husband.

Thokozile is blamed by her lover's sister for Filikisi's death:

Ntswari-wa-handle wo tshuka a dlayisa n'wana wa malume yena a endlela ku sala a dya mavele. Loko a ndzi lo n'wi kuma movha wa kona wa ha ku wa ingi ndzi n'wi hetisile mina.

This badly brought up woman who dragged my uncle's child into trouble with the aim of remaining to enjoy life alone. If I had arrived on the accident scene on time, I would have finished her once and for all.

This kind of blame was also seen in the previous novel, *Nkatanga i dlakuta* where Tsatsawani was blamed for Risenga's infidelity. In this novel, Dudu and Thokozile are also blamed for the infidelity of their lovers. All these women are single and all their lovers are married men who are cheating on their wives. Their unfaithfulness is ignored, and the blame is placed on the single women they get involved with. At the end of the novel, the three women are punished for their immorality; Mariya's house burns down and all her belongings including those of her children are destroyed; Dudu gets infected with HIV/AIDS, and Thokozile is confined to a wheelchair with the loss of her legs and her eyes. Ironically, these

women finally seek help from a male character, Tomasi, who is portrayed as a saint in contrast to Mariya and her daughters. It is a common practice in *Vatsonga* communities for women to bear the blame in adulterous relationships largely because men are allowed to have more than one wife. The author confirms this cultural norm by placing the blame on the female characters in the novel even though they are single and the men married. The female characters are duly punished in accordance with social expectations.

(iii) Summary of the depiction of women characters

As mentioned earlier, in Xitsonga culture a widow is expected to behave in a submissive and respectable manner as a sign of respect to her departed husband. In this novel, Mariya is portrayed as a 'problem woman' as she ignores this cultural convention. She quarrels with everyone and encourages her daughters to behave in a culturally unacceptable way by having affairs with married men. She is shown to be a failure in her parental role. The stereotypes seen in the previous novel recur in *Vutomi i Vhilwa* as the female characters are portrayed as gold-diggers and whores.

3.3 N'WANANGA

(i) Summary of the novel

The novel *N'wananga* female-authored by GS Shabangu, is about a couple, Suzan and Phinias, who fell in love, married and lived together happily. When Suzan conceived their first child, it turned out that while still at high school she had had an illegitimate child, Maxudu, before she met Phinias. She handed the child to a woman to take to the local social worker with the story that the child was abandoned by a stranger. Suzan did this on the advice of her friend Veronica.

It later transpired that the woman did not take the child to the social worker but instead adopted the child herself. Unfortunately, the woman died, and Veronica (Suzan's friend) subsequently found out about the woman's death while working as a social worker. She then returned the child to her biological mother (Suzan) who attempted suicide because she had not told her husband about the secret child. She survived the suicide attempt, and Phinias forgave her for not revealing the secret.

(ii) Analysis of the novel

Suzan is portrayed as a modern educated woman working as a professional nurse. The novel was written in 1997 (post-apartheid South Africa) inferring that over the years, social structures had changed and created opportunities for women to participate in the national economy contrary to the view that the man should be the sole provider.

The industriousness of a woman in Xitsonga culture is a key criterion to marriage. This cultural feature was evident in the two previous novels as well, and in this novel, Suzan is praised for being a hard worker. From an early age, a girl is brought up in preparation to be a 'good' wife to her husband. When she reaches puberty, she undergoes initiation during which all girls are taught *milawu* – 'laws' that teach girls how to behave in marriage, for example being respectful to their husbands and persevering in the marriage even when they encounter trouble and hardships. Similar advice is given just before a woman leaves home to join her husband's household in marriage (*ku hloma*). Elderly women are called in to give advice to the bride (*ku laya*) on how she should behave towards her husband and his family.

The need to persevere in marriage and to show respect – *hlonipha* are emphasised during *ku laya*. Industriousness is another characteristic that is highly valued in a woman, especially by her in-laws as she is expected to take care of them as well.

*Leswi a a ri mutini wa van'wana a a fanerile ku hubuta
wa ha ri mixo a basisa muti a tlhela a sweka. Phinias a
a vuyeriwile hikuva a a ta wisa ku rhumetela
vamakwavo ku n'wi swekela no n'wi hlantswela. A va
rhurile ndzhwalo hi ku teka nsati.*

Since she was in other people's home, she was expected to wake up very early in the morning to clean up and cook. Phinias was so fortunate because he would stop sending his siblings around to cook and wash for him. He had removed a heavy load from their shoulders by marrying a wife.

The author uses a metaphor, 'removing a heavy load' to illustrate how Suzan's presence will relieve her in-laws. This heavy load used to be carried by Phinias' siblings and is now expected to be single-handedly carried by Suzan. In Xitsonga culture, marriage does not only involve two people, that is the husband and wife; but also the families of the spouses. When a woman marries, she serves not only her husband but is also expected to serve the husband's family as well. Suzan has thus lifted the burden of household chores from Phinias' siblings.

Suzan's industriousness and obedience earns her approval and favour from her in-laws. Social Feminists argue that the family is responsible for the sexual division of labour and thus naturalises gender roles, which, in reality are socially produced.

Phinia's mother expresses her affection for her daughter-in-law to Phinias in the following words:

"Hlayisa Suzan hikuva wa yingisa swinene, loko a hoxile u nga n'wi tlhandleki voko kambe n'wi byele kunene". I N'wa-Nkuna loyi a ndhundhuzelaka n'wingi wa yena.

"Take good care of Suzan because she is a very obedient woman. When she wrongs you, don't ever beat her up, just talk to her." That is N'wa-Nkuna hailing praises to her daughter-in-law.

The author uses the word *ndhundhuzela*, the highest form of praise, to emphasise N'wa-Nkuna's approval of her daughter-in-law. There is no doubt that the praise is attributed to Suzan's hard work and obedience. As indicated before, in Xitsonga culture, marriage is considered the ultimate goal of womanhood. Falling pregnant before marriage is shameful, and Suzan therefore abandons her baby to a stranger to avoid stigmatisation.

She hides this secret from her husband due to a lack of assertiveness on her part and out of fear that he may divorce her:

A a swi tiva leswaku a fanele ku va mhaka leyi a yi hundzisile khale va nga se tekana kambe a a chava. Sweswi Suzan a a chava ku tshikiwa hikuva se a a swi twilwe ku nandziha ka vukati.

She knew very well that she should have disclosed the matter before they got married. Suzan was now afraid

of being divorced because she had already tasted the beauty of marriage.

The above extract indicates Suzan's lack of honesty and integrity - she sacrifices her honest character in order to save her marriage. The fear of divorce is again raised in the fifth chapter of the novel:

Suzan a a swi vona leswaku u dyoherile nuna swinene se a chava a ku Phinias u ta n'wi tshika.

Suzan realised that she had wronged her husband, and feared that Phinias would divorce her.

The author's repetition of Suzan's fear of divorce underlines the extent to which Suzan valued her marriage. She valued it so highly that, rather than being divorced, she preferred to die. To her, divorce meant being stigmatised forever:

U ehlekete ku ya ekaya a kuma ku ri xihlekiso. U vone swi antswa ku hambana ni misava leyi se a yi n'wi kombile maxangu.

She thought of going back home but realised she would be a laughing stock. She deemed it better to die than to face the problems at hand.

The expression *xihlekiso* (laughing stock) underlines the social unacceptability of divorce, which leads Suzan to attempt suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills.

The author uses Suzan to demonstrate the importance of marriage in a *Mutsonga* woman's life. Although educated (being a professional nurse), she is

still locked into a tradition that values marriage so highly that she is prepared to sacrifice her character. It is generally accepted that educated women are assertive, yet, in this case, Suzan's cultural belief surpasses her assertiveness.

3.4 XIHANGALASA

(i) Summary of the novel

Makhubele presents us with two female characters, Dani and Sasavona, who are daughters of the widow N'wa-Masiya. Dani falls in love with Sunduza and eventually marries him. Sasavona is envious of her sister because Sunduza is wealthy. She leaves her boyfriend and becomes the second wife of Sunduza. After moving in with Sunduza, she starts ill-treating her husband and her sister. One day when she and Sunduza are on their way back from a holiday (having left Dani behind), they are involved in a fatal accident where she is killed and Sunduza loses his legs and is confined to a wheelchair for life.

(ii) Analysis of the novel

At the beginning of the novel, Dani is depicted as a woman of exceptional beauty. She is said to be so beautiful it looked as though 'she used to bath with milk' (*ongae a hlamba hi masi*). The author also links her beauty with sexuality:

*Milomo ya yena a yi sasekile, yi tlhela yi tikomba
leswaku i ya munhu loyi a a rhandza ngopfu ku
tswontswiwa...*

She had beautiful lips, which revealed that she liked to
be kissed very much...

In reality, there is no way one can detect that someone likes to be kissed by the shape of their lips. The author's use of this exaggeration confirms the stereotype of defining women in terms of their relationship with men and viewing them as objects whose main purpose is to please men. This cultural view in the *Vatsonga* community of the role of women in marriage is discussed in Chapter 1 (p.4). Regarding this stereotype, Jones (1987:6) says:

The figure of beauty is not unrelated to the stereotype of the woman as the passionate and sensual lover. Much African literature concerns itself with the eroticism of the African woman to the extent that it can be argued that many male writers conceive of women only as phallic receptacles.

The author imaginatively uses a popular proverb in Xitsonga to describe Dani. He initially creates an impression that he is using this proverb in a positive way, but then immediately uses an after statement that opposes the positive use of the proverb. The author declares:

Hambileswi va nge, kuwa ro tshwuka ri ni xivungu endzeni,a va nga ta swi vula eka yena hikuva a a ri munhu wa tintswalo swinene a tlhela a rhandza ku tsaka ni vanhu kambe manyunyu be, wonge u lo kandza ka mkhulu.

Even though it is said that a red fig does not lack worms inside. One would not say this about her because she was full of kindness and liked people a lot, however, she was extremely proud as if she was a prince's wife.

The author thus indirectly confirms the proverb – *Kuwa ro tshwuka ri ni xivungu ndzeni* - which means that a beautiful wife always have a blemish in her character. He starts by praising Dani's character and then qualifies her good character with how proud she is. This proverb will be dealt with in detail in chapter 5. The author is here confirming the cultural belief that every beautiful woman has something immoral in her character. To emphasise that Dani's pride is not just ordinary pride, he uses a simile and likens her to someone who is married to a prince. By portraying Dani in this manner, the author perpetuates the Xitsonga cultural belief contained in the proverb.

The two rival sisters represent two conflicting stereotypes in the novel. Sasavona represents a gold-digger, selfish, cruel, and aggressive and a dominant woman, while Dani represents a submissive and humble woman. The author confirms societal expectations of a wife by condemning the character who defies Xitsonga cultural norms and by praising the character who upholds these norms.

The title of the novel (*Xihangalasa* – the scatterer) refers to Sasavona, who throughout the novel tries to destabilise Dani's marriage with Sunduza.

Gold-digging, is a stereotype seen in many Xitsonga novels discussed in this study, for example the two novels discussed earlier, *Nkatanga i Dlakuta* and *Vutomi i Vhilwa* have a gold-digging element. Sasavona has a boyfriend, Fumani, but the relationship is not driven by her love of him but by her love of money:

*Nkarhi wun'wana loko Sasavona a ri exikolweni,
Fumani a a kota ku ya n'wi vona, kambe Sasavona a a
tumbela. leswi a swi endla exikarhi ka n'hwetini ntseha,
loko n'hwetini yi herile, ha, Fumani wa vanhu a a titwisa
no tswontswiwa, a landziwa na le kaya a byeriwa
leswaku u rhandziwa ku tlula mpimo.*

Sometimes when Sasavona was at school, Fumani would visit her, but Sasavona would hide away. She would only do this during the middle of the month, at the end of the month; poor Fumani would even get a kiss, followed at home and be told that he is dearly loved.

The author highlights the stereotype of a gold-digger in Sasavona. Only at the end of the month, when Fumani gets paid, does she express any 'love' for him.

This stereotype is also expressed through mothers who encourage their daughters to marry wealthy men. N'wa-Masiya asks her daughter, Sasavona, probing questions about Sunduza's wealth:

Xana o va ni mimovha yingani leswi ndzi vonaka mimovha yo hambana masiku hinkwawo, yindlu yakwe yona yo va ni tikamara tingani? Ku vutisa N'wa-Masiya loyi a a tikomba a lava ku tiva hi vuenti.

How many cars does he have because I see different cars everyday, what about the size of his house, how big is it, how many rooms does it have? This is N'wa-Masiya who seemed to be probing in order to get deeper into the matter.

After getting the answers, N'wa-Masiya urges Dani to marry and move in with Sunduza. N'wa-Masiya's behavior is similar to that of Mariya's in *Vutomi i vhilwa*. These mothers are portrayed as having great influence on their daughters - they directly and indirectly influence them to fall in love and get married just because their lovers are wealthy. It is every mother's wish for her children to be successful, and, by portraying N'wa-Masiya in this manner, the author illustrates

the great concern mothers have for their children. This is generally praiseworthy, but in this context, it is not, as the mothers over-emphasise wealth as the most important factor at the expense of love in their daughters' relationships.

The unfaithful woman is another stereotype the author introduces in this novel. Sasavona, while in a relationship with Fumani, falls for Sunduza. What makes the infidelity even more unusual is that Sunduza is her sister's husband. Sasavona, driven by her love for money and marriage defies traditional norms by proposing marriage to her sister's husband:

Sundu swa fanela leswaku na mina u ndzi endla nsati wa wena, loko ku ri Dani yena, u nga kali u tipandzisa nhloko hi yena, wa swi tiva leswaku wena a wu lo velekeriwa yena ntsena, kambe na hina van'wana.

Sundu, you have to make me your wife as well, don't worry so much about Dani, don't crack your head about her, she knows that you were not meant for her only, but even for us as well.

Sasavona's contrary behaviour is similar to Tsatsawani in *Nkatanga i Dlakuta* who also defies cultural norms when she proposes to Risenga. The striking similarity between the two women is that they both propose to married men.

The extra-marital affair between Sunduza and Sasavona has negative consequences for Dani's marriage. Sunduza changes from being a loving to an abusive husband who verbally and emotionally abuses Dani to the extent that she temporarily separates from him. However, because of her love for her husband, she eventually reconciles with him. After the birth of their first son, the abuse gets worse, and Sunduza marries Sasavona as a second wife without

Dani's consent. Rather than being assertive and leaving her husband, Dani stays in the abusive relationship and suffers a mental breakdown:

*Dani u tshamile tin'hwetitimbirhi na ntlhanu wa masiku
exibedhlele hikuva swi vuye swi kombisisiwa leswaku
nhloko ya yena a yi nga ha khomi swona.*

Dani was admitted for two months and five days to hospital because it was discovered that she was mentally ill.

Dani suffers emotional and physical abuse from her husband and her sister - sometimes they would leave her and go on holiday for days, and sometimes she would be beaten up for not doing the household chores, but even under these circumstances, Dani remains submissive and apologetic to her husband and sister.

The author delves into the issue of co-wives' rivalry, and what makes this rivalry even more unusual is that the co-wives are sisters. Sasavona's abusive behaviour towards her sister is shown in the following passage:

*He wena Dani, hikokwalaho ka yini u nga basisanga
kamara ya mina, naswona u byele hi mani leswaku u
lumeka thelevhixini yaleyo loko ndzi nga ri
kona...Sasavona a vula hiku teka xidzudzela-nkuma
lexi a xi ri kwala henhla ka tafula a faya Dani milomo hi
xona...ngati yi karhi yi xiririka yi tshonela na masofa.*

Hey you Dani, why didn't you clean up my room; who told you to switch on the television set in my absence...Sasavona took an ash tray from the coffee

table and hit Dani on the lips... blood dripped from the lips onto the couch.

A normal person would defend herself and/or report the abuse to the police and leave such an abusive relationship, however, Dani does nothing, and the abuse continues until she lands up in hospital thus illustrating the importance of her marital status to her – she chooses to be physically and emotionally abused rather than lose this status. The author seemingly approves of Dani's meekness, submissiveness and perseverance in her marriage as it is in line with the cultural expectations of a married woman. A Xitsonga proverb actually validates this kind of behaviour as will be seen in chapter 5 where the portrayal of women in Xitsonga proverbs is discussed.

3.5 *MANYUNYU YA XITSOTSO*

(i) Summary of the novel

In *Manyunyvu ya Xitsotso*, the author presents a couple, Cawuke and Selina whose only daughter Khanyisa falls pregnant. This angers her father because the man who impregnated her is allegedly from a poor family. Cawuke furiously states that Khanyisa will never marry the father (Soyaphi) of her child because he does not want his family to be associated with poverty. He then looks for a suitable man for his daughter and advises her never to disclose to her husband-to-be (Humphrey) that she has a son. Humphrey eventually pays a dowry for Khanyisa and only later learns about her secret son. He thereupon divorces Khanyisa who goes into mental decline and attempts to commit suicide on several occasions.

(ii) Analysis of the novel

The two main female characters presented in the novel are Selina, Cawuke's wife and Khanyisa their daughter. Selina is a submissive wife who adheres to cultural norms and consequently subjects herself to the emotional, verbal and physical abuse of her husband. When Cawuke insists that Khanyisa will never marry a man from a poor background, she is afraid to voice her opinion because of Cawuke's aggression, arrogance and abusiveness. The extent of Cawuke's aggression is illustrated in the following passage:

Phela xifafa xa Cawuke xi hahlula ni mazingi elwangwini. Laha a hlundzukaka kona loko Selina nsati wa yena o tshuka o rito tokolo, na xihahati wa xi kuma.

Cawuke's aggression can even demolish a roof. If Selina utters even a single word, when he is angry, he would hit her with a palm of his hand.

