Beyond Feminism: Women Characters Operating as Subliminal Agents of Patriarchal Culture in Various isiXhosa literary texts

By

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Declaration

I, Rendani Molubo, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work. All the sources cited and referenced have been properly acknowledged. I attest that this work has not been submitted previously at any higher education institution for degree purposes. It is being submitted for a Doctor of Literature and Philosophy Degree at Rhodes University, in South Africa.

…… ……..

Rendani Molubo Date

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First and foremost, I would like to thank God for awarding me the opportunity and strength to fulfil the requirements of this degree. It has been quite a complex journey, and without God's reassurance and constant presence throughout my studying journey, I would not have been able to reach these heights.

To my ancestors that continuously guide and protect me, *Ndo livhuwa kamanda! Enkosini kakhulu!* To my family, thank you for all the love and support throughout this journey, you have been amazing and patient with me and my studies. *Mama wam*, I greatly appreciate you!

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to Dr Mhlobo Wabantwana Jadezweni. We have made it, Tata, just as you assured me that we would. Continue being the shining light that guides me.

To women whose stories are whispered or unspoken of, carrying the weight of entire worlds. To my mother, whose quiet strength taught me that resilience wears many faces. To my mentors and friends, who reminded me that questioning is an act of courage. And to every reader willing to see beyond the surface may these pages offer not only analysis, but also a mirror.

Abstract

This study investigates the enormous exploitation, subjugation and the embedded inferiority complex imposed upon women by other women utilising patriarchal cultural and traditional principles as justification. The examination will be conducted by exploring four isiXhosa literary texts, namely: *UNongxaki nezakhe* (1976) by G. Belebesi; *UDike noCikizwa* (1988) by A.M. Mmango; *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* (1994) by H. Mothlabane and *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda* (1997) by L.L. Ngewu.

Moreover, this study attempts to go beyond feminism with the logic that feminism is a broad concept which generally seeks to emancipate and empower women from all oppressive structures and norms suffered at the hands of patriarchy. Probing beyond feminism in this study means investigating both men and women as direct perpetrators of women's subjugation and oppression. Exploring this issue is essential in the quest to rectify gender injustices and inequalities. For better empowerment, women are to unite. However, unity is unattainable when there are women who subconsciously and, at times, consciously belittle and agonize other women under the patriarchal cultural and traditional guise and banner.

Culture and tradition play a fundamental role in the moulding and shaping of many African societies and amaXhosa in particular. Thus, it is essential to conduct this investigation, utilizing African feminisms as the leading philosophies to ensure that amaXhosa cultures and traditions are not neglected but brought under critical surveillance. This is to ensure that they are enhanced to represent the modern era, with advanced women experiences and their collective modus operandi.

African feminisms acknowledge cultures and traditions as the backbone of African societies and recognize that, in particular, amaXhosa and African women in general have a history of resilience and fearlessness. African feminisms do not view men as adversaries of women since African men and women have worked together, rebelling side-by-side against African enemies for centuries. African feminisms seek to expose all gender inequalities, and remedy them through uniting African men and women to share all platforms and principles justly, and equitably.

Isishwankathelo somxholo

Olu phando lujolise ekuhlalutyeni ukuxhatshazwa, ukunyanzeliswa nokunyenjwa kwamanina ngamanye amanina kusetyenziswa imigaqo yeenkcubeko nezithethe njengezizathu zokwenza oko. Olu phando luqhutywa ngokuphonononga izicatshulwa zoncwadi lwesiXhosa ezine, zezi zilandelayo: *UNongxaki nezakhe* (1976), ngokubhalwa nguG. Belebesi; *UDike noCikizwa* (1988), ngokubhalwa nguA.M. Mmango; *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* (1994), ngokubhalwa nguH. Mothlabane kunye no*Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda* (1997), ngokubhalwa nguL.L. Ngewu.

Ngaphezu koko, olu phononongo luzama ukuqabela ngaphaya kobukhomokazi phantsi kwengqiqo ethi ubukhomokazi luluvo nje oluphangaleleyo nolunjongo ikukukhulula ngokubanzi kwakunye nokuxhobisa amanina ngazo zonke izimo kunye nezithethe ezicinezelayo nezixhaphazayo ezandleni zamadoda. Ukuphanda ngokuqabela ngaphaya kobukhomokazi kolu phando kuthetha ukuphanda amadoda kunye namanina njengabanyhukuli nabaxhaphazi bamanina.

Ukuphonononga kwalo mba kubalulekile kwiphulo lokulungisa ukungabikho kobulungisa kunye nokungalingani ngokwesini. Ukuze abe nokuxhobiseka ngcono, amanina kufuneka emanyene. Nangona kunjalo, umanyano alunakufikeleleka xa kukho amanina athi esezingqondweni ngokugqibeleleyo, okanye mhlawumbi ngokungaqondi ngamanye amaxesha, edelela futhi engcikiva amanye amanina phantsi kwezithethe ezingcikivayo zobudoda.

Iinkcubeko nezithethe zidlala indima ebalulekileyo ekubunjweni kwanasekuyilweni kwezizwe ezininzi zamaAfrika, ingakumbi amaXhosa. Ngoko ke, kubalulekile ukwenza olu phando kusetyenziswa ubukhomokazi baseAfrika njengeyona mo yengqiqo iphambili ngenjongo yokuqinisekisa ukuba iinkcubeko nezithethe zamaXhosa azityeshelwa koko zibekwa phantsi kweliso elibukhali. Oku kukuqinisekisa ukuba ziyaphuculwa ukuze zikwazi ukumelana namaxesha esphila kuwo, ngamava amanina aphambili kwanangendlela asebenza ngayo amanina.

Ubukhomokazi baseAfrika buyazamkela iinkcubeko nezithethe njengentsika yentlalo yamaAfrika kwaye buyayiqonda nento yokuba amaXhosa, ingakumbi, namaninaase-Afrika ngokubanzi, anembali yokumelana neenzima kwanokukhalipha. Ubukhomokazi base-Afrika abuwathabathi njengotshaba lwamanina amadoda kuba kaloku amadoda namabhinqa ase-Afrika akhe asebenzisana isithuba seenkulungwane zeminyaka elwisana neentshaba zezwekazi lakokwethu.