Cawuke's aggression is described metaphorically – (*Xi hahlula ni mazingi elwangwini* - it demolishes a roof). His losing control and hitting his wife whenever he gets angry underlines the physical and emotional abuse Selina has to endure. Radical Feminists attribute Selina's behaviour to cultural imprisonment as a result of patriarchy.

Khanyisa is subjected to the cultural practice of the arranged marriage. Her father insists that she marries a man he chooses for her and he does this unilaterally and authoritatively at the expense of Khanyisa's wishes. Any parent would wish the best for his or her child; however, the parent's wishes should always be balanced with those of the child. No matter how good the parent's wishes are, if they are unilaterally imposed on a child, they will have a negative impact.

Khanyisa's father proclaims:

*Khanyisa a hi yena wo tekiwa eka Makwakwa. Wa mina
n'wana u ta tekiwa laha mina tata wa yena ndzi lavaka
kona.*

Khanyisa will never get married to the Makwakwas. My daughter will be married where I, her father, want her to be married.

With the use of the expression, 'I, her father', Cawuke seals the authority that he has over Khanyisa's life as the head of the family. In the African culture in general and *Xitsonga* culture in particular, the father is regarded as the head of the family whose word is always final (see page 5).

When Cawuke's mother tries to voice her opinion about Khanyisa's marriage, Cawuke cuts her short and reiterates:

*"I muti wa mina lowu, N'wa-Vilankulu," ... Hi mina
nhloko ya la.*

"This is my family Nwa-Vilankulu" ...I am the head here.

The repetition of Cawuke's words that he is the head of the family underlines the insignificance of Selina and Khanyisa's voices in the family. Nothing should be done in his family without his consent, and he is the sole decision maker.

Her father's refusal to allow her to marry a man she loves causes Khanyisa to lose her mind:

*U lo tshama masiku mangari mangani endzhaku ka
loko tata wa yena a cacile va ka Makwakwa, ivi ti
wachuka ebyongweni.*

She stayed for just a few days after her father hurled insults at the Makwakwa family, and then she fell mentally ill.

It is clear that Khanyisa's illness is a result of her father's emotional abuse. Selina agrees that this is the case and is also depressed by the situation:

*Kuri leswaku loko a vo lo n'wi tshika a titekeriwa hi jaha
rakwe ingi n'wananga a lo ntshe!*

If my child had been left to marry her man, she would have been fine.

The author's use of the idiophone '*ntshe!*' indicates the highest level of happiness. It implies that Khanyisa would be worry-free had she been allowed to follow her heart. Khanyisa is not the only woman who suffers abuse in the family - her mother is also physically abused but, against all odds, she remains faithful and submissive to the husband. After she takes Khanyisa to hospital for psychological treatment, Cawuke throws a tantrum and beats her with a sjambok. The author thus affirms the cultural expectation that women have to stay in marriage come what may. Cawuke finally finds a man of his choice for Khanyisa, and, because of the pressure to get married, Khanyisa takes her father's advice and does not tell Humphrey (her future husband) about her son. This also happened in the novel *N'wananga*, where Suzan hid the secret child from her

husband for fear of being divorced by him. Khanyisa in this novel commits the same mistake on the advice of her father. Also involved here is the stigma attached to having a child out of wedlock. When Humphrey discovers Khanyisa's secret, he divorces her.

Khanyisa's life is full of misery, firstly, because she is prevented from marrying the man she loves and, secondly, because she is divorced by her husband for lying to him about her secret child. She becomes depressed, mentally disturbed and attempts to commit suicide several times. Her mother is also depressed by Khanyisa's illness, unhappiness and endless troubles:

*I kangani Khanyisa a ri karhi a hlongorisiwa a khomile
ntambhu a kongoma eMadziman'ombe?*

How many times has Khanyisa been chased whilst
running with a rope to commit suicide at
Madziman'ombe?

The author uses this rhetorical question to express Selina's grief at her daughter's behaviour. She asks this question out aloud talking to herself. Talking alone is in itself a sign of depression - both mother and daughter are depressed and suffering under Cawuke's abuse. The author illustrates the helplessness of the two women under the same roof who cannot free themselves from Cawuke's aggression but, instead, remain faithful and submissive to him.

Selina and Khanyisa's behaviour could be attributed to fear of breaking patriarchal patterns that are sacrosanct in Xitsonga culture. Their behaviour could also be interpreted as striving to be socially correct because, in Xitsonga patriarchal society, a woman is never independent and always has to submit to the authority of either her husband and/or her father.

Roland and Harris (1979:106) seem to support this notion when they maintain that:

Autonomy, independence and assertiveness, the qualities most valid in our society, are considered “unfeminine”.

3.6 *XIMITANTSENGELE*

(i) Summary of the novel

The novel is about Makhuvele who had two wives, Molisa and Molina. The two women were unfaithful to him and had several extra-marital affairs. Molisa, the first wife, had an affair with Mozi, Makhuvele’s best friend and a trusted traditional healer. Molina, similarly, had an affair with a man named Mofet. Mozi tricked Makhuvele into believing that his house needed to be cleansed of evil spirits and that Molisa should be initiated as a sangoma. He suggested this in order to have private time with Molisa. When Makhuvele had to travel to a distant place to work, his wives had an opportunity to engage freely in their acts of infidelity.

After about a month, Makhuvele returned from work to find Mozi and his wife staying together in his house and to hear that his other wife, Molina, had lost both her legs in a car accident with her lover and was permanently confined to a wheelchair.

Molisa and Mozi were taken to the traditional court where they were beaten and chased from the village.

(ii) Analysis of the novel

The title of the novel, *Ximitantsengele*, is taken from a Xitsonga proverb '*Ximitantsengele xi tshembha nkolo*' translated as 'He who swallows a fruit stone has a high opinion of or trusts his throat'. The meaning of the proverb in this context is 'He who causes trouble trusts his strength or brilliance'. The proverb is used here to ridicule Makhuvele's wives and their lovers who wronged Makhuvele without thinking about the consequences of their actions. The author exposes behavior that is contrary to Xitsonga cultural values and norms, namely, infidelity. The two female characters are severely punished at the end of the novel.

The author presents us with two women characters whose behaviour is similar in that they are both untrustworthy, unfaithful, liars and cheaters. The author's perception of the women is indicated through the comments of the male characters in the novel. When Makhuvele confides to his colleague Mangawu about his suspicion that his wife may be having an affair with a close friend, Mangawu replies that he has faced a similar situation with a cheating wife:

Mina na mina swi ndzi humelerile Makhuvele. Mavala ya xibodze i mavala yan'we Makhuvele. Vavasati!... Vavasati i swigevenga Makhuvele.

It also happened to me, Makhuvele. The spots of a tortoise are all alike. Makhuvele. Women!...Women are criminals Makhuvele.

The proverb 'a tortoise's spots are all alike' emphasises the stereotype that all women are the same and that they cannot be trusted. The author avoids using a simile and instead employs an exaggeration to emphasise that women are not

like criminals but indeed are criminals. He places an exclamation mark after the word 'women' to indicate how difficult women are to understand.

To stress the sameness of women, the author records how the two men Makhuvele and Mangawu were seduced by several women at work:

Vavasati lava va ringetile ku kondletela swa vugangu ni tindhuna letimbirhi kambe va tsandzekile.

These women tried in vain to seduce the two men.

Throughout the novel, the author systematically promotes the stereotype of the unfaithful woman. The novel begins with a scene where a promiscuous woman is at Mozi's (traditional healer) place to have an abortion after falling pregnant while her husband was working far away in Germiston for a lengthy period of time. The woman seeks assurance from Mozi that the abortion will be successful:

Mbilu ya wansati loyi a yi vava swinene hikuva yena a a ku wo yiva.

This woman was so hurt because she thought she was just cheating on her husband.

The extract indicates the woman's infidelity - whenever the author mentions a woman in the novel it is in the context of infidelity and immoral behaviour.

Apart from being cheaters, Makhuvele's wives are also portrayed as drunkards:

Molina u davukile a nga n'wi byalwa kambe sweswi wo chela kunene.

Molina never used to drink alcohol but now she does not only drink, she is a drunkard.

Also, Molisa turns Makhuvele's house into a shebeen:

Loko se Makhuvele a ri ni vhiki a fambile, Mozi u sukele vana ni vasati va yena a ya tshama na Molisa emutini wa Makhuvele. Laha mutini va sungule ni ku xavisa byalwa.

A week after Makhuvele's departure, Mozi left his wives and children to go and stay with Molisa at Makhuvele's house. They started selling liquor at home.

To emphasise the women's love for alcohol, the author states that Molina who never drank alcohol before she married Makhuvele now does not only drink frequently but is a drunkard. He also repeatedly states that, Molisa has turned Makhuvele's house into a shebeen.

The women's infidelity does not go unpunished: the promiscuous woman who had an abortion dies from the medication given by the traditional healer, Molina loses both her legs in a fatal accident where her lover dies, and Molisa is beaten badly at a traditional court and is expelled from the village.

This novel is unique in this study in that it is the only novel where all the female characters are portrayed as whores. All three women are involved in extra-marital affairs and all get punished. Mashele's portrayal of these characters may be influenced by the way adultery is viewed in the *Xitsonga* community. As indicated in the previous novels, adultery is blamed on the woman, which is why there is no word for a male 'dlakuta' – 'whore'. The impression is given that

'*madlakuta*' (whores) are only women. Men who behave like whores are not censured as, culturally, they are allowed to have more than one wife.

All the novels analysed above have a predictable ending, namely the heavy punishment of the female characters who do not behave 'appropriately'. One would expect that justice would be fair in the novels, but on the contrary, it is mostly the female characters who eventually have to face the dire consequences of their 'unacceptable' behaviour. This is an indication of the gender bias of authors whose portrayals of women may be due to social expectations. Their writing promotes traditional *Xitsonga* cultural norms without reflecting the new social dispensation.

3.7 *U KHANYA MANI?*

(i) *Summary of the novel*

U khanya mani? (Whom are you spiting?) is a *Xitsonga* novel that won the De Jager Haum literary award in 1991. The novel revolves around two women characters, Masitipile and her daughter Marhandza-Teka.

Masitipile is married to Magalafawa and Marhandza-Teka is their only child. Marhandza-Teka is unruly at home and at school - she is disrespectful to teachers, is disruptive in class and smokes dagga. The principal once expelled her, but she was re-admitted following her mother's plea. She works as a waitress and as a prostitute after school at a pub without her parents' knowledge.

Her mother, Masitipile is over-protective and spoils her while her father reprimands her when she gets out of hand. She finally lands up in jail for the possession of a firearm at school and for cheating during her matric exam. As usual, Masitipile does all she can to get her released on bail, against her husband's will. She negotiates with the police, goes around borrowing money for

the bail, and, luckily, on her first appearance in court, Marhandza-Teka is released on bail pending the trial. While out on bail she is kidnapped by a gang of robbers who claim she owes them R15 000. The robbers phone her parents to demand R20 000 ransom for her release. Masitipile collapses from shock and dies in hospital. After her kidnappers discover that her mother is dead, they release her on the day of the funeral. Her father is furious and wants nothing to do with her, but, on insistence of other family members, he accepts her back. At her trial, she is sentenced to five years' imprisonment without the option of a fine.

(ii) Analysis of the novel

There are two female characters in the novel, Masitipile and her daughter, Marhandza-Teka. The author uses the naming technique to name *Marhandza-teka*, the trouble child:

*Marhandza-Teka loyi hakunene a a rhandza ku tshama
a ri karhi a nyikiwa swilo hi vanhu.*

Marhandza-Teka who indeed was always expecting to be given something by other people.

Masitipile's failure as a parent is similar to Mariya's failure in *Vutomi i vhilwa* and N'wa-Masiya's in *Xihangalasa* (analysed above). Women's failure in bringing up their children features in numerous novels and confirms the negative stereotypical view of a woman's parental role.

The author highlights Masitipile's weakness by giving her husband a contrasting character. She is portrayed as a complete failure as a parent while the husband is portrayed as an excellent father who knows what is good for his child. He is like Mgiba in *Vutomi i vhilwa*. In Mgiba's case the author implies that if the father (Zitha) was alive, he would have done much better than his wife (Mariya) in

bringing up the children. The implication has no reasonable base except that he is a man.

When Marhandza-Teka returns home drunk in the early hours of the morning, Magalafawa reprimands her, but Masitipile calls him 'old fashioned' for doing so. His patience and his desire to educate his wife is illustrated in the following words:

*Masitipile nkatanga, n'wana u fanele ku dyondzisiwa
tindlela ta mahanyele a ha ri ntsongo.*

Masitipile my wife, a child needs to be taught good manners while still young.

A mother's role is to inculcate good moral habits in her children, but Masitipile fails to do so, unlike her husband.

The depiction of the two opposite characters in Masitipile and Magalafawa is in line with the *Vatsonga's* belief that the mother has considerable influence on the behaviour of her children. In the *Vatsonga* society, when a child misbehaves, especially a girl child, it is believed that she has taken after the mother. A proverb in Junod and Jaques (1975:103) confirms this notion:

Ku tlula ka mhala ku letela n'wana wa le ndzeni.

Translation: the jumping/leaping of the young Impala is like that of its mother.

Meaning: the child copies the mother's way of life.

The above proverb is true in the case of Masitipile who the author portrays as encouraging her daughter to behave immorally.

Also, these two characters are the only female characters in the novel, and they are depicted as morally corrupt women who end up being severely punished for their corrupt behaviour. The author evidently believes that women who defy *Xitsonga* cultural norms deserve punishment.

3.8 *VURHENA BYAKWE*

(i) Summary of the novel

The novel *Vurhena Byakwe* (His Strength) is named after the main character, a young man called Minora. Minora lived with his grandmother N'waxikhwezana and his younger sister Gladness because his parents worked far away in Benoni and resided in Daveyton. After completing primary school, Minora went to boarding school, and after high school he stayed with his parents before going to a teacher-training college in Lemana. During mid-year at college, Minora received the sad news that his parents had died in a car accident, which meant that he could not continue his studies due to lack of money. His father's friend Khosa took him and stayed with him in Daveyton.

It was difficult for Minora to find a job and, because of boredom, he got into bad company and became involved in criminal activities. When Khosa found out, he expelled him from his house forcing him to stay with one of his criminal friends. Minora went to stay with one of his criminal friends who was later killed while robbing someone in the street. Minora was terrified and returned to Khosa to ask for forgiveness. Khosa took him back and found him a job in a cigarette company. He eventually married Alice, a Zulu woman.

One afternoon when Minora was relaxing in a park with Alice, a gang of men ran passed them chased by the police. These robbers were carrying a lot of money in a bag. After the police had left, the remaining robbers dug a hole and hid the bag of money in it in the veld next to the park where Minora and Alice were

relaxing. They did not realise that the couple had seen them. After they had left, Minora dug the money out of the hole and took it home.

He dug a hole in his bedroom floor where he hid the bag of money. One day when Alice was not home he took the money and hid it at his grandmother's place. Alice was not aware that the money had been moved and disclosed the secret to two of her friends. One of the friends was a policeman's wife who told her husband what had happened. The police eventually came to dig up Minora's bedroom floor but could not find the money. After the disappointment of not finding the money, the police told Minora the whole story, which led to Minora and Alice's divorce. Minora then returned to his Grandmother's place and married an earlier girlfriend, Stage.

(ii) Analysis of the novel

The author presents six female characters in the novel, namely Gladness who is Minora's younger sister; Sofi, Minora's mother; N'waxikhwezana who is Minora's grandmother; N'wa-Semu who is Khosa's wife; Alice, Minora's wife and finally, Stage who marries Minora after he divorces Alice. Nothing is said about Gladness except that she is Minora's younger sister. Again, very little is said about N'waxikhwezana. All we hear about her is that she used to stay with Minora when Minora's parents worked in Daveyton. We also hear about her when she bids Minora farewell when he leaves to join his parents in Daveyton. Minora's mother, Sofi, dies before we can learn anything about her. Stage comes into the picture only when she falls in love with Minora at high school. She then disappears and re-appears at the end of the novel when she marries Minora. N'wa-Semu, Khosa's wife comes into the story only when she tries to persuade Khosa to forgive Minora and not expel him after he finds out about Minora's criminal activities. Alice, Minora's wife, features frequently.

Alice's depiction is therefore central to the novel. Her portrayal will be analysed in terms of how the other characters in the novel view her and women in general as well as what the author says about her and women in general.

When Minora has to decide whom to marry between Alice and Stage, he receives advice from his close friend Jimmy:

*Vavasati va lomu madorobeni a va fani ni va le makaya,
va lomu va tshembeka kambe a va heteleli, va ni migilo,
evuton'wini bya vona.*

Urban women are different from rural ones, the urban ones are not fully trustworthy, they are deceitful in their lives.

In many of the novels analysed in this study, rural women were portrayed as virtuous, forgiving, hardworking and submissive. Jimmy's statement above is not surprising as the general belief is that urban women are influenced by the Western way of life and are generally educated and independent. Jimmy's advice confirms the stereotype of untrustworthiness of urban women. Jimmy grew up and spent a lot of time in Daveyton, an urban area, and bases his view of women's deceitful behaviour to his experiences of urban life. Minora has his own stereotypical view of rural women which differs from Jimmy's:

*Manguva lawa emakaya ku bava ku tlula lomu
madorobeni, hambu emakaya masiku lawa, wansati wa
swi kota ku tlhava wanuna hi mukwana. Loko byi ri
vuloyi a hi vuli...*

These days rural life is worse than urban life, even in the rural areas, a woman is capable of stabbing a man

with a knife. When it comes to bewitching, it is even worse...

What the two men imply is that you can hardly find a faithful woman anywhere these days. According to them, women are generally evil. Their perception of women becomes even clearer as they continue their conversation about women. They believe that women are incapable of giving each other sound advice and that they are so jealous and envious that they easily mislead each other:

Vunyingi bya vona vavasati byo xisana lomu va fambaka kona. Loko a ya hluleka emahlweni hi vona nakambe vanghana va nga ta rhanga va hleka ni ku yowetela.

Most women mislead each other whenever they meet. When one of them blunders because of wrong advice, they are the first to laugh and ridicule her.

The author confirms Minora's perception of how women mislead each other. When Alice discloses the secret of the money that Minora has hidden under their bedroom floor to her friends, the advice they give her is:

Loko u ri un'wana ingi wo n'wi kho! A kala a yi humesa, loko a nga pfumeli wo sala u yi cela u baleka na yona. loko swi ku hlula u ngo kuma un'wana u n'wi kombela a ku pfuna.

If you were wise, you would pester him until he takes the money out, if he refuses, just dig it out in his absence and run away with it. If you can't do it on your own, just get someone to help you.

Before she can carry out her friends' advice, the very same friends report the secret to the police. The author thus confirms the deceitfulness, untrustworthiness, and envy that are perceived to be central to a woman's character. Once Minora finds out about the disclosure, he says:

*WANSATI A NGA NA XIHUNDLA, WANSATI A NGA
NA XIHUNDLA, WANSATI A NGA NA XIHUNDLA.*

A WOMAN CANNOT KEEP A SECRET, A WOMAN
CANNOT KEEP A SECRET, A WOMAN CANNOT
KEEP A SECRET.

The repeated statement is written in capital letters to underline the perception of women. The repetition of 'a woman cannot keep a secret' three times, signals that what used to be a claim about a woman's character is no longer merely a claim but a fact as circumstances confirmed.

At the end of the chapter when Minora discovers that he has been reported to the police, he sighs and says:

*Ndzi karhele hi Alice, a a ye laha a yaka kona. Munhu
wo pfumala xihundla. Wansati – WANSATI A NGA NA
XIHUNDLA.*

I am tired of Alice, let her go wherever she wants to. A
person who can't keep a secret. A woman – A WOMAN
CANNOT KEEP A SECRET.

The author carefully builds a case to support his stereotypical view of women. At first, he uses the two male characters, who generalise about the women's unfaithfulness. One condemns rural women, while the other condemns urban

women. Both men base their claims on their own experiences where they grew up. Later in the novel, the perception is confirmed by the wife of one of the male characters who indeed proves incapable of keeping a secret. The conclusion is drawn that what at first was a perception has now been proved by the facts. The author does this by also employing a style of writing that conveys his message explicitly. The use of capital letters and repetition supports the author's message of woman's untrustworthiness.

In the end, Minora divorces his wife for untrustworthiness:

*Ku fikele laha rirhandzu ra vona ri fikeke emakumu
hikwalaho ka wansati wo pfumala xihundla.*

It came to a point where their love life came to an end
because of a woman who could not keep a secret.

Alice gets punished at the end of the novel by consequently being divorced by her husband. Minora on the other hand, who stole a lot of money and hid it is not condemned and is not punished for his criminal activity. In fact, he is rewarded by acquiring a new wife with whom he lives happily ever after. The author's intention in the novel is clear, namely to warn men against fully trusting their spouses because as a Xitsonga proverb puts it: 'Mavala ya yingwe I mavala yan'we – the spots of a Leopard are all the same'. This proverb is analysed in detail in Chapter 5.

3.9. Conclusion

The novels studied in this chapter deal mainly with characters who do not defy the cultural customs of the *Vatsonga*. Where these characters do clash with such customs, the characters are severely punished or the author finds a way of disapproving of their behaviour.

In Chapter 2, Western and African feminist theories were used to analyse the selected novels dealing with the image of women. Under Western Feminism, three broad theories were considered: Liberal Feminism, Social Feminism and Radical Feminism. The analyses revealed that some of the female characters defied the Xitsonga cultural norms of marriage thereby asserting the Liberal Feminist perspective of equal rights of both sexes. The analyses further revealed that the female characters tended to be bound by the patriarchal nature of society. These characters were verbally, emotionally and physically abused by their male counterparts, yet they continued to be submissive to their abusers for fear of losing their marital status. Such behaviour is in line with the Radical Feminists' belief that culture imprisons women and leads to their subordination because of the patriarchal nature of society.

The importance of industriousness of women is emphasised in some of the novels. In this regard, the Social Feminists view the family as the primary institution of the sexual division of labour and therefore central to women's oppression.

Conversely, as also seen in Chapter 2, African Feminists believe in the importance of the family for the wellbeing of society, however, they do not condone male dominance and abuse in family relationships. The depiction of some women characters as abused women who behave in a helpless manner contradicts all forms of feminisms, both Western and African.

The authors portray characters in ways that suggest that infidelity deserves punishment; but they make it very clear that in cases of men who commit adultery, the men were deceived and misled by the women as if these men could not think for themselves. The blame is thus laid solely on women who seduce men and lead them to temptation. This is reminiscent of the Biblical encounter of Adam and Eve.

Fewer literary works in Xitsonga have been produced by women than by men. In this study, only one female-authored novel was analysed - the other four female-authored novels were analysed by Mathye (2003). There are only 11 female writers in Xitsonga, and only five out of the 11 wrote novels.

This study corroborates Mathye's findings (2003:141) that female authors portray women characters positively, while their male counterparts portray them negatively, however, this study also reveals that some female authors convey negative images of women, for example in the novel, *N'wananga*. The female character (Suzan) in this novel is a professional nurse who thus moves beyond a woman's traditional role. She, however, still remains confined and bound by the cultural expectations of how an ideal *Mutsonga* woman should behave.

The conclusion is that similar to male authors, female authors also to a certain degree portray female characters in a manner that promotes patriarchal values and norms. However, in addition to this, female authors also convey positive images of women. In other words, unlike their male counterparts, they create both negative and positive images of women in their characters.

CHAPTER 4

THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN POETRY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the portrayal of women in poetry, focusing on the themes of the poems and the way the female characters are depicted. In the introduction, definition of 'poetry' is given and analysed. The poems are then presented and translated and following which the theme of each poem outlined and the poems analysed to examine how women are presented.

Fourteen poems from both male and female authors have been selected. Five of the fourteen are female-authored. As indicated in Chapter 4, the literary output of women is limited compared to that of men in Xitsonga. Two female poets, Mashele and Mudau have written poems with female characters; and these poems have been selected for analysis here, namely, *Wansati Lonene*, by Mashele; and *Dlakuta*, *N'wambhuri*, *N'wananga*, and *Swi Dzudzekile i Mberha* by Mudau. The other twelve poems are male-authored and were selected on the basis of having women characters.

Four of the fourteen poems, namely, *Wansati i Gumba*, *Nkata Xithicarana*, *I Wansati*, and *U nga Tshembi Wansati*; were sourced from Marivate's (1983) anthology of poems entitled, *Mpambulwa wa Swithhokovetselo*; the poem *Wansati*, was sourced from Marivate & Mayevu's anthology of poems entitled, *Swihlenge swa Vatsonga*; the poem *Kuwa ro Tshwuka*, was sourced from Marivate & Nkondo's (1982) anthology of poems entitled *Madaladala*, and the rest of the poems are individually authored.

As mentioned above, only three women have written poetry in *Xitsonga*. In his anthology of poems, Marivate (1983:4) assembled a number of poems under the

theme 'women'. He raised his concern that in all the poems he had collected, only a handful were about women, and none were about men. He speculated that this could be attributed to the fact that all the writers were men. He concluded by posing a number of critical questions to women:

*Mi kwihi n'wina vavasati? Mi ri yini hi leswi vavanuna va
vulaka swona hi n'wina? I ntiyiso xana?*

Where are you women? What is your reaction to what
men say about you? Does it reflect reality?

Marivate was evidently trying to persuade women to write their own poetry because of the scarcity of poetry about women by women themselves.

4.2 Definition of poetry

Poetry is a literary genre in which figurative language plays a key role. Hadza and Fortune (1979:43) refer to the unique use of language in poetry:

Poetry is a special form of language. All the elements of language, sound, grammar and meaning are necessary ingredients in the material of poems. What distinguishes poetry from the free use of language in prose is the fact that these ingredients are usually combined in distinctive patterns, not normally those of common speech.

The use of language in poetry is thus different from the everyday language use. According to Lewis (1944:14):

Poetry is a special way of using words in order to create
a special effect upon the reader and to light up the world
for him.

This special use of words is a feature poets use to express their feelings and emotions over their life experiences. A poet uses figurative language such as metaphors, similes, personification, etc. to create images of objects and ideas in the mind of the reader. For instance when Mbhiza in the poem *Vutomi* – Life, found in the anthology of Xitsonga poems by Marivate and Mayevu (1976:18) says:

Vutomi i maganga ni magova
Life is steep hills and valleys

He is actually referring to the ups and downs of life, as expressed in the English saying: 'Life is not all that Lillies and Roses'. '*Maganga* (steep hills) and *magova* (valleys) are symbols of difficulties one encounters in life. The poet thus employs metaphors to achieve his objective.

The form in poetry, as seen in the extract above, is unique. Poets use many different forms in their poems such as stanzas, quatrain, couplet, ballad, elegy, epic, lyric, sonnet, etc. For example, Masebenza (1974:45) in his poem *Swihloni* (Porcupines), criticises *Vatsonga* who are ashamed of their ethnicity and refrain from speaking their language when in the company of members of other ethnic groups.

In the following stanza of the poem, the author bends the verses of the stanza to one side as follows:

Loko va cinca swivongo,
Va kiringa-kiringa,
Va hundzuluxela-hundzuluxela
E-tintlhari ta kona - !

When they change their surnames,
They play around with words,
They translate - and – translate
The so-called wise men - !

The poet uses the above form to symbolise how 'bent' these people are, when they shy away from their identity. Poets are also influenced by their environment, their philosophy and their culture. In his foreword to *Vhilwa ra Vutomi*, (The Wheel of Life), Malungana (2006: i) states:

Vhilwa ra Vutomi i buku ya mina ya vumune. Hi yona ndzi rhandza ku kombisa leswaku vutlhokovetseri i vutshila byo phofula leswi humelelaka evuton'wini bya masiku hinkwawo. Vhilwa ra Vutomi i mahanyelo ya hina evuton'wini.

The Wheel of Life is my fourth book. Through this book, I want to reveal that poetry is the art of expressing our life experiences. The wheel of life is an expression of the way we live our lives.

Marivate (1983: xiii) seems to support the notion of the relationship between poetry and the poet's life experiences:

*Vatlhokovetseri va phofula leswi va swi twaka embilwini
ni le miehleketweni ehenhla ka leswi va swi vonaka
evuton'wini.*

Poets express their feelings and emotions over what they experience in life.

The images poets use in their poetry awaken emotional responses and may also give rise to attitudes and perceptions in the reader. The figurative language that poets employ allows the reader to bring out the meaning of the poem and what the poem suggests. The meaning or subject of a poem is called the 'theme' of the poem, and for the reader to understand the theme, he or she must read the poem critically. According to Grace (1965:63):

Poetry touches the emotions deeply...The poet's imagery tells us many things besides what is overtly presented. The overt presentation may be the least important aspect of what (s/he) has to say.

In the same way, the theme of the poem is often hidden in the figurative use of the language. Abrams (1981:111) defines theme as follows:

The term theme is more usefully applied to an abstract claim, or doctrine, whether implicit or asserted, which an imaginative work is designed to incorporate and make persuasive to the reader.

In other words the theme is the subject or the central idea in the poem.

4.3 Analysis of selected poems

4.3.1 Wansati

*Xiluva xa misava.
Tiko ra n'wi rhandza,
Ra n'wi sirhelela,
U xiximiwa ku tlula hosi.
A nga vileri ha nchumu,
I madya-tshamile.*

*Leswinene i swa yena.
I madlayisana byokota.
U ni xinghana xa le khumbini.
U tsandze Samson.
Futhi a nga khatali.
Ku ku khomisa vulongo.*

Woman

A flower of the earth.
The world loves her.
It protects her.
She is respected more than a king.
She is not bothered by anything.
She eats without working.

Good things belong to her.
She is a Bulbul bird a betrayer.
She has friends in walls,

She defeated Samson.
To her it is not an issue,
To let you hold animal dung.

Theme of the poem

The poem, *Wansati (Woman)*, was written by Mashele. It exposes the evil nature of women as a way of warning men not to be manipulated by them.

4.3.1.2 Depiction of women in the poem

In the first stanza, a woman is depicted as a beautiful creature that is respected, protected and taken care of by the nation as a whole. This is illustrated through the use of metaphors in the first stanza:

Xiluva xa misava
U xiximiwa ku tlula hosi
I madya-tshamile

Flower of the earth
She is respected more than a king
She eats without working

The poet employs symbolism by using the word, *Xiluva* (flower), which portrays an image of beauty. The image that a 'flower' creates is of a woman's beauty that is beyond reproach. The highest level in which the woman is loved and respected by everyone is portrayed by the use of the exaggeration, *U xiximiwa ku tlula hosi* (She is respected more than a king). The use of the compound noun, *Madya-tshamile* (she who eats without working) confirms the stereotype that men are the sole providers in the family and a woman's place is in the kitchen. As indicated in Chapter 1, in Xitsonga culture, the man is the sole provider of the traditional

family. It should be noted, however, that in the *Vatsonga* modern society, there are many professional women who fend for themselves.

The poet uses a contrast between the first and second stanza, to illustrate that the woman does not deserve the respect that she is given. Despite the respect and protection that she gets, she still engages in evil acts. In the second stanza, the poet employs a metaphor referring to a woman as a 'Bulbul bird'. A Bulbul bird migrates during winter and is known for its constant singing throughout the day and all year long. The *Vatsonga* interpret the Bulbul bird's song as, *Dyana-dyana n'ta ku lamulela*, meaning (Eat-eat I will defend you). The betrayal notion is contained in this song where the bird leads other birds to the greener pastures but it does not eat first. It lets the other birds taste the food first so that when the food is contaminated, it is warned in order not to die first.

Like the first woman in the Bible, Eve, who is alleged to have led Adam into temptation, women are considered to be deceivers. A woman is also said to be opportunistic and a betrayer in that she stays with a man only when he provides for her and quickly leaves when he is no longer able to do so. Also, women are said to be talkative and liars like the bird that sings throughout the day all year long. A particular Xitsonga idiom attests to this, *Ku pyhapyharha onge u wansati* (As talkative as a woman). The use of metaphor is even stronger in that a woman is not likened to a 'Bulbul bird', but actually is a 'Bulbul bird'. The poet thus confirms a woman's manipulative, deceitful and untrustworthy character. The reference to the Samson story in the Bible can perhaps be ascribed to the author's religious belief, and to the fact that the Bible constantly warns men to be careful not to be deceived by the devil, who sometimes may use women to lead them into temptation.

4.3.2 Vavasati

Vavasati i swivumbiwa swo hlamarisa.

Vavasati i makoti,

Vavasati i magama layo tlhavela ku tshika,

Vavasati i swikhwezana hi xiviri,

Va rhandza ku dyela.

Vavasati va rhandza switulu,

Vavasati va rhandza swiyimo,

Vavasati va rhandza xuma,

Vavasati va rhandza rifumo,

Vavasati va rhandza mali.

Vavasati va rhandza mpahla,

Mpahla ya vona i ntsandza-vahlayi.

Va rhandza ngopfu swibye,

Swibye swa vona swi furhekiwa malembe,

Malembe ya ntlhanu a hi nchumu.

Vavasati i vanhu va mavito,

Mavito ya swipandza-mananga⁴

I bombo ra vona.

Va rhandza tindlu ta mavito,

Migugugu i bombo eka vona.

Swiluva eka vona a hi nchumu.

Xana va nga vilela hi swiluva?

⁴ ‘*Xipandza-mananga*’ is a Xitsonga word that was coined looking at the function of the object (neologism) namely, the object is able to travel long distances including in the desert and has therefore been translated to mean a car in this context.

*Swiluva i mpahla ya vona,
Na vona hi vona swiluva hi voxé.
Vavasati i swivumbiwa swo hlamarisa.
Women*

Women are wonderful creatures.
Women are vultures
Women are hawks, they easily leave you,
Women are falcons,
They like nice things

Women like positions,
Women like status,
Women like dowry,
Women like wealth,
Women like money.

Women like clothes.
Their clothes are countless,
They like utensils,
Their utensils are stored unused for years,
Five years is nothing.

Women are people of status
Names of cars,
Is their pride.
They like mansions,
Mansions are their pride.

To them flowers are nothing.

Can they really be bothered by flowers?

Flowers are their clothes, they are flowers themselves.

Women are wonderful creatures.

4.3.2.1 Theme of the poem

The poem, *Vavasati – Women*, was written by Malungana. It exposes the evil character of women who are portrayed as greedy, materialistic and gold-diggers.

4.3.2.2 Depiction of women in the poem

The metaphors in the first stanza refer to women as *makoti* (Vultures); *Magama layo tlhavela ku tshika* (Hawks who easily leave you); *Swikhwezana* (Falcons). The images forcefully convey the ruthlessness of women; they go after men's wealth and snatch it from them like vultures and hawks. The poet employs symbolism with the words, *xuma* (dowry), *rifumo* (wealth) and *mali* (money) in the second stanza to illustrate women's love of money.

Women's materialistic nature is depicted in the second and third stanzas where the poet emphasises their love for clothes, utensils, luxury cars and mansions. The use of a compound noun, *ntsandza-vahlayi* (countless) in the second verse of the third stanza illustrates women's wide array of clothes. The poet uses the above exaggeration to stress the extravagance of women. This extravagance is taken further in the metaphor, *swibye swa vona swi furhekiwa malembe* (their utensils are stored unused for years). The image created by the word, *furheka* (ripen) is that of long storage, and the poet qualifies the 'long storage' by stating in the last verse of the third stanza that *malembe ya ntlhanu a hi nchumu* (five years is nothing).