Injongo yobukhomokazi base-Afrika kukubhentsisa konke ukungalingani ngokwesini ngokuthi bulungise ngokudihlanganisa amadoda namanina ase-Afrika ukuze abelane ngawo onke amaqonga kunye nemigaqo ngokuselekwe kubulungisa, nangokulinganayo.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

This study critically examines the pervasive abuse, systemic oppression, and the deeply ingrained inferiority complex that women inflict upon one another within the context of amaXhosa patriarchal cultural and traditional practices. By interrogating these dynamics, the research highlights how women, often positioned as custodians of culture, become agents in perpetuating patriarchal norms that marginalize their own gender. The investigation is carried out through a close textual analysis of four isiXhosa literary works: *UNongxaki nezakhe* (1976) by G. Belebesi, *UDike noCikizwa* (1988) by A. M. Mmango, *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* (1994) by H. Mothlabane, and *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda* (1997) by L. L. Ngewu. Collectively, these texts provide critical insight into the ways in which literature both reflects and critiques the cultural mechanisms that sustain gender-based hierarchies, thereby offering a nuanced understanding of women's roles within oppressive structures.

The rationale underpinning this study is to move beyond the conventional framework of feminism, as suggested in the title, in order to interrogate the role of women as active agents in sustaining patriarchal cultures and practices that oppress other women. While feminism, as a broad and multifaceted concept, primarily seeks to emancipate and empower women from gender-oppressive structures and norms imposed by patriarchy; this study extends the discourse by examining an often-overlooked dimension: the complicity of women in perpetuating patriarchal ideologies. In this regard, the analysis does not merely position men as the sole architects of women's subjugation and oppression, but rather foregrounds the extent to which women themselves contribute to reinforcing and transmitting oppressive cultural practices. Consequently, those who are subjected to such practices often internalize these constraints, resulting in a deeply embedded inferiority complex that further entrenches their marginalization.

In addressing gender injustices and inequalities, it is fundamental to interrogate the roles of women who, whether consciously or subconsciously, act as subliminal agents of patriarchy. True empowerment can only be achieved through women's solidarity and collective resistance against oppressive systems. However, the reality remains that some women continue to belittle, undermine, and inflict suffering upon other women under the guise of cultural preservation and traditional authority. Such practices not only fracture the possibility of unity but also perpetuate cycles of

subjugation that hinders meaningful transformation. Therefore, any pursuit of gender justice must not only challenge men's dominance within patriarchal structures but also confront women's complicity in sustaining these oppressive norms. Only by acknowledging and dismantling this internalized oppression can authentic unity, empowerment, and social change be realized.

South African women were able to stand alongside their male counterparts in fighting against colonialism and, later, apartheid. Be that as it may, women have always been aware that for them, that was not the end of the struggle, for they still had to contend with the struggle against oppression by men. An unidentified woman quoted by Magubane (2010: 975) concurs that women continue to carry a heavy burden that has been influenced by many factors. And there are women who exacerbate this burden for others through jealousy, retaliation of patriarchal norms, with which they inflict on other women by indirectly and directly imposing patriarchal values upon other women. An example of this kind of women are elderly women who, in many African societies, are the beacons of hope for young women and girls. They instil certain cultural and traditional principles in girls and guide them. However, these elderly women continue to implant patriarchal ideologies and principles upon the young. And as such, the young learn from these women and pass the teachings through to other generations of women that come after them. The women of the many anti-apartheid movements were inspired and guided by the 1950s' generation of women, who also drew their inspiration from women of the previous generations (Magubane, 2010: 976). Therefore, girls are inspired and guided by their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and women in the public spheres, as well as in their communities.

1.2. Background to the Study

Throughout centuries, amaXhosa have maintained customs and traditional practices that they continue to value and abide by just like the rest of the African societies. Some of the customs and practices have been manipulated for patriarchal gain and, as a result, subjugate, exclude, and demean women. Bongela (2001: 35) notes that these patriarchal norms are harsher in marriage for women. However, they do not exclude unmarried women as they are judged according to the standards held by these principles. It is through this premise that Herbert (1990: 455) argues that one of the justifications given for the victimization of women is that women are unclean beings. This is due to their monthly menstrual cycles, and because they are treated as outsiders by their in- laws. Wives are viewed as "a threat to social harmony of the homestead" (Herbert, 1990: 455). And this threat is portrayed evidently in *Ingqumbo yeminyanya* (Jordan, 2008: 149) where the king's wife is

persistently made to feel like an outsider by *amaMpondomise*. The principal enforcers of these patriarchal customs are mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law and other women within the family and outside.

One of the most prestigious practices that also comprises a language component to it amongst amXhosa is *isihlonipho*. *Isihlonipho* as a language and a combination of practices are the backbone of amaXhosa culture (Bongela, 2001:35) in which traditional customs are biased towards male dominance. In turn, women subconsciously internalize *isihlonipho* language and its cultural practices as the foundation of culture and disseminate them on to their daughters in society, unconscious of their active roles as agents of patriarchal cultures. Ntsimane (2007: 115) postulates that *isihlonipho* is, in general, the African way of living. The concept, in broader context, means respecting all elders, irrespective of their gender, and this is to be obeyed by all young(er) persons. However, amaXhosa use a hierarchical system to exercise this form of respect and it was strictly obeyed in the olden days. In the present day, this hierarchical system of respect has been relaxed with certain rural parts of the Eastern Cape still upholding them. The system stipulates that children should respect their mothers, who, in turn, are also expected to respect their husbands, while men show respect to the kings, and the kings respect the ancestors. In Mothlabane's words. "*Abantwana bahlonipha oonina, bona bahloniphe amadoda abo, wona ahloniphe iinkosi, zona zihloniphe izinyanya*" (1994: 31).

Besides the above-mentioned hierarchical system of respect, there are other levels of division amongst amaXhosa women. At the lowest level would be girls, who are between the ages of thirteen and sixteen years old (Bongela, 2001: 35). These girls would have just reached puberty. "They are taught to respect all the members of the divisions above them, both from the women's and the men's sides" (Bongela, 2001: 35). In the past, they were traditionally prohibited from sitting with boys. Bongela (2001: 36) adds that these girls were also prohibited from being romantically involved with boys.

The girls had to undergo the *intonjane* ritual, which is "a rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood" (Sotewu, 2016: 2). Through this rite of passage, the young girls were encouraged not to engage in any sexual activity before marriage (Maluleke and Troskie, 2003: 57). The author further states that *intonjane* basically prepared girls for marriage as they were taught how to conduct themselves should they be preferred for marriage by an interested family. Furthermore, these girls were taught that marriage is the destiny of all women (Sotewu, 2016: 3). The knowledge that these

girls received during the rite of passage was viewed as essential as it prepared them to become proficient wives and mothers. All these traditions and guidance were imparted to the girls by the elderly women within the community and family.

The second level of class amongst amaXhosa women is that of young women. Women in this division would mostly be those who had already undergone the *intonjane* ritual. According to Bongela (2001:36) these young women were disciplined on how to respect members of the public in general, more especially men in their age group as well as men older than them. In the same modus as the girls, "they have to shy away when they are discovered by an adult member of the public walking or standing with men" (Bongela, 2001:36). There were certain foods that young women were barred from consuming (Soga, 1937:356) until they were ready for marriage.

The next level of division amongst amaXhosa women is that of the newly married women, brides. Finlayson (1984:138) argues that newly wedded women suffer the most restrictions than all the other women in amaXhosa society. All the restrictions they are obligated to follow are reinforced and monitored by their mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, and other elderly women within society upon the brides (Dowling, 1988:60). Furthermore, according to Finlayson (1984: 138) women, especially married women, are compelled to *hlonipha* throughout their lives. It is precisely in the light of the above critical and scholarly insights and evaluations that the practice could be associated with discriminatory and oppressive patriarchal customs against women.

The level of division of women that follows the newly wedded women is that of women who had been married for a few months, those who have passed the initiation into marriage stage (Bongela, 2001:37). Once the initiation stage is over, they could take off their temporarily compulsory bridal attire, which is accompanied by the removal of certain restrictions. However, their duties within the household remain the same.

Following the above-mentioned level is that of old or mature women (Bongela, 2001:38). Their role amongst amaXhosa is to guide and advise those of the levels below theirs (Bongela, 2001:38). Women in this level command profound respect from their daughters, daughters-in-law and the younger generation at large. However, they too are expected to respect the elderly women. The elderly women belong to the last level of division and have been married for many years, therefore, are said to have immense knowledge and experience. They command the highest respect amongst all the levels of women below theirs. They give advice and solve all disputes or any other issues

"emanating from any of the levels below" (Bongela, 2001:38). The elderly women that reinforce *isihlonipho* on brides are regarded as having done their share of *ukuhlonipha*, therefore, are wiser and able to train those younger than them (Soga, 1937: 210). "The daughters-in-law initial position is one of subservience to her mother-in-law" (Herbert, 1990: 457). This is no different to the dominance that women endure from men. All these divisions and rules scrutinized above form part of *ukuhlonipha* amongst amaXhosa. *Isihlonipho* is defined as "a cultural concept that refers to the avoidance of certain actions, objects, words and food in order of not offending certain people and spiritual powers" (Bongela, 2001:25). Kropf and Godfrey (1915:161) in Finlayson (1984:49) define *ukuhlonipha* as being bashful, keeping at a distance through reference and to shun. Soga (1937:208) combines these definitions provided by the previously mentioned academics and defines *ukuhlonipha* as:

> To respect, to reverence, to be bashful, is used in connection with these various renderings, according to the circumstances of the case. It is usually applied to the custom whereby a married woman is debarred from using the name of her father in-law, and must avoid all words, whose initial syllable is the same as the initial syllable of her father's in-law name or indeed any word that includes the whole of the father's in-law name.

The above cited definition of *ukuhlonipha* as well as the explicit unfair levels of division of women, and the outrageous rules and treatment that the different women in these divisions are subjected to, is a fertile ground whereby this research would interrogate the critical role that women undertake as instruments in enabling and sustaining hegemonic principles in society. These principles result in female oppression, restraint, and discrimination.

1.3. Aims of the Study

This study aims to demonstrate how single and married women are treated by other women as depicted in selected isiXhosa literary texts with respect to cultural and traditional customs. It explores the treatment that the women protagonists in Belebesi's *UNongxaki nezakhe* (1976), Mmango's *UDike noCikizwa* (1988), Mothlabane's *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* (1994) and Ngewu's *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda* (1997) experience from other women characters. This study is prompted by the exploitation of culture and tradition by patriarchy to further oppress and subordinate women in society. Such actions project women as subliminal agents of male-dominated ideologies and practices, enforcing

these upon other women.

The study is driven by the premise that the ideal woman is not necessarily innate to her sex, but that the patriarchal pressures and cultural influence compel her to behave in conformity with the image" (Frager and Fadiman, 2005:56). As a result, daughters grow up silenced and subservient because of their mothers' disempowering and domesticated teachings, daughters-in-law become inferior and enslaved because of the subordination guidelines and regulations passed on to them by their mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law.

As a matter of fact, this research explores the role played by *isihlonipho* language and customs in contemporary amaXhosa societies and whether this could be linked to that portrayed in the literary texts examined in this study. The focus here would be on certain traditional customs imposed upon married and single women expressed in the literary texts selected for this study and their relation to contemporary amaXhosa society.

This study also investigates the impact that 'women against women' behaviour has against women's quest for emancipation from gender inequality, oppression, discrimination, and hegemony. This will be pursued by examining the actions of the women protagonists in the chosen literary texts because of the subliminal patriarchal influences portrayed by the other women characters. These will be compared to the reactions of women in real life.

Lastly, the study also considers whether there have been any transformative movements in the present era with regards to *isihlonipho* language and customs that are directed at married women. By doing so, this study attempts to examine whether there have been any changes in the conduct of married women to their in-laws and from society as a whole; as well as if there has been any transformation in the way single women have been treated by the elderly and young married women amongst amaXhosa.

These texts have been chosen specifically to strike a balance between the pre-democratic and post-democratic eras in South Africa. They also strike a balance between that which has been written by male authors, and that written by female authors about women and the implications of patriarchy disguised as culture and tradition since *UDike noCikizwa* (1988) and *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda* (1997) are exclusively written by male authors while *UNongxaki nezakhe* (1976) and *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* (1994) are written by female authors.