The poet is seemingly concerned only about women's love of material things. He is silent about men's love of luxury cars, in other words, it is acceptable for men to love cars but not for women to love material things. The same can be said about the love for money, status and so on. Men love money and status as well, but the impression that one gets from reading the poem is the bias against women and thus gender bias. This bias was also seen in the analysis of novels where certain behaviours were acceptable in men but not in women, for instance acts like committing adultery. In Xitsonga culture, equality between men and women is not accepted as mentioned in Chapter 1, which explains why the poet expects women to behave differently to men, and why he condemns women who behave like men.

4.3.3 Wansati i gumba

*Gumba i wansati,
Gumba ri fana ni wansati,
Hi ximumu ri tlhakela matiko ya xona,
Kasi laha ku xurhiwaka wansati a nga pfumaleki.
Loko vuxika byi enghena gumba ri tsemakanyile,
Kasi na yena a nga lavi no vona mombo wa ndlala,
Wa hlundzuka loko yi twala hi swigingi,
Wa rhukana loko yi ri kusuhi no fika,
Loko yi fikile u fana ni gumba hi nkarhi wa vuxika.
Hi luyaa, u ya eximun'wini*

A woman is a Stork

A Stork is a woman,
A Stork is like a woman,
In summer it flees to its places,
Where there is plenty of food you will always find a woman.

When winter comes, the stork flees,
Similarly she does not want to see hunger near her,
Its footsteps anger her,
She swears when it comes closer to her,
When it arrives, she is like a stork in winter,
There she is, fleeing to the place where it is summer.

Theme of the poem

Marhanele, the author of the poem, '*Wansati i Gumba* (A woman is a Stork), also exposes the woman's evil nature calling women gold-diggers and untrustworthy. The poem seems to be a warning to men not to be manipulated by these wealth-loving creatures.

4.3.3.2 Depiction of women in the poem

A metaphor is used as the title of the poem, *Wansati i Gumba* (A woman is a Stork). The likening of a woman to a Stork elicits the image of a gold-digger and an unfaithful person. The poet states that a woman will remain with a man only when he has money, food and a comfortable lifestyle but will leave immediately the situation changes for the worse. This idea is conveyed in the following metaphors:

*Kasi laha ku xurhiwaka wansati a nga pfumaleki, loko
vuxika byi nghena gumba ri tsemakanyile.*

Where there is plenty of food you will get a woman,
When winter comes the stork disappears.

The word, *vuxika* (winter) symbolises unfavourable conditions and '*tsemakanyile* (leave hastily) symbolises the quick way in which a woman leaves once she realises the conditions are no longer favourable for her. The disappearance of a

woman to escape of unfavourable conditions mirrors the stork fleeing the winter season. This is illustrated in the last verse of the poem by the use of the copulative, *Hi luyaa* (there she is) illustrating how far away the woman has run to look for a better life.

As in the previous poems, the poet condemns the behaviour of women that is unacceptable in society.

4.3.4 Nkata Xithicarana

Loko ri xile exitulwini hi ko ku tikitiki!
A korhamisa nhloko swa xigumatshuku.
A rhunga wo malapi yo khavisa etafuleni,
U rhunga hi tintiho swanga I milenge ya phume.

Bodlela ra tiya kwala nyongeni gee!
U tola a ambala a helela man' n'wina!
Rikhahlu nkata xithicarana be!
Boyi yo tiyisela hi byo vusiwana.

Manyunyuyu onge u lo tekiwa eka mukhulu;
Swakudya swa le mitini u ri swi ni thyaka.
Maxangu le vatswarini u rivele!
Vuthicara bya nuna I baji eka yena.

Hinkwako eka mbuyangwana bya tirhisiwa:
Evhenkeleni, ebazini,...a ku pfuniwe yena eku sunguleni,
Vanhukulobye i ncini eka yena?
Ku vuhosi a byi peli nambu a nga swi tivi.

La kaya ku lo cacaa!
Boyi ya Xikwembu yi lunghisile hinkwaswo,
'Mesi' vo kombetela hi rintihlo,
Vo na ngangamuka onge va hlamba hi ximuwu!

Ku khohlolanyana, u tsutsumele emubedweni,
Emubedweni swakudya vata ka va yisa
Thicara a nga wu hoxa ni nomo na?
A ha ri jaha a a hamba a ku: He mina-mina! Mina-mina!
Swi kwihl?
A a biwe phela nsati wa kona hi vona,
Ho dzumba hi mamisiswa tintihlo;
Hi tincence ta matolo hina xana?
Emahelweni ya n'hwetl, nuna u vuriwa 'papa'
A a nga se vuya, hi fasitere u hlometeriwile.
Loko cheke yo vuya yi fayiwile, u ta titwela.
Xithicarana xa kona xi kumekile.
U swi twela evurhongweni mbuyangwana
Swivilelo swakwe ku nga rungula xikhegelo.

A wife of a young teacher

Daily, she lazily and comfortably sits on a chair!
Bowing down like an initiate,
Busy knitting doilies,
She knits with fingers like spider webs.
A bottle of tea next to her!
Always looking gorgeous!
She's good at scolding people!
Her servant tolerates her due to poverty.

She is proud as if she is married to a royal family;
She despises food from other homes as dirty.
She's forgotten the poverty from her parents' home!
She clothes herself with her husband's profession.

It's used everywhere
In shops, in the bus---she must always come first,
Others are nothing to her!
She forgets that her authority applies at her home, not everywhere.

The house is spotlessly clean!
The servant has done everything perfectly well,
Madam just gives orders,
She's grown tremendously overweight like a Baobab tree.

A slight sneeze she sneaks into bed,
Food will ultimately be served in bed,
The teacher doesn't have a say?
When still young, he would boast about his manhood!
What now?
Let him hit his wife, let's see if he can,
We are just misled and made to look foolish;
Are we babies to believe this?
She adoringly calls her husband "daddy" during month end
She can't wait for him to be home – she peeps through the window.
The cheque has to reach home intact.
The poor teacher is in trouble.
 He has no one to talk to
 Only his pillow can tell it all.

4.3.4.1 Theme of the poem

In the poem *Nkata xithicarana* (Wife of a young teacher), Maphalakasi (the poet) condemns proud women who are abusive to their husbands.

4.3.4.2 Depiction of women in the poem

A woman is defined based on her relationship with her husband. She is not independent and shields herself under her husband's profession as conveyed in the title of the poem, *Nkata xithicarana* (A wife of a young teacher). The stereotype of a lazy housewife is evident where the woman stays lazily at home expecting to be supported by her husband. This depiction of women is in line with Xitsonga culture as described in Chapter 1. The woman's laziness is depicted in the first verse of the first stanza:

Loko ri xile exitulwini hi ko ku tikitiki!

Daily she lazily and comfortably sits on a chair!

The idiophone, *tikitiki!* (sitting lazily and securely), emphasises the woman's laziness and care-freeness, as she knows that even if she does not work, the husband will provide for her. The woman is also depicted as cruel. The idiophonic expression, *Rikhahlu nkata xithicarana be!* (the young teacher's wife is always scolding), emphasises how she ill-treats her helper.

The use of a simile, '*Manyunyu onge u lo tekiwa ka mukhulu* (She is proud as if she is married to a royal family) in the first verse of the third stanza indicates the extent of her arrogance. The symbolism in the last verse of the same stanza, *Vuthicara bya nuna i baji eka yena* (Her husband's profession is her cloak), stresses her lack of independence as she shields herself with her husband's achievements.

The woman neither works nor does she do the household chores - the helper does everything for her. The idiophone, *cacaa!* (spotlessly clean), in the first verse of the fifth stanza, emphasises how hard the helper is made to work.

The woman's laziness is emphasised in the following stanza:

La kaya ku lo cacaa!
Boyi ya Xikwembu yi lunghisile hinkwaswo.
'Mesisi' vo kombetela hi rintihlo

The house is spotlessly clean!
The servant has done everything perfectly well,
The madam just gives orders

The poet uses the words, *boyi* (servant) and *mesisi* (madam) above, to expose the master – servant relationship between the woman and her helper. The woman is portrayed as abusive to both her husband and her servant. The servant's abuse is indicated in the last verse of the second stanza:

Boyi yo tiyisela hi byo vusiwana.

Her servant only tolerates her because of poverty.

As her husband has to bring his pay cheque home in full, otherwise *u ta titwela* (he will be in trouble). This idiomatic expression exposes the danger that may befall the husband should he not comply.

As in all the poems analysed thus far, the image of a gold-digger is present in the ninth verse of the last stanza:

Emahelweni ya n'hwetl nuna u vuriwa 'papa'

A a nga se vuya, hi fasitere u hlometeriwile.

She adoringly calls her husband 'daddy' during month-end, she can't wait for him to be home – keeps peeping through the window.

The image illustrates the manipulative nature of the woman. Just as Mashele in *Wansati* (analysed above) indicated the powerful character of a woman through Samson's story in the Bible, Maphalakasi condemns the manhood of the woman's husband. When he was still young he used to boast that he would never allow a woman to undermine him. But now that he is married, he accepts the woman's abuse and remains silent about it for fear of becoming a laughing stock. The poet contrasts the man's 'weakness' and the woman's powerfulness in the last stanza:

A a hari jaha a hamba a ku:" He mina-mina!

Swi kwihi?

Xithicarana xa kona xi kumekile

U swi twela evurhongweni mbuyangwana

Swivilelo swakwe ku nga rungula xikhegelo.

When still young he would boast about his manhood,

What now?

He has no one to talk to

Only his pillow can tell it all.

By mocking the husband's submissiveness to his wife, the poet criticises the deviation from the cultural norm of the man as the head of the family. The poet changes the stanza format in the final two verses of the last stanza to emphasise the man's weakness. It reveals how small the man is made to feel by his wife and how shy and afraid he is of disclosing to anyone how his wife abuses him

4.3.5 I wansati

I mani a kotaka ku rhandza?

I wansati.

I mani a kotaka ku venga?

I wansati.

I mani a kotaka ku hleva?

I wansati.

I mani a kotaka ku monya?

I wansati.

I mani a kotaka ku lehisa mbilu?

I wansati.

I mani a komeke mbilu?

I wansati.

I mani a kotaka ku rihisela?

I wansati.

I mani a kotaka ku rivalela?

I wansati.

Wansati i xivumbiwa xo hlamarisa.

Ku hanyisana na xona kahle xi khome bya bodhlela,

Xi byele marito yo saseka,

Mi ta tumberhisana fole.

It is a woman

Who is capable of loving?

It is a woman.

Who is capable of hating?

It is a woman.

Who is capable of gossiping?

It is a woman.

Who is capable of despising?

It is a woman.

Who is capable of being patient?

It is a woman.

Who is short-tempered?

It is a woman.

Who is capable of paying revenge?

It is a woman.

Who is capable of forgiving?

It is a woman.

A woman is a wonderful creature.

To be able to live harmoniously with her, you should handle her with care.

Tell her beautiful words.

You will get along well.

4.3.5.1 Theme of the poem

Rikhotso in the poem, *I wansati* (It is a woman) depicts the dynamic nature of a woman. He maintains that a woman is capable of being good or evil depending

on how she is treated. He warns men that in order to live harmoniously with a woman, they must handle her with care.

4.3.5.2 Depiction of women in the poem

A woman is portrayed as capable of expressing opposite extreme characters. The poet employs rhetorical questions in the first four stanzas to illustrate the variable traits of a woman. Each stanza with the exception of the last one contains two rhetorical questions expressing a woman's contrasting characteristics and also emphasising how unpredictable a woman's character is. She is capable of 'loving' and 'hating', she is capable of 'exercising patience' and being 'short tempered', she is capable of expressing 'vengeance' and 'forgiveness'. All these traits are contrasted with each other in different stanzas in order to illustrate the unpredictability and complexity of the character of a woman.

In the second stanza, the poet breaks the monotony of listing the opposing traits of a woman and instead emphasises a woman's 'gossiping' character:

I mani a kotaka ku hleva?

I wansati.

I mani a kotaka ku monya?

I wansati.

Who is capable of gossiping?

It is a woman.

Who is capable of despising?

It is a woman.

The poet stresses the uniqueness of these two female characteristics by coupling them in a single stanza instead of contrasting them as in the other stanzas. He thus confirms the stereotype of likening women as 'chatterboxes'.

In the final stanza, the reader is given advice on how to avoid trouble and to live harmoniously with these 'complicated' human beings:

*Wansati i xivumbiwa xo hlamarisa,
Ku hanyisana na xona xi khome swa bodhlela;
Xi byele marito yo saseka'
Mi ta tumberhisana fole*

A woman is a wonderful creature,
To live harmoniously with her, you should handle her with care;
Tell her beautiful words'
You will get along well.

In the second verse above, the poet uses a simile, *xi khome swa bodhlela* (hold her like you are holding a bottle) to stress how fragile (like a bottle) a woman is. The poet concludes the poem in the last verse with a metaphor, *Mi ta tumberhisana fole* (you will smoke from the same pipe) to emphasise how well you will get along with a woman if you treat her with care.

4.3.6 U nga Tshembi Wansati

*U tlangela yini hi mpfundze?
Loko u humesa hinkwaswo swa mbilu yaku?
U sala u pfumala xihundla ni ndzhuti?
U paluxela yini swihundla ka la ku hlongoriseke entangeni,
A wu swi tivi leswo wansati i wansati?*

*Lemela swihundla swaku,
U swi biheleta hi mahlampfu ya xigatlu,
U lema hi mhula u sikisela,
Swi tikirhete empfungwe laha ku nga riki na tinsumba,
Xaka rakwe i mana wakwe ntsena.*

*U nga n'wi tshembi makwerhu,
I nsati wa wena,
A hi makwenu.
Loko u ta dzudza matluka hi vuxika,
U ta rhurha bya gumba u sala wexe.*

*Ngopfu n'wi chave eka leswi khumbaka xuma,
Yudas u mamile a va siyela,
Vavasati va wisile tihosi ni vuhosi,
U tata wa vana vakwe,
Phela n'wana u tiva hi mana wakwe.*

Never trust a woman

Why do you play with hot ash?
By expressing everything that is in your heart?
And remain without a secret and dignity?
Why do you reveal secrets to someone who caused you to be chased from the garden,
Don't you know that a woman is a woman?

Seal your secrets,
Fence them with branches of Acacia,
Seal them off with wax,
Hide them securely at the rear of the hut,

Her relative is only her mother.

Do not trust her dear brother,
She is your wife,
She is not your sibling.
When you shed leaves during winter,
She will immigrate like a stork and leave you alone.

Be very careful with matters that deal with wealth,
They took over from Judas,
Women caused the fall of kings and kingdoms,
You are the father of her children,
But a child is known only by his/her mother.

4.3.6.1 Theme of the poem

In his poem, *U nga tshembi wansati* (Never trust a woman) Magaisa gives warning to men never to trust women, especially their wives and never to reveal any secrets to them or discuss money - matters with them, as women are gold-diggers.

4.3.6.2 Depiction of women in the poem

The title of the poem contains warning to men *U nga tshembi wansat* (Never trust a woman). The reader is warned right from the outset of the untrustworthiness of a woman.

The first verse is in the form of a rhetorical question that indicates the danger of a woman. She is likened to 'hot ash', that is something that burns and inflicts pain. As in Mashele's (1982) poem *Wansati*, some poets refer to the Bible as a way of validating their statements and claims. Since the Bible is regarded as entirely

truthful, the portrayal of women in the Bible cannot be disputed. Mashele (1982) refers to the Samson and Delilah story, and in this poem, Magaisa refers to Eve's deceitful tactics in the Garden of Eden. Adam, the first man in the Bible, is said to have been deceived by Eve. Even though they were both deceived by the serpent, the blame is solely put on Eve. Likewise, Magaisa depicts a woman as untrustworthy in the last two lines of the first stanza:

*U paluxela yini swihundla ka la ku hlongoriseke
ntangeni? A wu swi tivi leswo wansati I wansati?*

Why do you reveal secrets to someone who caused
you to be chased from the garden? Don't you know that
a woman is a woman?

The poet's use of repetition in the last verse above, *wansati i wansati* (a woman is a woman) emphasises that all women are the same and that they never change; they share the same characteristics with the first woman, Eve who beguiled her husband into eating the forbidden fruit.

The poet advises men to seal their secrets and hide them. The word *empfungwe* (at the rear of the hut) in the fourth verse of the second stanza creates an image of a hiding place where valuable assets are hidden. Marhanele's (1983) metaphor in the poem, *Wansati i Gumba* (A woman is a Stork) is repeated in this poem by Magaisa who similarly likenes a woman to a stork to convey an idea of an opportunist. Men are also warned not to trust women because they are not their siblings, and they may desert them anytime, especially in difficult circumstances:

*U nga n'wi tshembhi makwerhu,
I nsati wa wena,
A hi makwenu.*

*Loko u ta dzudza matluka hi vuxika,
U ta rhurha bya gumba u sala wexe.*

Do not trust her dear brother,
She is your wife,
She is not your sibling.
When you shed leaves during winter,
She will immigrate like a stork and leave you alone.

The last two verses of the stanza above contain metaphors that convey the image of an opportunist; *Loko u ta dzudza matluka hi vuxika* (When you shed leaves during winter), suggests hard times, as in Marhanele's poem (1983), Magaisa's simile, *U ta rhurha bya gumba u sala wexe* (She will immigrate like a stork and leave you alone) highlights the opportunistic nature of a woman. Again, in the second verse of the last stanza, a biblical reference is made, where women are compared with Judas who betrayed Jesus in the Bible. The metaphor, *Yudas u mamile a va siyela* (They breastfed from the same breast with Judas), compares Judas' character with that of women, thus emphasising the seriousness of the poet's warning to men. The metaphor in the third verse of the last stanza depicts the powerful nature of women:

Vavasati va wisile tihosi ni vukosi.

Women caused the fall of kings and kingdoms.