In *UNongxaki nezakhe*, the author explores the issue of arranged marriages amongst amaXhosa. Marriage has always been held in high esteem in amaXhosa societies (Hoza, 2010: 135). The girl is taught from an early age how to behave for her to be seen and chosen by a man for marriage (Kwatsha, 2009: 131). The girl is taught by her mother how to conduct household chores, training her for her husband and in-law's household (Kwatsha, 2009: 132). UNongxaki, the female protagonist finds herself in such a situation, where her mother refuses to send her to school claiming that every girl should be taught at home by their mother on how to conduct women duties, preparing her for marriage (Belebesi, 1976). This issue might seem irrelevant in the present-day context yet in some parts of rural South Africa, like that of Libode in the Eastern Cape where girls as young as 12 years old were recently taken out of school to be placed in arranged marriages, it is still practiced (Ndindwa, 2014: 2).

Nongxaki's mother is harsh upon her daughter-in-law, whom she claims is lazy and was not raised well because she left her in-laws and followed her husband to Johannesburg, leaving the mother- in-law with no one to assist her around the household (Belebesi, 1976: 11). *Nongxaki*'s mother approves that *Nongxaki* be entered into a loveless, arranged marriage, her paternal aunt delivers the news to *Nongxaki*. She emphasizes the fact that *Nongxaki* is not given any choice or option, she is only notified about the wedding so that she can prepare for it (Belebesi, 1976: 16).

In *UDike noCikizwa*, the protagonist *Cikizwa* is coerced into marrying into a family with whom she has no prior relationship or familiarity. This arrangement is orchestrated and reinforced by her paternal aunt, who persuades *Cikizwa* by asserting that "a young woman's home is in marriage" (Mmango, 1988: 9). The aunt further reprimands her niece for being 'ungrateful,' arguing that Cikizwa's father is merely acting in her best interest by securing her future through the establishment of a marital home (Mmango, 1988: 9). This episode highlights the internalization and reinforcement of patriarchal ideologies by women themselves, where female authority figures assume the role of gatekeepers of cultural norms. Instead of offering support or alternative possibilities, the aunt becomes an instrument of coercion, perpetuating the belief that a woman's worth and security are exclusively defined within the boundaries of marriage. Such instances reveal how women are often implicated in sustaining systems of oppression, thereby complicating the binary narrative of men as oppressors and women solely as victims.

Both of the above-mentioned literary texts, published prior to 1994, foreground the central role that

customary marriage played within a young woman's family among the amaXhosa. As Du Toit (2007: 1) observes, marriage among the amaXhosa fifty years ago was regarded as the cornerstone of social organization and the definitive marker of adulthood. It not only established kinship ties between families but also secured a woman's identity and legitimacy within the broader community. It is, however, important to acknowledge that in contemporary contexts, the institution of marriage has undergone significant transformation. Social change, urbanization, and shifting gender dynamics have altered the ways in which marriage is valued and practiced. For some, marriage no longer carries the same communal or cultural weight as it once did; yet, for many traditional households, it continues to function as a foundational principle, preserving its symbolic and practical significance in defining familial stability and cultural continuity.

In *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*, the woman protagonist, *Nolasti*, is the third and last wife in an *isithembu* (polygamist) marriage. *Nolasti* finds strength and challenges her oppressive, abusive, and chauvinistic husband. However, the other two wives also involved in the *isithembu* frown upon her behaviour and tell her that being a wife has nothing to do with having rights and modernization but all about subservience and domestication (Mothlabane, 1994: 14). The two wives avoid using certain words like the normal word *intloko* when referring to the head and use *ityhontsi* as a way of respect (Mothlabane, 1994: 7). When *Nolasti* is physically assaulted by their husband and has him charged for assault, the other wives are enraged at her for the arrest. *Nolasti* finds herself fighting for women's emancipation alone. Her mother forces her to go back to her husband when she leaves him and goes back home, stating that *Nolasti* is an embarrassment to her family for wanting to be an equal to a man and for leaving her husband (Mothlabane, 1994: 45).

In *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda*, *Nozinto* the woman protagonist is cheated upon and abused by her husband. The husband has been ill-treating her for years, and she has been reaching out to her female friends, but with no support (Ngewu, 1997: 5). *Nozinto* ends up an alcoholic and engages in an affair. Her friends judge her for both these acts, dismissing her husband's transgressions. *Nozinto* hires assassins who kill her husband, and whilst preparing for his funeral, all the women around her expect her to mourn in a certain way. Her in-laws suddenly take over her household by making decisions on how her husband should be buried and that she may not enter the graveyard as women are not allowed at the graveyard of a person who has died from an accident (Ngewu, 1997: 49). She is told that women are evil therefore, are barred from the graveyard (Ngewu, 1997: 49).

In the latter dramas, both situated within the post-apartheid era, the narratives illustrate that even during South Africa's transitional period, women continued to experience persistent gender inequalities. The endurance of such inequities underscores the reality that political liberation did not automatically translate into gender justice. Indeed, thirty years into democracy, the subordination of women remains a pressing social concern, which highlights the necessity of sustaining critical dialogue through both literature and academic inquiry. What becomes particularly striking in these texts is the manner in which women are often sabotaged not solely by men, but by other women who, themselves constrained by patriarchal hegemony, perpetuate oppressive practices under the guise of culture and tradition. This cycle of internalized oppression demonstrates the deep entrenchment of patriarchal ideologies, revealing how cultural authority is mobilized to sustain gender hierarchies even within a supposedly liberated era. By exposing these contradictions, the dramas challenge readers and scholars alike to reconsider the complexities of women's agency within systems of domination.

1.4. The Problem Statement

Despite the progressive framework of South Africa's democratic Constitution, which is designed to uphold equality and protect the inherent dignity of all human beings, women and in particular black women continue to endure profound forms of marginalization and suffering. The struggle faced by black women is twofold: not only are they subjected to systemic and interpersonal oppression from men, but they are also undermined by other women within their communities. This intra-gender oppression is frequently enacted through the weaponization of patriarchal discourse, whereby slander, stigmatization, and the invocation of so-called cultural traditions are employed to police, silence, and disparage women. Such practices serve to incapacitate women both socially and psychologically, reinforcing an internalized sense of inferiority that perpetuates gender hierarchies. The persistence of these dynamics demonstrates that formal legal equality is insufficient without a corresponding cultural and social transformation that addresses the embedded patriarchal logics operating within both public and private spheres.