This metaphor creates an image of deceit. In the final two verses of the poem, the poet seals his portrait of women by emphasising their deceitful nature. He warns men that even their children could have been fathered by somebody else because it is only the mother who knows the father of her children:

*U tata wa vana vakwe,
Phela n'wana u tiva hi mana wakwe.*

You are the father of her children,
But a child is known only by his/her mother.

4.3.7 Vavasati

*Vavasati, vavanuna mi lo va ntswi!
Loko ri xile majaha ma vulavula hi n'wina;
Va vulavula hi n'wina ku fana na n'wina mi vulavulaka hi vona.
Vavasati ma tiphina ke!*

*Loko ri xile mo sweka mi dya.
Swakudya va ta xava vavanuna venu.
Mali hinkwayo ya miholo mi ta yi kuma.
Swiambalo leswi mi swi rhandzaka va ta xava vavanuna venu.
Vavasati mi tsandzile;
Hi ku hlekelela, leswinene vavanuna va mi endlela;
Nhenha ya xinuna a mi yi hlayi nchumu:
Va-Samson mi lerhisile n'wina.*

*Tiko ri le mavokweni yenu;
Leswinene ku endleriwa n'wina ku sungula;
Vavanuna va baleselana n'wina hi swibamu;
Swiphukuphuku emadorobeni mi swi khorwisile.*

*Rirhandzu renu a ri na mpimo;
Hambi riri rizondzo renu a ri na makumu.
Loko mi lunghile mi lunghele mugwazo;*

Loko mi onha mi onhela makumu.

Vavasati mi swipendzani;

Loko mi nga lulamisiwanga ma dyoha;

Loko mi byeriwa swihoxo swen'wu ma tshika.

Lexiya na lexiya hi ye inani.

Mi katekile vavasati!

Women

Women, you have tied men down!

Boys are forever discussing you;

They talk about you as you talk about them.

Women, you are indeed enjoying yourselves!

Every day you cook and eat.

Your husbands will buy the food.

You get all the money from their salaries.

Your husbands will buy you clothes of your choice.

Women, you are powerful;

With your deceitful smile you get all good things from men;

A man of strength is nothing to you:

You brought Samson down.

The world is under your control;

All the good things come to you first;

Men shoot each other fighting for you;

Stupid men in cities never go back home to their families.

Your love knows no limit;
Even your hatred is infinite.
Your kindness results in cruelty;
When you destroy, you destroy forever.

Women, you are just musical instruments;
If not corrected you sin;
When you are told your mistakes you leave everything.
You never accept responsibility.
Women, you are indeed fortunate!

4.3.7.1 Theme of the poem

The above poem was written by Maphalakasi and condemns the evil characteristics of women.

4.3.7.2 Depiction of women in the poem

Right from the beginning of the poem, Maphalakasi refers to the controlling nature of women and he uses an idiophonic expression in the first verse of the first stanza to emphasise men's powerlessness:

Vavasati, vavannuna mi lo va ntswii!

Women, you have tied men down!

The full dependency of women on their husbands was also noted in the poems of Mashele (1982) *Wansati* (Woman), Malungana (2006) *Vavasati* (Women) and Maphalakasi (1976) *Nkata xithicarana* (A wife of a young teacher). In this poem too, Maphalakasi (1976) stresses the dependency of women on their husbands in accordance with societal expectations. The second stanza reads as follows:

*Loko ri xile mo sweka mi dya. Swakudya va ta xava
vavanuna venu, Mali hinkwayo ya miholo mi ta yi kuma.
Swiambalo leswi mi swi rhandzaka va ta xava
vavanuna.*

Everyday you cook and eat. Your husbands will buy the food; you get all the money from their salaries. Your husbands will buy you clothes of your choice.

The biblical Samson is again used to depict the deceitful character of women as in the previous poems. A woman is alleged to be so powerful that she can defeat a strong man. This image is depicted in the last two verses of the third stanza:

*Nhenha ya xinuna a mi yi hlayi nchumu!
Va Samson mi lerhile n'wina;*

A man of strength is nothing to you;
You brought Samson down.

Women are also depicted as trouble-makers. When men fight, their fighting is not condemned, but, instead, women are blamed as the instigators of the fighting. Similarly, when married men leave their families and do not return, the blame is placed on women who are accused of having seduced them. The reasons for portraying women in this light were discussed in Chapter 3 in the analysis of Mashele's novel, *Ximitantsengele*. Women's trouble-making nature is emphasised in the exaggeration in the last two verses of the fourth stanza:

*Vavanuna va baleselana n'wina hi swibamu;
Swiphukuphuku emadorobeni mi swi khorwisile.*

Men shoot each other fighting for you;
Stupid men in cities never go back home to their
families.

Women's unbalanced nature is shown through their extreme emotions. They are portrayed as either extremely hurtful or extremely kind (fifth stanza):

*Rirhandzu renu a ri na mpimo;
Hambi ri ri rizondzo renu a ri na makumu;
Loko mi lunghile mi lunghele mugwazo.
Loko mi onha mi onhela makumu.*

Your love knows no limit;
Even your hatred is infinite,
Your kindness results in cruelty;
When you destroy, you destroy forever.

The above image was also encountered in Rikhotso's (1983) *I wansati* (It is a woman). Women are depicted as human beings who cannot control their emotions, which explains why traditionally there were few professional male nurses because nursing was believed to be a feminine profession as it involves a lot of emotions. *Vatsonga* men are taught from an early age to endure pain and never to cry 'like a woman' when they face difficulties or experience pain.

4.3.8 *Kuwa ro Tshwuka*

*Ndza xi vona hi tihlo ra moya
Nhwanyana xihlamba-hi-ntswamba, xiyila-dyambu,
Nhompfu yi lo tsetsenene, wonge yo femba moya.
Mahlo ya kona i tindhulwana.*

*Xino'wana xa kona i xuva ra nereta,
Swindlebyana hi le'swa mangadyana,
Meno wa basa leswi
U ta ku yini hi nhloko ya kona?*

*Vona swimidyanyana swa kona,
Hayi le'swa madliridliri wonge 'nguluve.
U ri yini hi xisuti? – bodlhela ra khol'drinki.
Ha, xi vumbekile n'wana wa xihlangi.*

*Va vurisile va ku:"huma mhiri ku nghena mamba,"
Swi ndzi vutlerile vafana,
Va hahisile lava swi kotaka,
U tivonela kuwa ro tshwuka mfo.*

*A red fig
I can see it through the spiritual eye
Very pretty and scare of the sun,
A sharp pointed nose.
Eyes like marbles.*

*A very tiny mouth like a needle hole,
Her ears are that of a bat,
Her teeth as white as snow
What about her head?*

*Look at her portable body,
Not those flabby ones like pig,
What about the waist?-bottle of cold drink.
Oh, she has a body to die for.*

It is true when they say:” Go puff-adder, in comes the mamba”.

Boys grabbed her from me,

Those who can have moved with her,

Watch out for a red fig, my brother.

4.3.8.1 Theme of the poem

Like Magaisa (1983) in, *U nga tshembhi wansati* (Never trust a woman), Shilote in the poem, *Kuwa ro Tshwuka* (A red fig) issues a stern warning to men not to be deceived by a woman’s beauty as beautiful women always have bad characters.

4.3.8.2 Depiction of women in the poem

The title of the poem is a shortened form of a Xitsonga proverb about women’s wickedness. The proverb *kuwa ro tshwuka ri ni xivungu ndzeni* (a red fig does not lack worms inside), meaning that a beautiful woman has a wicked character. This proverb is analysed in depth in Chapter 5.

In the first three stanzas, the poet goes to extreme lengths to expressing the beauty of the woman. Similes are used such as: a waist like ‘cold drink bottle’, eyes like ‘marbles’, a tiny mouth like a ‘needle hole’, teeth as white as snow, little ears like those of a bat, and of course a body to die for.

The portableness of the woman’s body is illustrated in the first two verses of the third stanza:

*Vona swimidyanyana swa kona,
Hayi le’swa madliridliri wonge ‘nguluve*

Look at her portable body,
Not those flabby ones like a pig

The diminutive, *swimidyanyana* (very tiny body) conjures up the image of a fashion model, which is reinforced by the negative phrase, *Hayi le'swa madliridliri wonge 'nguluve* (Not those flabby ones like a pig). The poet prompts the reader to think of the opposite of a pig - a tiny, petite body.

Immediately after praising the woman's beauty in the first three stanzas, the poet in the fourth and last stanza reveals the evil character of this 'beautiful woman'.

*Va vurisile va ku:"huma mhiri ku nghena mamba"
Swi ndzi vutlerile vafana,
Va hahisile lava swi kotaka;
U tivonela kuwa ro tshwuka mfo.*

It is true when they say:"go out puff-adder, in comes the
mamba"
Boys grabbed her from me;
Those who can have moved with her,
Watch out for a red fig my brother.

The contrast confirms the stereotype 'the prettier the woman, the more wicked she is'. This idea is also found in the English expression:'A woman is like a road, the more curves she has, the more dangerous she is'.

The proverb, *Huma Mhiri ku nghena Mamba* (Go Puff-adder, in comes the Mamba) tells about a woman who leaves a good man for a bad one. In Xitsonga idiom, a Mamba symbolises a bad man as it is considered to be more dangerous than a Puff-ader which signifies a good man. The poet uses this proverb to depict the opportunistic character of a woman who leaves her husband for another man, only to find that the man is worse than the husband she has just left.

In the last verse of the poem, the poet repeats his warning:

U tivonela kuwa ro tshwuka mfo.

Watch out for a red fig young man.

4.3.9 Wansati

*Hikwalaho ka xivundza,
Adam a kombela ka Yehovha,
Wo dzumba no dyangata na yena,
Yehovha a yingisa xirilo xa Adam.*

*Adam a biwa hi vurhongo,
A vinjanisa ni mantonoro ri lo hosi!
Yehovha a konyomola rivambu,
Leswo a ta “khandza” wo hungasa na yena.*

*Swi nga leswi wansati a kulaka,
Ha! U nga ha n’wi khoma xikatla?
Phela no dzivula ku dzivuriwile.
Ko twala ntsena: “Lowu i Muti wa mina,”*

*Loko rirhandzu ra ha sungula,
Hinkwaswo i swinene.
Rirhandzu ra kona ro nkhulee!
Ni xiritwana xa kona!*

*Lembe a ri heli a hlomisiwile,
U nga ha n’wi tiva leswi hi ye wa xiritwana?
Xichavo ni mafundzha swa ha ri kona?*

Loko ri xile wo tshamela ku demeteriwa.

Maxaka ya nuna ya nga ha wu tsema?

Ivi nomo wu nga yimiseriwi henhla?

Swona mi nga dya byi rhelela?

Ha! U ta va ni xivindzi xo fika kwihi?

Hey'! hi ri wansati wa leva

Loko dyambu riku pee, masiku hinkwawo,

U fanele ku va la' kaya

“kasi hi swo a wu ndzi tekela swona?”

Vanghana va ha endzeriwa?

Loko va ku rhamba, vo hlamuriwa ntsena:

Ndzi nge swi koti ndzi “busy”,

A ku na “vubusy” bya la!

Loko lava ka vona vo endza,

Va phyandlasela mafurha,

Va dya ni leswa le mpfungwe,

Laha xikandzeni “vun’wayin’wayi” bya nsati.

Laha mutini a wa ha ri na rito,

Loko kona o hola mali yo tlula ya wena!

U ta cina rhuvurhuvu.

U to byeriwa leswaku a wu xaveleriwi.

Pho, masiku lawa ku nga ni switofu,

U ta sahisiwa tihunyi u ko u ku “dankie”,

“tata” Rhukanani, mi ta ndzi pfuna ku

Hlantswa swibye swo dyela

Loko mi hetile mi ta hi yela exitolo.”

*U nga ka u hlamula?
Wo tigingirikela u lo whi!
Loko va dinekile vo phamela byi ri hava xixevo
U byeriwa ku xeva hi marha.*

*Loko u nga si teka,
Wo twa: Mina wansati a nge ndzi endli
Leswi endliwaka va tata va Rhukanani
Ndzi nga dlaya hi mavoko.*

*E-ya! A hi nga mi vutisi?
U nga ha swi byela munhu
Hi to vona munhu a ondzile
Ku sele dyo'dyi gelevendze.*

*Swi tsandze tingwenya ta swibakela
Swi tsandze tihosi
Hi ri swi hlule na swigwili,
Hinkwavo va vuya la, ka wansati.*

*Swa antswa munhu a hambana na swona,
Swa antswa munhu a nga teki.
Kambe swi ta pfuna yini?
Ndzhwalo va ringetela makatleni.*

Woman

*Due to loneliness,
Adam pleaded with God,
For a companion,
God listened to Adam's plea.*

Adam fell into a trance
Snoring in daylight!
God extracted a rib,
To create a companion for him.
Indeed a woman matures,
Does she need support anymore?
Indeed the skin has peeled off.
All you will hear: "This is my home"

During the early stages of love,
Everything is well.
The love is so pleasant!
With a little voice!

After a year's anniversary of her marriage,
Would you recognise her as the one who used to have that soft voice?
Is she still respectful and courteous?
Rebuking becomes the order of the day.

Can the in-laws still visit?
With her angry facial expression?
Will there ever be peace?
Oh! How brave will you be?

Oh! The woman is rude indeed
Every day, before the sun sets
You must be at home
"Is this the reason you married me?"
Do you still visit friends?
When you get an invite, the response is always the same:
I won't make it, I'm "committed",

When in reality there is no “commitment”.

When her relatives visit,
They fry delicious food,
They eat even the food that was hidden at the rear of the hut,
The wife’s face will be cheerful.

You no longer have a say in your home,
If she earns more than what you earn!
You will be ill-treated.
She will even tell you that she can do without you!

Because stoves have since been invented,
You will be forced to chop firewood until you are “fatigued”!
“Rhukanani’s dad, you’ll help me with washing the dishes
When you are done, you will go buy me some items at the shop”

Will you object?
You will just silently comply and work very hard!
When she is upset, you get food with no relish,
You are told to eat saliva as savour.

When you were still a bachelor
You use to say:” I will never allow a woman
To treat me the way Rhukanani’s dad is treated.
I can strangle her to death.

Really! Can we ask now?
You will not confide to anyone,
We will just see a person loosing weight,
And the head becoming too huge.

A woman defeated boxing champions
She defeated kings
She defeated even the wealthiest people,
All the above will never compete with a woman.

It's better to forget about marriage,
It's better to be a bachelor.
But will it solve anything?
It is better to try than give up.

4.3.9.1 Theme of the poem

In the poem *Wansati* (Woman) Phephenyane warns men against the manipulative nature of women.

4.3.9.2 Depiction of women in the poem

In the first two stanzas, the poet tells about an ideal situation of a marriage union, where husband and wife are friends and lovers. He refers to the Bible story where God realised that Adam, the first man, was lonely and then created Eve from Adam's rib to be Adam's companion.

In the third stanza, the woman deviates from the purpose the poet suggests she was created for, namely, to be a companion to her husband. This is described in the second verse of the third stanza with the idiomatic expression, *U nga ha n'wi khoma xikatla?* (Will you still hold her shoulder?) *Ku khoma xikatla* (to hold one's shoulder), is a Xitsonga idiom meaning, 'to give support'. In other words, the behaviour of this woman to her husband is such that she demonstrates to him that she is self-sufficient and can do without him.

A metaphor, *Phela no dzivula ku dzivuriwile* (Indeed the skin has peeled off) is used in the third verse of the third stanza, to indicate that the woman has now settled down in the marriage. The word, *dzivula* (peeling off of the skin) suggests maturity - a snake, for example, goes through the process of skin-peeling or shedding as it matures. The woman who was created to be a man's companion turns out to be highly manipulative. She no longer lives harmoniously with her husband. Her controlling is shown in the last verse of the third stanza:

Ko twala ntsena: "Lowu i muti wa mina."

You only hear her boasting: "This is my home."

To emphasise the woman's instability, the poet employs contrast in the third and fourth stanzas. In the third stanza, the woman's behaviour changes for the worse and in the fourth stanza the poet then describes how well-behaved the woman was during the early stages of the marriage. In the third verse of the fourth stanza, the idiophonic expression, *Rirhandzu ra kona ro nkhulee!* (The love has a pleasant smell) suggests how peaceful and joyful the marriage was in the beginning. In the last verse of the fourth stanza, the poet uses a diminutive in the phrase, *Ni xiritwana xa kona!* (With her little voice), to indicate how respectful the woman used to be. She never raised her voice when speaking to her husband, which was a sign of humility and respect. Her sudden change of behaviour after a year of marriage portrays an image of a great pretender:

*Lembe a ri heli a hlomisiwile,
U nga ha n'wi tiva leswi hi ye wa xiritwana?
Xichavo ni mafundza swa ha ri kona?
Loko ri xile wo tshamela ku demeteriwa.*

After a year's anniversary of her marriage,
Will you remember her little voice?

Will respect and honour still be there?
Swearing becomes the order of the day.

The word *demeteriwa* (swearing) in the last verse above indicates a woman who has lost respect and is manipulative and a bully.

In the seventh stanza, the poet describes how the man has lost control of his life and how the woman has taken over. When the man is invited out by friends, he has to find excuses for not accepting the invitations for fear of his bully wife.

As outlined in Chapter 1, in Xitsonga culture, a man is the head of the family and his word is always final. In this poem, the opposite is true - the man has no say in his house, he is dictated to by his wife (first line of the ninth stanza):

Laha mutini a wa ha ri na nomo.

You no longer have a say in your home.

The woman's domination and the man's loss of control are further illustrated when the woman orders her husband to do the household chores. According to Xitsonga culture, all household chores should be done by the woman, hence the saying that a woman's place is in the kitchen. The woman's dictatorial attitude is described in the following stanza:

*Pho, masiku lawa ku nga ni switofu,
U ta sahisiwa tihunyi u ko u ku "dankie",
"tata' Rhukanani, mi ta ndzi pfuna ku
Hlantswa swibye swo dyela,
Loko mi hetile mi ta ndzi yela exitolo."*

Because stoves have since been invented,
You'll be told to chop firewood until you are "fatigued",

“Rhukanani’s dad, you will help me with washing the dishes, when you are done you will go buy me some items at the shops”.

To demonstrate the power of women, Phephenyani like Maphalakasi (1976) in *Nkata Xithicarana* describes how boastful young men are before they get married, swearing that they will never allow a woman to undermine them after marriage; but because of the power of women, they cannot fulfill their bold claims (twelfth stanza):

*Loko u nga si teka,
Wo twa: Mina wansati a nge ndzi endli
Leswi endliwaka va tata va Rhukanani
Ndzi nga dlaya hi mavoko.*

When still a bachelor
You’ll always hear one say: I will never allow a woman
To treat me like Rhukanani’s dad is treated
I can strangle her to death.

Phephenyane ends the poem by repeating, as did Maphalakasa (1976) in the poem *Vavasati* (Women), and Magaisa (1983) in the poem, *U nga tshembi wansati* (Never trust a woman), how powerful women are; they have defeated the mightiest men on earth including kings, tycoons and even boxing champions.

4.3.10 *Wansati Lonene*

*Xana wena u wansati lonene ke?
Swona wansati lonene i wansati wa njhani ke?
Ku laveka yini ku va wansati lonene ke?
Kasi u kona wansati loyi a nga riki nene ke?*

Xana u nga n'wi ahlula njhani wansati ke?

Swi vuriwile khale leswaku wansati la tlhariheke u aka muti,

Kambe wa mihoni wa wu hahlula,

Naswona wansati lonene i hari ya vubombi eka nuna wa yena.

Xana wena nuna wa wena wa karhi wa tidzunisa hi wena ke?

“yingisani vavanuna va n'wina ku kotisa loko mi yingisa Hosi,

Hikuva nuna i nhloko ya wansati.”

“Hikuva la kumaka nsati wa xiviri u kumile ku kateka

Naswona nsati wa ku anakanya i nyiko.

Kambe wansati wa xiyimo xo saseka la pfumalaka miehleketo,

U fanisiwa ni sindza ra nsuku enhompfini ya nguluve.”

A good woman

Are you a good woman?

What type of a woman is a good woman?

What is required to be a good wife?

Is there a woman who is not good?

How can you judge a woman?

It was said long time ago that a wise woman builds her family.

But a stupid wife breaks it,

And again a good wife is a crown of pride to her husband.

How about you, is your husband proud of you?

“listen to your husband like you listen to God,

Because a man is the head of a woman.”

Because he who finds a real wife is blessed
And a clever woman is a gift.
But a beautiful wife without brains,
Is like a gold wrist on a pig's nose.

4.3.10.1 Theme of the poem

Mashele's *Wansati lonene*, (A good woman) and all the subsequent poems are written by women. The poet encourages women to be good wives and lists the characteristics of a 'good' woman.

4.3.10.2 Depiction of women in the poem

The poet poses rhetorical questions in the first stanza to prompt the reader to do some soul-searching and encourage women to live righteously:

Xana wena u wansati lonene ke?
Swona wansati lonene i wansati wa njhani ke?
Ku laveka yini ku va wansati lonene ke?
Kasi u kona wansati loyi a nga riki nene ke?

Are you a good woman?
What type of a woman is a good woman?
What is required to be a good wife?
Is there a woman who is not good?

In the second stanza, the poet is specifically targeting married women. The tone of the poem is positive towards women in contrast to all the male-authored poems analysed above. The poet seems to support the idea that the crucial issue in the life of a married woman is to please her husband and that the woman's

needs are secondary. This preoccupation with pleasing the husband is shown in the last verse of the second stanza:

*Naswona wansati lonene i hari ya vubombi eka nuna
wa yena.*

And again, a good wife is a crown of pride to her husband.

The rhetorical question in the first verse of the third stanza underpins this notion: *Xana wena nuna wa wena wa karhi wa tidzunisa hi wena ke?* (how about you, is your husband proud of you?). Instructions are given in the following verses of the same stanza on what women should do to please their husbands: they should be obedient, but not only obedient, they should also respect them the way they respect God. The poet confirms the man's authority as head of the family. She states why respect, honour and reverence should be given to men by their wives. Although written in the singular it is evident that the poet is referring to men in general when she states that 'a man is like God'. This perception can be linked to the Radical feminists view that men as a group are beneficiaries of the systematic form of power and are accordingly the 'main enemy', Beasley (1999:55). The poet indicates this by writing *Hosi* (King) in the second verse of the third stanza with a capital 'H'. The comparison of a husband to God illustrates the level of respect and honour that should be accorded the husband. The position of the husband in the family is reinforced in the following idiomatic phrase:

Hikuva i nhloko ya wansati.

Because a man is the head of a woman.

Nhloko (Head) above is idiomatically used to refer to a *murhangeri* (leader). The depiction of women in the poem confirms the position of women in Xitsonga culture. When explaining aspects of Xitsonga culture, Rikhotso (1985:19) indicates the position of the man in a family:

*Hi yena nhloko ya muti. Ku hava lexi faneleke ku
endliwa handle ka yena. A nga tali ku kanetiwa eka
leswi a swi vulaka...*

He is the head of a family. Nothing is done without his knowledge and consent. He is hardly opposed...

4.3.11 *Dlakuta*

*Hi yaloye n'wamatshama-epatweni
Hi yaloye n'wamatshama a bombile
Hi yaloye n'wamahanya-hi-ku-kombela;
Xa yena i ku ri vona ri xa ri pela.*

*Lomu mabyaleni va tiva yena;
Etibarheni ku dumile yena;
Emadorobeni ku yiva be!
Etilonji vavanuna va karhele hi yena.*

*Laha a nga kona ko tshama ku lo mpoti!
Ku kombela hiloku!
Rintiho be!
Va karhele no gembetela.*

*Emaphoriseni ko va kaya,
A nga ha chavi ku ya tenga hi le kaya,*

*Swivati emirini i mavala-ya-yingwe;
U fe tshirita a nga ha ri munhu.
Ekaya hi laha a pfukaka kona,
Ntsena loko a kuma ku tumbeta nhloko;
A ta kota ku ya lomu byi vilaka kona,
Xa yena ku tshama a lo hliki!*

*Magoya ya lo tata muti,
A nga tshiki ku boxa milomu;
Vatswari hi vona va dyaka mbitsi,
A va ha khatali, va karhele hi swona.
A whore*

There she is, the one who is always on the road,
There she is, the one who is always dressed to kill,
There she is, the one who is always begging;
Hers is to watch the rising and the setting of the sun.

She is well-known at the shebeens;
She is well-known at the bars;
She steals whenever she is in town!
At the shebeens men are tired of her.

There is always lots of noise wherever she is!
Always begging!
A thief!
They are even tired of beating her up.

The police station is her home,
She is no longer afraid to go to court,
The scars on her body are Leopard's spots;

Her conscious is dead, she has lost her humanity.

Wherever she lays her head its her home,
As long as she finds a place to lay her head;
So that she can go wherever there is plenty of alcohol,
She is always drunk!

She has many illegitimate children,
She never stops swearing;
Her parents are the ones who suffer,
They no longer care, they are tired of her.

4.3.11.1 Theme of the poem

Dlakuta (A whore) and all the following poems were written by Mudau. In this poem, the poet condemns women as moral losers.

4.3.11.2 Depiction of women in the poem

The title *Dlakuta* (A whore) sets the tone for the poem. The poet uses compound nouns, n'wamatshama-epatweni (she who is always on the road); n'wamatshama a bombile (she who is always dressed to kill); n'wamahanya-hi-ku-kombela (she who is always begging) in the first three verses of the first stanza to indicate the extreme behaviour of the woman. The prefix *n'wa-* in this context is used to name the woman in accordance with the acts she commits thus; underlining the extremity of the woman's behaviour.

An idiomatic phrase, *Emaphoriseni ko va kaya* (The police station is her home) is used in the first verse of the fourth stanza, to indicate the frequency of the woman's visits to the police station. Home is where one spends a lot of one's time; and in this poem, the woman spends most of her time at the police station.

In the third verse of the fourth stanza, a metaphor, *Swivati emirini i mavala ya yingwe* (The scars on her body are Leopard's spots), is used to emphasise the numerous scars of the woman. The woman's bad behaviour and loose morality is described in the last verse of the fourth stanza:

U fe tshirita a nga ha ri munhu

Her conscious is dead, she has lost her humanity.

Ku fa tshirita (death of a conscious) is a Xitsonga idiom that means to have no feelings or conscious whatsoever'. Loosing one's humanity is the highest level of immorality.

4.3.12 *N'wambhurhi*

Ya hundza ntombhi ya ku vatlwa!
Hi luya, u nyarhula bya nhuntlwa,
Nkhaviso exikandzeni wo n'wi be!
U vumbekile n'wana wa mugaza.

Ku leha kona u lo twa!
Ku lala onge a nga dyi no dya,
K'amberiwa i ku tson'wa;
Kunene hi yo hlula-mani.

K'ambaleni kona a hi vuli,
Eminkondzweni ntanghu ya penisela yo n'wi kwatsa!
U yi hlurile hakunene!
Ku hleka ntsena, tino i ro basa paa!
Se wa bomba n'wana wa Muchangana.

*Entsungeni wa malwandle u vuya kona,
Eka pa kona a ha ha vuli,
Hambi vaveleki a va ku vonanga,
Va ta ya ku vona loko va ri ematilweni.*

*Bombani n'we timb hurhi ta rikwerhu;
Tinyungubyiseni i vumbhurhi byenu;
Tatana u mi tumbuluxile a mi rhandza,
Tirhandzeni hi ku hlawula mintirho leyinene.
Mi nga tionheli vun'wina byenu;
Tihlayiseleni vumundzuku byenu;
Masiku a ya tihlayanga,
Ya ku hanya kwerhu emisaveni.*

Pretty woman

There goes a skillfully crafted lady!
There she is walking steadily like a Giraffe;
Looking so good with her facial make-up
A beautiful child of Gaza.

She is very tall;
So slim like she does not eat,
To be told is to be denied a full description;
The competition is tight.

When it comes to dressing up, there is nothing more to say,
Her pencil heel shoe fits her so well!
She really has defeated it!
When she smiles you see her pure white tooth!
There goes a Shangaan girl.

She went as far as overseas,
She even went to Cape Town,
Even her parents never reached these places,
They will only see the places in heaven.

Dress up and be proud beautiful folks;
Take pride in your beauty;
Your father loved you from birth,
Take pride in choosing good works.

Do not spoil your humanity;
Take care of your future;
You do not know how long
You will live in this world of yours.

4.3.12.1 Theme of the poem

Mudau in the poem, *N'wambhurhi* (Pretty woman) seems to be encouraging women to improve their self-esteem and to be morally upright.

4.3.12.2 Depiction of women in the poem

The poet uses symbolism to illustrate the beauty of the woman in the first verse of the first stanza, *Ya hundza ntombhi yaku vatlwa* (There goes a skillfully crafted lady). In other words, the woman was created cautiously and meticulously. A simile is used to describe how she walks:

Hi luya, u nyarhula bya nhuntlwa

There she is, walking steadily like a Giraffe

The poet further emphasises the woman's beauty with an idiophonic phrase in the third verse of the first stanza:

Nkhaviso exikandzeni wo n'wi be!

Looking so good with her facial makeup

The ideophone, *be!* (fitting beautifully) suggests beauty beyond description. Tallness and slenderness in a woman are associated with beauty and fashion models; the poet therefore employs an ideophone, *twa!* (straight) to emphasise the woman's tallness; and an exaggeration phrase, *ku lala onge a nga dyi no dya* (so slim as if she does not eat) to illustrate the woman's slim and petite body.

The poet not only praises physical beauty but also encourages women to be beautiful, both externally and internally. She encourages women to uphold morality in order to build a better future for themselves:

*Mi nga tionheli vun'wina byenu;
Tihlayiseleni vumundzuku byenu.*

*Do not spoil your humanity;
Take care of your future.*

4.3.13 N'wananga

*Ndzi ehleketa minkarhi ya khale,
Loko ndzi ku veleka,
A ri ri lembe ra dyandza,
Dyambu a ri tshama ro tuwatuwa!
Ri hisa ni vusokoti.*

*Swona! Loko ndzi swi hleketa!
Mbilu ya mina yi pfempfa ngati,
Kambe namuntlha swi hundzile,
Ku lo sala ku hlambanyisa ntsena.
A ndzi nga pfumeli ndlala yi ndzi hlula.*

*A ndzi handza ndlala hi ku tirhela vanhu,
Rileke ra mugayu a ri ndzi lunghele;
Loko tata wa wena a khorwile exilungwini;
Laha a nga vuyisa sirha ntsena,
Ndzi tiyisela ndzi nga heli mbilu ku n'wi ongola.*

*Ndzi khensa loko u tihlangule vusiwana,
Hi mavoko lawa ya wena;
Lawa u nga ma pfumelelangiki ku mila byasi;
Hi ku vona ku hlupheka ka mina,
Namuntlha ndzi tinyungubyisa hi wena.*

*Ndzi khensa wena mativula yanga,
Vamakwenu va hluvuka hi wena,
Ndzi nga ka ndzi nga ku rivali,
Loko yi ri mikateko ndzi ku nyika yona;
Hinkwaswo a swi ku fambele kahle.
My child*

I remember the good old days,
When I gave birth to you,
It was the year of drought,
The sun was always extremely hot!
The heat even burnt the ants.

When I remember all that!
Blood trickles from my heart,
But today it is over,
It is only the memories that remain.
I never allowed hunger to defeat me.

I would fight hunger through working for others,
A bag of mealie-meal was enough for me;
When your father migrated to the city and never came back,
He returned a living corpse,
I persevered and nursed him.

I am delighted that you defeated poverty,
Through your own hands;
The hands which you never allowed grass to grow on;
Through watching my troubles,
Today I am proud of you.

Thank you my first-born child,
Your siblings are well-off because of you,
I will never forget you,
I give you all the blessings;
Let everything go well with you.

4.3.13.1 Theme of the poem

In the poem, *N'wananga* (My child), Mudau encourages single women whose husbands have left them to be hard working and self-sufficient.

4.3.13.2 Depiction of women in the poem

Mudau describes a strong and courageous woman whose husband left her for other women in the city. The woman managed to raise her son alone under difficult circumstances. She is depicted as a fighter and a survivor. The difficult circumstances of the woman are described in the following last three verses of the first stanza:

*A ri ri lembe ra dyandza,
Dyambu a ri tshama ro tuwatuwa!
Ri hisa ni vusokoti*

It was the year of drought,
The sun was always extremely hot!
The heat even burnt the ants

The word, *Dyandza* (drought) is used symbolically. The drought and the accompanying scarcity of food and water indicate the difficult circumstances of the woman. Her hardship is further emphasised by the idiophone, *tuwatuwa* (extremely hot). Her pain and suffering are underlined by the metaphor in the second verse of the second stanza, *Mbilu ya mina yi pfempfa ngati* (Blood trickles from my heart). The phrase, *pfempfa ngati* (trickle or ooze of blood) suggests a painful bleeding wound and highlights the suffering of the woman.

To survive the drought, the woman has to work tirelessly, as emphasised by the personification in the last verse of the second stanza:

A ndzi nga pfumeli ndlala yi ndzi hlula.

I never allowed hunger to defeat me.

The challenge the woman is faced with, namely, hunger, is personified to emphasise the woman's courage, determination and hardwork. The situation of the woman in this poem is reminiscent of the novel, *Nkatanga i dlakuta* (My wife is a whore) analysed in Chapter 3, where the man leaves his wife and family to stay with other women and returns home only when he is ill and has lost everything. In both cases, the wives welcome the men back as their husbands as expected of them by society (the third stanza):

*Loko tata wa wena a khorwile exilungwini;
Laha a nga vuyisa sirha ntsena,
Ndzi tiyisela ndzi nga heli mbilu ku n'wi ongola.*

When your father migrated to the city and never came
back;
He returned a living corpse,
I persevered and nursed him.

The image of a 'living corpse' indicates the extent of the man's illness and uselessness. As expected of a 'good' wife, the woman accepts the husband back and nurses him thus showing him compassion and kindness.

4.3.14 *Swi Dzudzekile i Mberha*

*Swi ndzi helerile!
A ndza ha voniwi ndzi fana na xivungu mbuya!
Hambi mbhongholo ya antswa ku nyenyiwa mhayi!
Ndzi pheriwa ngi a ndzi munhu mhayi!*

*Siku leri ndzi nga godza ha rona,
Nkarhi wo longa a wu nga ri kona,
Ndzi rivala ni vugwili bya vatswari*

Ndzi navela na misava yi ndzi mita.

*Swi ndzi tikela hambi ku tlakusa nenge,
Ngi a hi mina manyarhula bya nyarhi;
Mihloti yi hundzuka papa,
Ndzi nga voni lomu a ndzi ya kona.*

*Embilwini a ku ri ni xivutiso xin'we;
Xana Khwekela u lo ndzi tshika ke?
Kambe a ndza ha vutisa mani?
Hakunene a swi dzudzekile swa mberha.*

*Ndzi ehleketa siku ra nkhuvu wa hina;
Kambe a swi nga ko twi!
A ko twala minkulungwana ntsena;
Ndzi ala ndza ha tibyela u ta vuya.*

*Ndzi vonile hiloko ndzi ya enawini,
Laha ti nga helela kona;
Kwalaho a ndzi nga ha ri na nomo;
Vukati byi fisa xisweswo.
It fell off it is dew*

It is finished!
No one notices me anymore, I am just like a worm!
Even a donkey is better off!
They spit on me as if I am not human!
The day I left,
There was no time to pack,
I even forgot my parents' wealth
I wished the earth could swallow me.