Amongst amaXhosa, women suffer from a young age up to wifehood. Spinsters are also subjected to slander, oppression and bullying by other women. Those who are divorced or separated from their husbands are not exempted from this as Magona (1992:1) explains that divorced women and those separated from their husbands are labelled '*oomabuy' ekwendeni'*, a derogatory term that can

be directly translated as returnees from wifehood. This term is used to refer to women even in instances where the husband is the one who left or divorced the wife. Magona (1992:20) expands by stating that mothers warn their sons against such women. *Oomabuy' ekwendeni* are disrespected, going from being well-esteemed people in society due to their previous wife status, to being positioned right at the bottom as impudent.

The unmarried women or spinsters are labelled *amadikazi*, a reference to unmarried women. The situation of women being slandered by other women is aggravated when the unmarried woman has children out of wedlock, she is devalued and frowned upon by the elderly women in amaXhosa societies. "She has had a child, they say, therefore she is too old for you" (Magona, 1992:20). The elderly women make this comment when their sons, nephews and community members want to marry or show interest in an unmarried woman who has borne a child, echoing the words that elderly men would also use.

Moloko-Phiri, Mulaudzi, and Heyns (2016:245) contend that language plays a fundamental role in society, serving as a crucial tool for rendering descriptions, providing definitions, and facilitating a deeper understanding of people's lived experiences. Consequently, the use of derogatory or defamatory labels to describe women not only undermines their individual character but also diminishes their recognition as full human beings within the social fabric. Building on this perspective, the present study further investigates the strategies and approaches employed by mothers in raising their daughters, with particular attention to the cultural teachings and social norms imparted by elderly women within amaXhosa communities. By examining these intergenerational practices, the study seeks to illuminate how cultural knowledge, language, and socialization collectively shape the identities, values, and lived realities of young girls in these societies.

As noted by Kwatsha (2009:131), girls in many African societies are socialized from an early age by their mothers to adopt nurturing roles and exhibit obedience to men. Those who deviate from these prescriptive norms are often negatively labelled as ill-mannered or uncultured, and, over time, may be socially categorized as "improper African women" (Ebila, 2015:144). This process of gendered socialization continues into adulthood, where newly wedded women are instructed on how to conduct themselves in accordance with societal expectations of married life. Within these communities, hierarchical structures among women are also evident, whereby those occupying

higher social ranks exercise authority and often express disapproval toward women of lower ranks. Such hierarchies reinforce social conformity, perpetuate traditional gender roles, and regulate acceptable behaviour, thereby maintaining both cultural continuity and social control within the society.

Nevertheless, there is a need for the unification of women. Through woman unity, women can work on an approach to mend and equalize relations with men for cultural and traditional transformation: transformation that will benefit all humans equally in society. However, that cannot occur when some women are intent on instilling patriarchal values and norms upon others with the mentality that this is the only way because that is what they were taught by their mothers, grandmothers, and other elderly women in their communities. As much as there is an increase in the emergence of a generation of women that is fearless, strong and outspoken, this does not change much when there are still elders who frown upon these young women, and there is also a huge gap between the cultural teachings of young women in the rural areas and those in urban areas.

1.5. Research Questions

1. To what extent do the women characters depicted in the selected texts enhance patriarchal culture, and can this be viewed as a true reflection of contemporary reality in amaXhosa societies?
2. What role do other women characters play in oppressing and discriminating against women protagonists in the selected literary texts?
3. What is the role of the other women, be it the mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, sister wives, women friends and so forth in a married woman's life?
4. How does supporting patriarchal ideologies sabotage the African feminists' principles?
5. How could women achieve equality and true emancipation when they are sabotaged from within?

1.6. The Significance of the Study

This study aspires to make a great contribution in assisting women unanimity for fiercer and rapid transformation in cultural and traditional practices. It also desires to illustrate that cultural and traditional customs remain fundamental. However, it is imperative that these practices should evolve with times and be accommodative to all equally. It aims to demonstrate that all women are essential for the survival of society in general and so, therefore, should be treated equally amongst

themselves and, in comparison, to men. This research wishes to portray the resilience that women have been bestowed with; that even when faced with trials, they are still capable of succeeding, however short-lived the said success could be.

Ironically, two of the authors of the chosen literary works for this study are men and two are women. However, the women authors portray the women protagonists as empowered and resilient but not ready or well-equipped for change. For instance, *Nongxaki* is explicit in not marrying the man her family chooses for her. She defies her father and paternal aunt by opting to get married to the man she loves (Belebesi, 1976:34). She confidently follows her heart. However, she is faced with major trials in her marriage and experiences more from her in-laws. Her worst enemy becomes her mother-in-law, who is supposed to be her guide and protector. As a result, *Nongxaki* fails and resorts to returning home to the parents that she had defied, illustrating that as a young woman, she is incompetent to make decisions for herself and that she is a failure and a coward. However, *Nongxaki*'s return to her parents' homestead can also be viewed as powerful as it demonstrates that she is resolute in her decision to leave her marriage when she realises that she is no longer valued and appreciated. She dares to go back home and apologise for her actions and continue with life as her parents' daughter.

In *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*, *Nolasti* is portrayed as a character determined to instigate significant transformation in the lives of traditional and conservative women. She expresses confidence that meaningful change must begin within her own household, advocating for a marital relationship in which her husband treats her as an equal rather than as a subordinate or servant (Mothlabane, 1994:62). However, *Nolasti's* initial resolve is short-lived, as she ultimately demonstrates an inability to effectively champion broader social change. She withdraws from the struggle to empower other women, asserting that the cause is not her fight and reflecting on her prior efforts as misguided, thereby deciding to relinquish her pursuit of reform (Mothlabane, 1994:63). This narrative trajectory underscores the complex interplay between individual agency and structural constraints, highlighting the difficulties women face when challenging entrenched patriarchal norms within both the domestic and wider societal spheres.