I could not even lift my leg,
As if I'm not the one who normally walks bristly like a Buffalo;
My tears turned into a cloud,
I could not see where I was going.

I had only one question in my heart;
Has Khwekela divorced me?
Who was I asking?
Indeed the love had fallen off like dew.

I remembered our wedding day;
I could recall everything;
People were ululating all over the place;
I kept on telling myself, he will come back.
I realised when we went to court,
Where everything ended;
I could not say a word;
That was the end of my marriage.

4.3.14.1 Theme of the poem

In the poem, *Swi dzudzekile i mberha* (It fell off it is dew), the poet expounds on marriage as a social institution.

4.3.14.2 Depiction of women in the poem

The poet creates a similar image of a woman in, *Swi dzudzekile i mberha* (It fell off it is dew) to that in the previous poem, *N'wananga* (My child), namely, that of a woman who has been left by her husband. The only difference is that in *N'wananga* (My child) the man came back to the wife as a 'living corpse',

whereas in this poem, *Swi dzudzekile i mberha* (It fell off it is dew), the man divorces the woman.

The poet exposes the plight of divorced women, that is, the stigmatisation they have to endure in society. In the second verse of the first stanza, a simile is used comparing the woman to a worm. A worm suggests a useless creature an image that is carried forward in the final two verses of the first stanza:

Hambi mbhongholo ya antswa ku nyenyiwa mhayi!
Ndzi pheriwa ingi a ndzi munhu mhayi!

Even a donkey is better off!
They spit on me as if I am not human!

This exaggeration indicates the extent in which the woman is looked down upon by society, she is treated far worse than an animal.

The treatment she receives makes her wish that, *misava yi ndzi mita* (the earth swallows me). This metaphor emphasises the pain the woman has to endure; she would rather die than live with the humiliation. In Xitsonga culture, divorce is totally unacceptable, and to stress its unacceptability, a Xitsonga word has been coined for a woman divorcee, namely *xivuya* (she who returned). The poet being a woman points out the unfair treatment of divorcees.

4.4 Conclusion

The poems analysed in this chapter show that male poets are indeed biased in their depiction of women. Overall women are portrayed by male poets as unfaithful, gold-diggers, materialistic, control freaks, dependent, lazy, housewives, betrayers, bully, immoral and trouble-makers. This gender - stereotypical images are not in line with Western or African Feminisms. Radical

as well as African Feminists call for more positive images of women in literature. On the other hand, African Feminists argue that social and cultural discourses are not just sources of entertainment, but ideological tools, which reflect, justify and enhance certain beliefs and attitudes.

As is the case of the female characters found in the novels analysed in Chapter 3, the study of the poems in this chapter shows that the depiction of some female characters tend to transcend the traditional norms of subservience. The poets also disapprove of behaviour when it contravenes Xitsonga cultural norms; however, these female characters are used in the same way as in the novels to question patriarchy, which Social Feminists believe is rooted in the family as the key institution for perpetuating dominance over women.

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, there are only three female poets in Xitsonga. Some of their poems deal with the patriarchic marriage relationship in Xitsonga culture, where the woman has to sacrifice her feelings in order to please her husband. This can be contrasted with African feminists' view that any form of inequality in a marriage relationship is wrong although conceding that the family is a key institution for the well - being of society.

Mudau is the only female poet who depicts women differently to the way male poets and her female counterparts depict them. For her, women are courageous, survivors, independent and morally strong. Viewed from a feminist perspective, her woman can be embraced by both Liberal as well as Radical Feminists. However in one poem, she depicts a woman with loose morals, a very common depiction of women in male-authored poems.

CHAPTER 5

THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN PROVERBS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical analysis of the images of women in proverbs with the aim of determining whether any gender bias exists in the way women and their roles are portrayed in this literary genre. The study of proverbs help us understand how culture and gender roles are dynamic and not static. The selected 17 proverbs were sourced from *Vutlhari bya Vatsonga (Machangana) – Wisdom of the Vatsonga (Shangaans)* by Junod & Jaques (1970) and from *Tinhlanga ta mfuwo wa rixaka* (Reeds of the culture of a nation) by Malungana (2006). The selected proverbs are grouped under four themes: marriage and procreation; beauty; power and authority; and morality.

A proverb is a powerful vehicle for the transmission of the culture, mores, manners and ideas of a people from one generation to another (Boyce - Davies, 1994). This implies that in order to determine the view or attitude of a people to an object, event or phenomenon, one can study or look into their proverbs. Proverbs are closely linked to the society in which they are used. According to Gyekye (1975:47):

Proverbs must have risen out of people's experiences;
either from their customs and beliefs or from certain
events in their history.

Similarly, Shipley (1970:174) maintains that proverbs are rich with societal values and social cohesion, she adds that proverbs are community-based and seldom individualistic and that it is derived from shared experiences, interests and vision. In Xitsonga, proverbs are also used to propagate norms and values by

encouraging what is deemed acceptable in society and condemning what is not. The theoretical framework used here, namely, African feminist criticism is therefore appropriate for the contextual analysis of Xitsonga proverbs.

Many scholars have attempted to define a proverb; I will cite some of the definitions in order to elucidate what a proverb means in the context of this study. For example, Dalfovo in Saayman (1996:42) defines proverbs as sayings originating from experience, being expressed in a pithy, fixed and metaphorical language, and conveying a message.

As in poetry, the language used in proverbs is also metaphorical. After studying 55 popular definitions of a proverb, Wolfgang (1989:39), an international proverbs scholar came up with what he referred to as a uniting statement expressing the various ideas located in the different definitions of a proverb:

A short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation.

As I agree that there is no universally accepted definition of a proverb, I will refrain from attempting to provide a single encompassing definition, but rather endeavour to identify three key characteristics of a proverb from the definitions cited above, namely, its concise, fixed artistic form; its conservative function in society; and its authoritative validity. With regard to the function of proverbs, Monyai (2003:66) says:

The role of proverbs is essentially to propagate those values and principles that are educationally important in governing human behaviour for the benefit of society.

Among the *Vatsonga*, proverbs are integral part of the general discourse. Because of their high rhetorical significance, speakers use them to add beauty and strength to their arguments. Endowed with authority, proverbs have helped moulding people's roles and identities. The danger of the authoritative and prescriptive nature of proverbs is men and women who do not fit the prescribed behaviour are stigmatised, (Schipper, 2003). For example, the Xitsonga proverb, *O va wanuna sweswi a ngo ambala maburuku* (he is only a man because he wears trousers) ridicules men who do not live up to what is expected as a man's role by society. All the warnings for men, alongside the prescriptions and rules for women instill fear of moving away from the status quo. Mathumba (1988:113) states that the role of Xitsonga proverbs is to teach, warn, advise, comment on or ridicule someone's conduct, and to help settle disputes. The role of proverbs is expanded by Sawadogo in Saayman (1996:116):

Proverbs represent universal truth; they are never debated or modified because they represent traditions. Proverbs are used to settle disputes, educate children and generally express the worldview of a given culture because they contain universal truths that are not disputed but are part of common knowledge.

Regarding authoritative validity, Xitsonga, proverbs have been passed on from generation to generation and are referred to as the established wisdom. The first collection of Xitsonga proverbs by Junod (1970) is entitled *Vutlhari bya Vatsonga Machangana* (The wisdom of the Vatsonga Machangana people). Because proverbs are regarded as the established wisdom or wise sayings, they are rarely disputed which gives them authority in the *Vatsonga* community.

Hussein (2005:61) maintains that this view exists generally in Africa:

In Africa, the proverb is regarded as a noble genre of African oral tradition that enjoys the prestige of a people's wisdom and philosophy of life.

Mathumba (1988) made an intensive study of Xitsonga proverbs in an attempt to understand the way of life and thinking of the *Vatsonga* people. That is why it is also critical to examine the image of women in Xitsonga proverbs.

The impact of established wisdom in Xitsonga proverbs is heightened by references such as: *va vurisile vakhale loko va ku* (our ancestors rightfully or correctly pointed out that). In other words, if the authority has said so, who are we to question such a sound pronouncement. By referring to the established wisdom's unquestionable validity, the speakers also command respect and authority for themselves. A proverb's authority has the effect of preventing the questioning of certain role patterns.

Papini, cited in Kaschula (1993:44) says that in Xitsonga, a proverb is called *xivuriso*. The infinitive is, *ku vurisa*, which literally translated means (to say well or wisely, to say completely), in other words, *ku vurisa* in relation to proverbs means (to express truth fully and well). *Xivuriso* (proverb) is the noun derived from the verbal radical –*vuris*–, therefore we can interpret *xivuriso* as (a statement full of truth and wisdom). However, truth and wisdom are not synonymous, accordingly, whether Xitsonga proverbs truthfully depict images of women and their roles in society remains to be proven.

The meaning of proverbs is also key in analysing the portrayal of women in proverbs. A proverb is characterised by its artistic form and language use plays a key role in this regard. According to Finnegan (1970:390):

In many African cultures a feeling for language, for imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly clearly in proverbs.

The above is true in the case of Xitsonga proverbs. Allusive and covert phraseology is used in the proverbs for various reasons and according to Mathumba (1988) 'sometimes it is to prevent youngsters from understanding the conversation of their elders and at times it is to soften the impact of the idea to be expressed'. For example, when someone is about to announce death to the bereaved, they may say:" *Rifu a ri na siku* – Death has no appointed day", meaning that death is everywhere and it may come at any time. This may be said to console the bereaved.

Hussein (2005) contends that as we cannot separate a dance from its dancer, we cannot separate what we say about something from our attitude towards that thing. Similarly, what a society says through proverbs about women and men is the society's view of women and men. To emphasise this, Hahn (1998:149) states:

What we call something summarises our attitude towards it.

5.2 Analysis of selected proverbs

As indicated in the introduction, the selected proverbs are divided into four themes, namely, marriage and procreation; beauty and sexuality; power and authority; and morality.

5.2.1 Proverbs related to marriage and procreation

In Xitsonga culture, women are expected by parents and in-laws to bear a child as soon as possible after marriage. Procreation is part and parcel of marriage. The woman does not have control over the number of children she has as it may sometimes depend on son preference (2008:116). Procreation is so crucial that if a woman appears to be barren, the husband is justified in marrying a second wife who will be able to bear him children.

(a) *Wansati a nga na fusi*

Translation: A woman cannot be left like an untilled land.

Meaning: no woman should be left without a man to care for her.

The word *fusi* means a 'fallow field' and a woman in this proverb is likened to a fallow field. It is acknowledged that there are more women than men, and therefore, even if it means marrying more than one woman, men should ensure that every woman is married and taken care of.

(b) *Tshuri handle ka musu a ri na ntirho.*

Translation: The mealie-mortar is useless without the pestle.

Meaning: A woman without a husband is useless.

The above proverb contains symbolism in that the *Vatsonga* use a mortar and a pestle to grind mealies to make maize meal for porridge. Porridge is *Vatsonga's* staple food. In other words, without a pestle, the process of producing maize-meal cannot be completed. The proverb therefore suggests that a single woman is useless as she cannot bear children alone and she also cannot live on her own without a husband who will take care of her. This proverb can be understood clearly against the background of *Vatsonga* customary law (Ramsay 1941), which states that while unmarried, a woman is a minor under the guardianship of

her father, and when married, she is a minor under the guardianship of her husband. The proverb is also used to criticise women who prefer to stay single.

(c) *Wansati i ku veleka*

Translation: A woman is to give birth.

Meaning: For a woman to be respected in a family she should beget children.

Procreation is the key objective of marriage in *Vatsonga* culture. This proverb is used to criticise barren women and women who choose not to have children.

(d) *Mhangela loko yi nga ri na vana, i mavala ntsena.*

Translation: If a guinea-fowl has no chickens, it is nothing but colours only.

Meaning: A beautiful woman without children is useless.

The proverb contains symbolism in that the physical characteristics of an animal, namely, guinea fowl are likened to a beautiful woman. As in the previous proverb (c), women without children are considered worthless. The proverbs (c) and (d) are closely related to the following proverb which also stresses the importance of childbearing in marriage.

(e) *Xuma a xi fi ku fa munhu.*

Translation: Bride-price does not die; it is the person who dies.

Meaning: If a woman dies before bearing children, her parents are obliged to give their son-in-law a substitute wife who will bear children for him.

According to *Vatsonga* custom, if a woman dies before bearing children, the parents of the widower have the right to negotiate for a return of the bride - price because the woman died before fulfilling her key responsibility in the marriage, namely, bearing children (1941:9). If the man dies first, the widow is given to the husband's younger brother.

The widow is also expected to bear children with her new husband to perpetuate the clan name, according to Ramsay (1941:9):

If the wife dies early in the marriage, and before the normal time has arrived for her to bear a child, her father must, if requested by the bereaved husband, provide a substitute wife. If unable or unwilling to do so, he must return the dowry received for the deceased wife.

The issue of inheritance is very important among the *Vatsonga*. Because girls are married off and end up in another household (in-laws) where they spend the rest of their lives; they therefore cannot inherit wealth from their fathers. A *Mutsonga's* wealth should be enjoyed by family members. If no male heir is born to his family, the *Mutsonga* man becomes very concerned and may marry a second or third wife who will bear him a heir. The following proverb illustrates this:

(f) *Munhu wa tshala a nga dyeri hi timbyana.*

Translation: A person who has built a granary does not watch his food eaten up by dogs.

Meaning: If you have a son, everything that you possess will be properly cared for and utilised after your death because there is someone who will inherit your property.

The above proverb is in line with the *Vatsonga* law of inheritance. Culturally, the woman and her children belong to the husband, and, even if her husband dies prematurely, she is expected to remarry within the family because she constitutes a portion of her husband's landed property as she and her husband's land are owned by the family.

(g) *Ku tswala wansati i ku tswala wanuna.*

Translation: To beget a woman is to beget a man.

Meaning: Do not grumble if you beget a woman, she will give birth to a man – or, to beget a woman means that when she is taken in marriage, her husband becomes your son.

A woman's role as a wife includes childbearing, but she must ensure that in fulfilling this role, she also gives birth to a male child. Among the *Vatsonga*, a boy child is preferred to a girl child for various reasons, the key reason being that boys are capable of perpetuating the clan name (*ku kurisa xivongo*). With girl children, the clan name dies out because they will get married, and the woman's children will belong to her husband's clan. The proverb (g) is used to console a woman who only has girl children. It implies that there is a possibility that the woman's girl child may beget a boy child and that boy child may also be regarded as the woman's child. A son-in-law is also a blessing to a woman who could not bear a son of her own.

(h) *U nga voni vunkhinsa-nkhinsa leswi i mano yo hlomisa.*

Translation: do not be impressed by the activity of the girl. These are good manners only for getting married.

Meaning: A person may think that a girl is suitable noticing her good manners and how active she is. But this is a mere pretence in order to find a husband.

According to *Vatsonga* custom, marriage is crucial for women. Those who do not conform to the social expectation become the objects of gossip as it is believed there is something wrong with them. A single woman is seen to have 'failed' to marry. This proverb indicates that women will do anything to get married even if it means being deceitful. The advice is given to men that they should not be deceived by a woman's good manners as they could merely reflect her desperation to get married.

(i) *Wanuna a nga famberiwi.*

Translation: A man is not gone about for (not looked for by a woman).

Meaning: It is not right for a woman to go about in search for a man. It is a man who must go in search of a wife.

It is taboo for a woman to propose love to a man according to Xitsonga custom. Women who visibly express their feelings in this way are regarded as prostitutes and immoral. This is illustrated in an extract from Chauke's (1965) novel, *Nkatanga i dlakuta* which was analysed in Chapter 3; where one of the male characters is portrayed as a fool:

*Na yena wanuna wa kona o va dodombedzi. Loko a
nga ri ntlunya u ri a a to pfumela ku vulavurisiwa hi
wansati?*

This man is really a fool. If he wasn't stupid do you think
he would allow a woman to propose him?

However, it is important to note that in modern times, this notion is changing; women do express their feelings in matters concerning love.

(j) *Vukati i mbilu*

Translation: Wedlock is the heart.

Meaning: there are many problems in marriage which can be overcome through patience and forbearance.

Divorce is unacceptable in *Xitsonga* and has very strict conditions if it must occur. Because it is a woman who is stigmatised, there is no word for a male divorcee. Only a woman divorcee has a name; ridiculously referred to as 'xivuya' (she who has returned). As observed above in the proverb (e), when a woman marries, she leaves her family to become part of her husband's family. Even if

the husband dies, she does not go back to her family but is transferred as a wife to her deceased husband's younger brother. The stigma attached to divorce is the reason why before marriage, a group of elderly women conduct what is called *ku laya* (to guide or to counsel); where they give rules of marriage to a bride-to-be. The woman is warned against divorce, told about the difficulties of marriage and encouraged to stay with the husband at all costs. This proverb is in line with Gaidzanwa's (1985:31) description of an ideal Zimbabwean wife:

The women who are idealized may be those women who are obedient to their husbands even if the husbands are wrong and unreasonable. They are women who do not complain when they are badly treated.

5.2.2 Proverbs related to women's beauty

These proverbs use symbolism to depict women's physical beauty where women are likened to irresistible fruits such as, *kuwa* (fig) and *ndzhulwana* (Natal cherry) or to beautiful animals.

(a) *Kuwa ro tshwuka ri ni xivungu ndzeni.*

Translation: A red fig does not lack worms inside.

Meaning: A beautiful girl is often lazy, or she is addicted to robbing, or ill-tempered or wicked.

A similar proverb in *isiZulu* reads: *Ikhiwane elihle ligcwala izimphethu* (A beautiful fig is infested with worms). This proverb is a warning to men that they should not be deceived by a woman's outward appearance implying that beautiful women make men's lives miserable. There is also a comparable expression in English: "All that glitters is not gold".

(b) *U nga voni ndzhulwana ku vangama, endzeni ka yona ka bava.*

Translation: Do not be deceived by the shiny appearance of the Natal cherry, it is very bitter inside.

Meaning: A woman may be very beautiful indeed, but may have a very bad character.

It is evident from the proverbs (a) and (b) that beauty in women has negative connotations, and that men should not be seduced by it.

(b) *Homu ya ntlhohe a yi na ntswamba.*

(c) Translation: A white cow has no milk.

(d) Meaning: A beautiful woman is usually lazy.

In the *Vatsonga* culture, as in many African cultures, a woman who works hard is greatly respected. Laziness is a grave 'deficiency' in a woman. This female stereotype is also seen in proverbs (a) and (b).

5.2.3 Proverbs related to power and authority

In *Vatsonga* society, traditionally, men are regarded as leaders in the family and in societal affairs, however, this is slowly changing in modern societies as observed in Chapter 1 with the N'wamitwa chieftancy case. As will be seen in the following proverbs, Xitsonga proverbs illustrate the traditional manner in which society expects men and women to behave in relation to power and authority, even though in reality, things have changed.

(a) *Vavasati a va na huvo*

Translation: Women have no tribal court.

Meaning: A woman's word is of no value, especially in the tribal court. In court cases it will not have the same weight as a man's word.

This proverb is closely linked to the traditional role of a man in a family. Women occupy an inferior position in terms of decision-making in a family and in public affairs. For example, there are no female counsellors in the Xitsonga tribal court.

(b) *Loko homu ya ntswele yi rhangela emahlweni, ti ta wela xidziveni.*

Translation: If a heifer leads the herd, all the cattle will be drawn into a well.

Meaning: When a woman is given the lead, the life in the village or in the family deteriorates.

A woman is likened to a heifer, to symbolise her immaturity. Proverbs (a) and (b) reinforce the stereotype of the inability of women to lead or rule. One of the key responsibilities of a leader is decision-making, and the implication is that because a word of the woman has no weight, she can never assume a leadership position. She is considered naturally incapable of leading.

5.2.4 Proverbs relating to morality

As observed in Chapter 4 where the image of women in novels was analysed, women are generally portrayed as morally loose and as causes of man's downfall and evil behaviour. The proverbs confirm this stereotype.

Women are generally regarded as the same - because of their gender, they automatically lose their individuality and uniqueness:

(a) *Mavala ya xibodze i mavala man'we.*

Translation: the spots of a tortoise are all the same.

Meaning: All women are the same.

This proverb confirms the stereotype that all women are stupid or immoral. The symbolism involves likening a woman to *xibodze* (tortoise), an animal that is known for its slow, lumbering movement. If a woman commits a mistake, it is

usually used as an affirmation that it was actually expected as she cannot be different from any other woman. I will further illustrate the use of this proverb by citing an extract from Mashele's (1986) novel, *Ximitantsengele* analysed in Chapter 4, where two male characters confide in each other about their painful experiences in their marriages:

Mina na mina swi ndzi humelerile Makhuvele. Mavala ya xibodze i mavala yan'we Makhuvele. Vavasati!...vavasati i swigevenga Makhuvele.

I have also experienced that Makhuvele. The Spots of the tortoise are all the same Makhuvele. Women! Women are criminals Makhuvele.

(b) *Ku teka i ku hoxa nyoka exikhwameni*

Translation: To get married is to put a snake into one's pocket.

Meaning: The woman that you marry is bound to cause you a lot of trouble.

In this proverb, a woman is compared to a snake. A snake is poisonous and causes excruciating pain when it bites, and, similarly in this proverb, a woman is depicted as a trouble-maker and very dangerous. The proverb contains a warning and advice to men on what they should expect in marriage. Women are portrayed as the source of all trouble.

(c) *Wansati u fana ni xigalana emirini.*

Translation: A wife is like a tick on one's body

Meaning: A woman brings trouble in marriage

The two proverbs (b) and (c) confirm the anguish that women allegedly cause men. Just like the snake, a tick causes pain to its prey. It bites into its prey, sucks and feeds on its blood, gorging itself until it becomes, fat and happy at its prey's

expense. In the same way, a woman is considered to bring suffering to a man's life. This proverb portrays men as victims in the marriage institution.

5.3 Conclusion

The study of proverbs in this chapter has revealed images of women that assert the African Feminist theory. This may be attributed to the fact that Xitsonga proverbs reflect the philosophy of life of the *Vatsonga* people. Unlike in the study of novels and poetry in Chapters 3 and 4, where Western as well as African Feminist theories manifested in the manner in which women were depicted, the study of proverbs in this chapter revealed the manifestation of solely the African Feminist theory as Xitsonga proverbs reflect the customs and beliefs of the *Vatsonga* community. Marriage, polygamy and procreation are important themes in Xitsonga proverbs as observed in the analyses of proverbs above. In the same breath, motherhood is never questioned as in Western Feminism but instead defended by African Feminists. Similarly, the family is central in African Feminism as it opposes separatism of men and women which is advocated by Radical Feminists. Furthermore, polygamy is acceptable in African Feminism as it is said to enable a division of labour that eases women's daily life.

Some of the characteristics of a proverb as outlined in the introduction are its authoritative validity, its expression of established wisdom and its allusive and covert phraseology. Xitsonga proverbs, as observed, do not always reflect wisdom as some convey false images and representations of women. The proverbs analysed here disclose the stereotypes of women that are widespread in the *Vatsonga* community, namely, jealousy, stupidity, unfaithfulness and witchcraft.

In terms of women's role as decision-makers, numerous women are today occupying positions of authority and leadership roles both in the public and private sectors following their access to education and to employment after the

advent of democracy in South Africa. *Vatsonga* women have evolved to the extent that there are now female economists, professors, lawyers, doctors, ministers, politicianscontrary to the image of women depicted in the sampled proverbs. The proverbs cited in this study therefore do not represent the complexity of women's reality today.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter answers the research questions posed in the beginning of the study, namely, is it a fact that male *Vatsonga* authors are biased in the depiction of female characters and that it is only women writers who present an objective treatment of womanhood and the problems of women in their texts? Does the depiction of women by *Vatsonga* authors change to reflect the new social and political dispensation with its dynamics and finally, a proposal for further research is given.

6.2 Research findings

The analysis of the image of women in Xitsonga novels, poetry and proverbs in the preceding chapters has presented an overview of how *Vatsonga* society views women and their roles. These analyses confirm that male authors are biased in their depiction of female characters.

It is evident that gender played a crucial role in the depiction of characters in the novels, poetry and proverbs analysed in the study. In the Xitsonga tradition, gender differentiation begins at the birth of a child. If a male child is born, the announcement made to the husband is (you have begotten a spear) *wa matlhari*. If it is a female child, the announcer states, (you have begotten a grain basket) *wa xirhundzu*. The spear symbolises war, in other words, you have somebody who will fight and protect you, whereas the grain basket symbolises tilling the field to harvest, which illustrates the expected industriousness of a woman. The boy is associated with male masculine activities of hunting, protecting the community and on the other hand, the girl's birth is defined in terms of feminine

domestic activities such as pounding, tilling the field and drawing water from the well.

The value assigned to a boy child as seen in the proverbs analysed gives rise to the stereotypical view of women in society regarding their social roles, their biological roles and consequently, how they are portrayed in literature.

The analysis of the selected novels in this study revealed that some of the female characters defied the Xitsonga cultural norms of marriage and how a single woman should behave, thereby asserting the Liberal Feminist perspective that culture imprisons women and that women's individual interests takes precedence over the general societal interests.

The analyses also revealed biasness in the manner in which female characters were depicted. A reflection of women stereotypes was observed where women characters were depicted as gold-diggers, untrustworthy, greedy, bully, prostitutes, submissive, dependant and betrayers in the selected novels by male as well as female authors. With regard to the female novelists, there are also some positive traits that go into their depiction of women characters. In other words, in the female-authored novels, we observe both negative and positive depiction of women characters.

In poetry, a similar trend was observed with male poets where women characters were depicted in a biased manner that confirms and promotes the patriarchal nature of the Xitsonga society. Contrary to the call by Western as well as African Feminists for more positive images of women in literature, the poems analysed depicted stereotypical images of women. It is unfortunate that even the very few female poets could not fully advance the positive characterisation of women in their poems. As revealed, there are some female-authored poems that depicted women in a negative and stereotypic manner. The poems analysed revealed the

value of the family in the Xitsonga culture, thereby, asserting the African Feminists' belief in the importance of the family for society's well-being.

One of the characteristics of a proverb as outlined in the introductory part of Chapter 5 is its authoritative validity and its expression of established wisdom. Xitsonga proverbs as observed do not always reflect wisdom. Some of these proverbs express false images and representations of women. The sampled proverbs unveil the stereotypes against women which are widespread among the *Vatsonga* community; these stereotypes relate to how marriage is viewed by the community and the role of a woman in marriage; woman's beauty; and power-relations between men and women.

Xitsonga proverbs are a reflection of the Xitsonga customs indicated above. In other words, what the proverbs say about women is the society's view and expectation of them. The marriage expectation on a woman came out very clearly in the proverbs analysed. Endurance and perseverance by a woman in marriage is similarly reflected in the sampled proverbs.

Another characteristic of a proverb as outlined above is its expression of established wisdom. As explained in the previous page, the sampled proverbs unveil the stereotypes against women which are widespread among the *Vatsonga* community.

In terms of women's role as decision-makers; given their access to education and to employment after democracy, a considerable number of women are occupying positions of authority and leadership roles both in public and private sectors. The proverbs cited in this study do not represent women's reality today. The reality of women today is more complex. *Vatsonga* women today have evolved considerably, for there are women economists, professors, lawyers, doctors, ministers and politicians, some of the sampled proverbs reflected the

African Feminist belief of the importance of family and motherhood as well as the acceptance of polygamy.

The answer to the question on whether the portrayal of women in Xitsonga literature reflects the changing political reality is obvious. According to the literature analysed in this study, women are portrayed in a biased manner that do not reflect the current political and social reality. The images depicted in the sampled literature contribute towards the perpetuation of stereotypes that characterise women as housewives, dependant, murderers, weak-minded, not capable of taking decisions etc. which is in contrast with the social reality of these women.

Women's images as portrayed in this study are problematic in the sense that there is lack of realisation that society has evolved over time and that there are a lot of influential women. Women in general and *Vatsonga* women in particular have grown to transcend the traditional norms of submissiveness and total dependence. There are a lot of very influential women in society, career and professional women and women who occupy even the traditionally male-dominated professions. The reality is women no longer belong to the kitchen. It is for this reason that the partial portrayal of women in literature should be exposed, so that young men and women should not grow up thinking that there is only one type of women.

The analysis of the sampled literature in this study was a worthwhile and crucial exercise as it helped us understand how culture and gender roles are dynamic and not static.

6.3 Further research

As indicated in the beginning of the study that affirming the status of women is a multi-disciplinary approach. This approach includes critically looking at the

manner in which women are portrayed in all literatures, as well as encouraging women to contribute positively in the literary output through looking at themselves positively. It is time that women stop watching when things are written for them about them, instead they should make effort to recreate their images in literature.

This study managed to expose the scanty literary output of women in Xitsonga literature. Women should take it upon themselves to re-define the images depicted in this study into those that they deem to be more realistic and constructive.

Despite the contributions that this study has made into the feminist critical reading of Xitsonga literature, it could not cover all the Xitsonga literary genres. Of interest will be further studies on the depiction of women in drama and other folklore genres.

As mentioned in the limitations of the study in chapter two, this study could not compare the portrayal of women by South African authors with that of the authors outside the borders of South Africa where Xitsonga is spoken. Of interest will be further studies on the depiction of women in literature by *Vatsonga* authors outside South Africa.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

A Mutsonga woman in Xitsonga traditional gear.

Appendix 2 (a) and (b)

Valoyi Chieftaincy case

Appendix 3

An example of an apartheid era driver's licence

Appendix 1: A *Mutsonga* woman in *Xitsonga* traditional gear



Appendix 2 (a): Valoyi Chieftaincy case

argument over legal fees delays chieftainship case

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Argument over legal fees delays chieftainship case

*An ANC MP's bid to become the woman chief of the Valoyi community suffered a setback after her lawyer argued unsuccessfully that he was outgunned, writes **RUSSEL MOLEFE***

[Print article](#)
[Email story](#)

TINYIKO Nwamitwa-Shilubana left the Constitutional Court a disappointed woman this week.

Accompanied by scores of women in traditional Tsonga regalia, Nwamitwa-Shilubana came to the court in a final bid to reclaim the chieftainship of the Valoyi community in Limpopo. Nwamitwa-Shilubana (65), an ANC MP, feels her right to the chieftainship was being wrested from her by her cousin, Sidwell Nwamitwa, because of her gender.

But also disappointed was the full bench of the the court, led by Chief Justice Pius Langa, when Nwamitwa's counsel, Lucky Bokaba, unexpectedly launched an application for the postponement of the case.

The case dates back to 2002 when Nwamitwa-Shilubana was appointed hosi of the Valoyi community after the death of her uncle, Hosi Richard Nwamitwa. But, her cousin, Sidwell Nwamitwa, the eldest son of Hosi Richard, mounted a Pretoria High Court challenge that her appointment was "not in accordance with the practices and customs" of the Valoyi.

The Pretoria High Court and the SCA have since agreed with Nwamitwa. That is why Nwamitwa-Shilubana has approached the Constitutional Court. She will argue that Valoyi practices and customs in appointing a hosi are now inconsistent with the Constitution.

For five generations, the chieftainship of the Valoyi was patrilineal and according to primogeniture.

This will be the second case in which the court will rule on the clash between customary law and the Constitution when it comes to gender rights.

In 2004, the court delivered a landmark judgment in relation to the inheritance of property.

Nontupheko Bhe approached the Constitutional Court after a magistrate in Cape Town ruled that her deceased husband's father should inherit his property in accordance with customary law.

But in a judgment penned by Langa, the Constitutional Court declared the customary law in relation to inheritance of property to be discriminatory and unconstitutional.

Wednesday June 11 2008 SOWETAN

3



READY: The constitutional court ruled that Lwandlamuni Felia Shiluvhana is the rightful leader of the Valoyi tribe near Tzaneen and she is not letting opposition stop her. PHOTO: ELIJAR MUSHIANA

WOMAN CHIEF DENTS EGOS

Alex Matlala

The constitutional court ruled in favour of women chiefs – but a group calling themselves “the disgruntled” couldn’t care less.

“It is against our tradition to have a female chief,” spokesman for the group Ishmael Risivi told *Sowetan*.

“We don’t care about her victory from the highest court of the land.”

Risivi was referring to the constitutional court ruling that women may be chiefs after Lwandlamuni Felia Shiluvhana challenged the installation of her male cousin.

“We believe he who would be chief should be installed according to the tradition and

customs of the Valoyi tribe and not through a piece of paper,” Risivi said.

The chieftaincy wrangle has been raging since 2001 and came to a head on Sunday when residents from the 38 villages of the Nwamitawa clan welcomed Felia as the new chief of the Valoyi tribe.

Two head of cattle were slaughtered but the celebrations didn’t stop a group led by Felia’s cousin, Sydwel N’wamtwa, from enjoying their own party 200 metres from the royal council.

When things started to get out of hand the police were called but even their presence did not deter the proceedings.

“We were playing our own

music and trying to chart our way forward for our own inauguration later this year,” Risivi said yesterday.

He said “the disgruntled” were against the court’s ruling declaring Felia a chief.

“She is married to the Shiluvhana family,” he said.

“How will she be able to discharge her marriage and leadership responsibilities at the same time?”

But Felia, an ANC bigwig and MP, said at her rural house that no amount of power and groupings would prevent her from leading her community.

“We are continuing with the inauguration in August without fear from individuals whose aim is known only to them,” she said.

Appendix 3: An example of an apartheid era driver's licence

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PAGE 01/01

CAPE PROVINCE—KAAPROVINSIE Revenue/Inkomste 844

(Road Traffic Ordinance No. 19 of 1955) B No 34100
(Ordonnansie op Padverkeer no. 19 van 1955)

DRIVER'S LICENCE/PERMIT BESTUURDERSLISENSIE/PERMIT

CLASS OF VEHICLE Motorcycle under 50 cc. GLAS VOERTUIG

DISTRICT(S) IN WHICH VALID (In case of time-licence)

DISTRICT(S) WAARIN GELDIG (In geval van plaaslike)

SURNAME Machaba FAMILIESHAAN

CHRISTIAN NAME VOORNAME

ADDRESS Harvey, Harburg ADRES

AMOUNT PAID BEDRAG BETAL 50 RAND Seventy Five CENT

(If free delete and state "Free" — Indien kosteloos laat daar en meld "Kosteloos")

CERTIFICATE OF COMPETENCE — BEVOEGDHEIDSCERTIFKAAT

NO. 5355 DATE DATUM 30-8-66

IF FREE LICENCE — INDIEN KOSTELOSE LISENSIE:

LICENCE SURVIVED NO. DATE DATUM

LISENSIE OORHANDIG PLACE OF ISSUE PLEK VAN UITREIKING

IF DUPLICATE OF LICENCE/PERMIT: INDIEN DUPLIKAAT VAN LISENSIE/PERMIT:

ORIGINAL NO. DATE DATUM

GOEPERONKLIKE

G. Machaba

SIGNATURE (OR RIGHT THUMB IMPRESSION) OF DRIVER
HANTEERING (OF RECHTERDUIMAFDruk) VAN BESTUURDER

This licence/permit is hereby granted to the above-named who photograph and signature (or right thumb impression) upon thereon, to drive a motor vehicle of the class described above.

Hierdie lisensie/permit word aan bogenoemde wie se foto en handtekening (of regterduimafdruk) hierbo verskyn toegestaan om 'n motorvoertuig van bogenoemde klas te bestuur.

ISSUER OF LICENCES/UITREIKER VAN LISENSIES

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