In contrast, male authors often depict their female protagonists as resilient, assertive, and capable human beings. For instance, Ngewu (1997) presents *Nozinto* as a bold and determined woman who remains unshaken despite enduring significant hardship. Her experiences, rather than weakening

her, serve to strengthen her resolve and propel her into making daring, if morally ambiguous, decisions. In a bid to reclaim her dignity and power, which were eroded over the course of her marriage, *Nozinto* orchestrates her husband's death. While her methods are flawed, her determination to assert agency and leave a mark on her circumstances remains central to her characterization. Similarly, in *uDike noCikizwa*, Mmango (1988:63) portrays *Cikizwa* as courageous in defying her father and paternal aunt by refusing to participate in an arranged marriage. She boldly stands her ground in church on her wedding day, objecting to marrying the man chosen for her. Upon learning that her father has killed her true love, *Cikizwa* commits suicide, demonstrating her unwavering commitment to the promise she made to her beloved *Dike* that nothing, not even death, would separate them. In this way, *Cikizwa* embodies the notion of a "soldier" who sacrifices herself for her cause. Although *Cikizwa's* initial characterization reflects the conventional portrayals often found in male-authored texts, her narrative evolves toward a more complex and tragic conclusion. Given the morally ambiguous or negative outcomes in both *Nozinto's* and *Cikizwa's* stories, Ngewu's and Mmango's portrayals of female characters invite nuanced analysis, highlighting the tension between resilience, agency, and the consequences of defying societal norms.

The contrasts discussed above illustrate that, while the contemporary literary landscape has witnessed a notable increase in women authors who highlight the resilience, intelligence, and agency of female characters, the portrayal of such boldness often remains circumscribed. As Kwatsha (2009:2) observes, although these narratives foreground women's capacity for strength and critical thought, some authors depict this assertiveness with inherent limitations, framing their protagonists as inexperienced or ill-equipped to effect meaningful societal change. In many cases, the characters' moments of enlightenment or assertion of agency are accompanied by significant personal cost or eventual downfall, suggesting that the exercise of autonomy within patriarchal structures is fraught with risk. This tension underscores the complex negotiation between empowerment and societal constraint in women's literature, reflecting broader cultural anxieties about the place of women within traditional and modernized social orders.

1.7. Scope of the Study

The first chapter introduces the research, clearly articulating the aims and objectives of the research study. It also demonstrates the basis for the researcher going beyond feminism and exploring

women's conduct towards each other because of certain patriarchal cultural and traditional customs, utilising African feminisms. The proposed methodological approach for this study is the critical discourse analysis with emphasis on feminist discourse analysis and African feminist discourse analysis. This chapter also defines the fundamental concepts that hold the basic premises of this study. A brief explanation of how these concepts work, as well as their background, from formation and development is provided. In conclusion, the chapter summarises all the information provided.

The second chapter focuses on the literature review, which outlines the manner in which the theories will be employed. This chapter also examines literature by other scholars who have written about the key topics presented in this study, such as *isihlonipho* amongst amaXhosa in general and, in particular, in relation to women; the African feminism discourse, African Womanism (as part of African feminisms). This is because the discourse carries the same principles as African feminisms but those who coined it detested being associated with anything to do with feminism and African cultures and traditional ideologies towards women. It articulates the different literature aims and objectives. This is fundamental as it draws contrast and incompatibility between the different research works and this research study. The comparison is illustrated by examining both African and South African literatures.

The third chapter provides a comprehensive exploration of the concept of 'beyond feminism' by critically engaging with the selected literary texts, as well as with other isiXhosa works that exemplify the resilience, determination, and audacity of amaXhosa women across generations. This chapter aims to demonstrate how these texts collectively challenge conventional feminist narratives, offering nuanced insights into the lived experiences, agency, and social positioning of women within traditional and evolving cultural contexts. In order to facilitate the reader's understanding, a concise summary of each literary work will be presented, providing essential background context for the chosen dramas and novel. This approach not only situates the analysis within the broader isiXhosa literary canon but also underscores the ways in which literature serves as a vehicle for documenting and interrogating the complexities of gender, power, and resistance in amaXhosa society.

The fourth chapter primarily examines the concepts of African culture and tradition by providing clear definitions and detailed discussions that contextualize their significance within African societies. It critically interrogates the ways in which these concepts are often manipulated to serve patriarchal interests, highlighting the intersection between cultural norms and gendered power

structures. Furthermore, this chapter provides a thorough analysis of how patriarchal interpretations of culture and tradition are frequently employed to justify the ill-treatment, discrimination, and subordination of African women. To substantiate this analysis, the chapter draws on four selected isiXhosa literary works, using specific characters and narratives to illustrate how cultural and traditional frameworks are exploited to perpetuate gendered oppression. Through this approach, the chapter not only elucidates the mechanisms through which patriarchy is maintained but also underscores the broader implications of cultural manipulation for the social positioning and agency of women within amaXhosa communities.

The sixth chapter presents the recommendations and conclusion of the study, addressing the research problem and responding to the questions that motivated the investigation. This chapter synthesizes the key findings, highlighting their significance for understanding the dynamics of gender, culture, and agency within the selected isiXhosa literary texts and broader societal contexts. The recommendations offer practical and theoretical insights aimed at promoting gender equity, challenging patriarchal norms, and fostering a more nuanced appreciation of women's resilience and empowerment in both literary and real-world settings. In addition, the chapter concludes with a comprehensive reference list, documenting all sources consulted throughout the study, thereby ensuring academic rigor and providing a foundation for further scholarly inquiry.

1.8. Motivations for the Study

This research study seeks to encourage African women to collectively challenge and dismantle both overt and subtle forms of oppressive and defamatory behaviour that they may perpetuate, whether consciously or unconsciously, often justified through patriarchal societal and cultural values and norms. Such conduct, whether internalized or socially reinforced, mirrors the very mechanisms of domination employed by patriarchal structures, thereby undermining efforts toward genuine gender equality and emancipation. By highlighting the ways in which women may inadvertently uphold systems of subordination, this study underscores the necessity of critical self-awareness, solidarity, and transformative action. Ultimately, it advocates for a concerted effort among African women to resist internalized patriarchy, promote mutual empowerment, and advance the broader struggle against hegemonic forces that seek to limit women's agency and societal participation.

This research similarly implores African women to work in unity with men in transforming cultural and traditional practices and norms. It also beseeches women to change their narratives from

subservient, hopeless, and oppressed humans to bold, confident, and decisive humans. This research is motivated by the increasingly differences in attitudes and teachings of amaXhosa women from rural areas and those in the urban areas. These conflicting attitudes in the present era are causing a serious rift between women. Although, there is an increasing growth in educated, empowered, and emancipated women from both areas and a huge transformation in ideologies, there is still a gap between the two.

It is essential to recognize that "literature is fundamental in society as it remains an essential source of learning in most societies, familiarising people about the norms, culture and tradition of that particular society" (Molubo, 2020:10). Literature functions not only as a reflection of societal values but also as a medium through which cultural knowledge, moral codes, and social expectations are transmitted across generations. Consequently, it serves as a powerful tool for shaping perceptions and influencing behaviour. Given this influential role, literature becomes a critical site for addressing and promoting cultural transformation, offering the potential to challenge entrenched patriarchal norms, highlight inequities, and inspire progressive change within society. By embedding transformative ideas within narratives, authors can both educate and empower readers, fostering a more reflective and equitable engagement with cultural traditions.

1.9. Research Methodology

This study employs a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach to examine the selected isiXhosa novel and three dramas, providing a framework for interrogating the ways in which language, narrative, and dialogue construct and reinforce social realities. As noted earlier, the study investigates the implications of patriarchal ideologies that are often masked as cultural norms, and how these ideologies shape and constrain women's experiences. In particular, the research explores the influence of cultural and traditional expectations on the roles played by elderly women, in-laws, and women in general, with a focus on their impact on girls and young women, especially brides. By employing CDA, the study uncovers the subtle mechanisms through which power and gender hierarchies are maintained, highlighting how socialization, cultural practices, and intergenerational transmission of norms contribute to both the subordination and resilience of women within isiXhosa society. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the intersections between culture, gender, and power as they manifest in literary representations and social realities.

The proposed methodological approach, namely critical discourse analysis (CDA) with a focus on

general feminist discourse and African feminist discourse, constitutes a qualitative analytical framework. This approach critically describes, interprets, and explains the ways in which discourses construct, sustain, and legitimize social inequalities (Mullet, 2018:116). As Mullet (2018:117) further asserts, critical discourse analysis examines how language and culture produce, shape, and regulate social and psychological phenomena. In the context of this study, CDA is employed to analyse the selected isiXhosa novel and three dramas, revealing how female protagonists are systematically oppressed, marginalized, and disempowered through social norms and linguistic practices that are justified under the guise of culture and tradition. This approach underscores the centrality of language and cultural frameworks in shaping social life, particularly within amaXhosa society and many other African contexts, demonstrating how discursive practices both reflect and reinforce gendered hierarchies while simultaneously offering sites for resistance and empowerment.

Feminist critical discourse analysis investigates the cause of injustices and inequalities and conveys knowledge that seeks to emancipate women and, also give them a clear view of their dominated inequalities (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 7). This is fundamental to this study as it seeks to emancipate women from all forms of oppression, even the subconscious ideologies that are instilled in them by cultural and traditional teachings. According to Mullet (2018: 119), the dominance in the power relations that the feminist critical discourse analysis explores is that of certain people in society over others, such as the cases cited in these selected literary texts (where men practice domination over women and certain women over other women).

A feminist critical discourse approach, such as the one employed in this study, "aims to produce rich, nuanced analyses of the complex workings of power and ideology in discourses that sustain gendered social orders" (Lazar, 2007:141). Gender inequalities and injustices often manifest in both subtle and overt forms, shaping social relations, opportunities, and individual experiences. Lazar (2007:149) further contends that feminist discourse analysis plays a crucial role in uncovering the intricate ways in which these gendered issues and hegemonic power relations operate across different societal and cultural contexts. By critically examining language, narrative structures, and social practices, this approach enables a deeper understanding of how patriarchal norms are reproduced, challenged, or negotiated, offering insights into both the mechanisms of women's oppression and the avenues through which empowerment and resistance are enacted. In the context of African societies, particularly within the isiXhosa cultural framework, such analysis illuminates how traditional and cultural discourses intersect with gendered power to shape the lived realities of women.

It is therefore the position of this study that it is imperative for women to come together and engage in collective discussions about their lived experiences, histories, and the cultural and traditional forces that shape their lives. Feminist critical discourse analysis provides a robust and insightful platform for such engagement, offering tools to interrogate the complex interplay of language, power, and ideology in sustaining gendered social structures. The central aim of feminist critical analysis is to examine patriarchal discourses, illuminate power relations, and promote the empowerment of women by strategically placing them in a position from which they can challenge oppression and assert agency (Lazar, 2007:145). Through this approach, women's voices, perspectives, and narratives are foregrounded, enabling a critical examination of the mechanisms that reproduce inequality while simultaneously fostering spaces for resistance, transformation, and social justice.

The African feminist discourse shares similarities with the feminist critical discourse discussed above; however, it places particular emphasis on the experiences, histories, and struggles of African women, considering their specific cultural and traditional contexts (Guy-Sheftall, 2003:32). This approach prioritizes an understanding of the ways in which African women navigate social, political, and economic structures while contending with the legacies of colonialism, patriarchy, and indigenous customs. Furthermore, as Davies and Graves (1986:10) note, African feminist discourse seeks to articulate the unique needs, perspectives, and aspirations of African women, highlighting both the oppressive mechanisms they confront and the strategies they employ to assert agency and effect change. By centring African women's lived realities, this discourse provides a critical framework for analysing gendered power relations that are deeply embedded in local traditions, social hierarchies, and cultural norms, offering both theoretical and practical tools for empowerment and social transformation:

> …recognises a common struggle with African men for the removal of the yokes of foreign domination and European/American exploitation. It is not antagonistic to African men but challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspects of woman's subjugation which differ from the generalized oppression of all African peoples…[it] recognizes that certain inequalities and limitations existed/exist in traditional societies and that colonialism reinforced them and introduced others…

African feminist discourse analysis as defined by Davies and Graves (1986:10) acknowledges Western views on the feminist discourse but offers a more African exclusive discourse. One that

highlights African women attributes to reflect their needs and goals. It explores African societies and their behaviours towards women. “It respects African woman’s self-reliance and the penchant for cooperative work and social organizations” (Davies and Graves, 2003:11). Most importantly, African feminist discourse analysis recognises that African women of different societies are faced with many issues, such as race, class and sex oppression therefore they are not only battling a single issue. This forces African women to be in one accord in order to overcome these battles.

1.10. Definitions

1.10.1. Ukuhlonipha

According to Ntsimane (2007:115), “A custom of deference, male and female youths and married women avoided male elders as means of respect and homage.” *Ukuhlonipha*, fundamentally a code of respect, has historically structured and, in some communities, continues to shape social interactions and daily life across many African societies. Ntsimane (2007:116) notes that *ukuhlonipha* predominantly applies to women and children, emphasizing the gendered dimension of this cultural practice. He further explains that “the *ukuhlonipha* code demanded especially of women to show respect to certain men in their behaviour, speech and general conduct, particularly in performing certain rituals of avoidance” (Ntsimane, 2007:116). While the practice of *ukuhlonipha* is observed across amaXhosa society, its enforcement is markedly stricter for women, particularly married women, who are expected to adhere rigorously to these codes in order to demonstrate deference and maintain social harmony. This highlights the gendered asymmetries embedded in cultural norms, illustrating how traditional practices, while ostensibly promoting respect, can simultaneously reinforce patriarchal authority and constrain women’s autonomy.

Irvine and Gunner (2018:174) concur with the above by Ntsimane (2007) and give a further definition of the term. They break it down to *hlonipha* as the noun stem of the word meaning respect or a respectful behaviour in speech and action in isiXhosa and isiZulu (Irvine and Gunner, 2018:174). They further argue that *hlonipha* includes a variety of components to it, such as language, bodily posture, comportment, food, and clothing. *Ukuhlonipha* defined by Rudwick and Shange (2006:474) is a social custom amongst Africans that entails an entire value system based on certain social variables that include language. In closing, Dowling (1982:2) states that there is a language aspect to *ukuhlonipha*, which is referred to as *isihlonipho*. She defines *isihlonipho* as “a language in which syllables occurring in the names of menfolk are avoided” (Dowling, 1982:2).

Fandrych (2012:67) concurs with Dowling by stating that language use is significant in African societies as it influences the attitudes of a society.

1.10.2. Ukuzila

It is essential to define *ukuzila*, as this practice functions within the broader framework of *isihlonipho*. *Ukuzila* refers to "respect shown by avoiding physical or eye contact to certain people and by not addressing them, or by avoiding certain actions, places and words" (Ntsimane, 2007:118). Ngubane (2000:46) further describes it as the act of "showing respect by avoidance." While *ukuzila* primarily functions as a form of deference and social respect, it is not merely a general social practice; it can also serve as a structured mourning ritual in certain Nguni societies, observed after the death of a family member. This dual function of *ukuzila* as both a mechanism of everyday social regulation and a ritualized practice illustrates the interplay between cultural norms, social hierarchy, and gendered expectations. Among amaXhosa and other Nguni communities, women are often required to practice *ukuzila* more rigorously, reflecting the broader pattern in which cultural prescriptions disproportionately govern female behaviour, thereby reinforcing patriarchal social structures while simultaneously affirming communal values of respect and propriety.

Ngubane (2021:1) directly translates the term as to abstain or refrain. He states that for a widow the practice in Nguni societies can be defined as spousal mourning. This period of mourning for wives begins immediately after the confirmation of their husband's death and the practice is conducted to, "honour the deceased, secondly, to show respect to the ancestors; and thirdly, to preserve custom" (Ngubane, 2021:1). He further explains how the process unfolds as stated below taken from his LLM thesis (2021:1):

> First the widow is expected to sit on a mattress and is restricted from making movements in and outside the yard until after the burial. During this period, only married women sit with the widow who must be covered with a blanket. The second phase is marked by a widow wearing a black garment as a sign of mourning. The wearing of inzilo – a black garment is a process that takes the form of the external expression of mourning. The purpose of wearing black mourning clothes is for widows to be distinguishable, preventing men from approaching them for sexual relationships. The last phase of ukuzila is generally known as purification or cleansing. The widow is expected to bathe in cold water mixed with various

traditional herbs.

The foregoing discussion is particularly significant as it highlights the intensity and rigor with which the practice of *ukuzila* is imposed on women. In contrast, the ritual is relatively lenient for widowed husbands, who are expected to mourn privately and internally, without adhering to formal restrictions or outward displays of grief. Ngubane (2021:2) notes that no specific prohibitions are imposed on widowers, allowing them to continue with daily life largely unaltered. Magudu (2004:141) examines the practice of *ukuzila* among widowed women during the mourning period, emphasizing that widows are required to observe prescribed behaviours and rituals in order to demonstrate respect for their deceased husbands and their in-laws. This gendered distinction underscores the unequal social expectations surrounding grief and propriety, revealing how cultural norms differentially regulate male and female behaviour. In this study, both forms of *ukuzila* the general practice and the widow-specific mourning ritual will be examined, with particular attention to their implications for women's agency, social positioning, and the broader dynamics of gendered cultural practices within amaXhosa society.

1.10.3. Culture

Culture can be broadly defined as "the total product of a people's 'being' and 'consciousness' which emerges from their grappling with nature and living with other human beings in a collective group" (Jadezweni, 2013:78). In essence, it encompasses the ways in which a society organizes itself, socializes its members, and sustains communal life. Kolawole (1998:11) further emphasizes that culture represents both the collective and individual expressions of a society, reflecting the values, norms, and practices through which people articulate their identities. Other scholars expand on this understanding by describing culture as "intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development, a particular way of life of a group or historical period or texts and practices which people produce meaning" (Williams, 1983:10). Similarly, Gill (2013:71) characterizes culture as "a system of knowledge, beliefs, procedures, attitudes, and artefacts that is shared within a group." Collectively, these definitions highlight culture as a dynamic, multifaceted construct that not only informs social behaviour and interaction but also provides the framework through which communities create meaning, maintain continuity, and negotiate change over time.

According to the definitions discussed above, the society and community in which an individual grows up and socializes play a fundamental role in shaping behaviour, beliefs, and social interactions.

While culture is a complex and multifaceted concept, all definitions consistently emphasize the sharing of ideologies, norms, and practices within a group. Jadezweni (2013:77) contends that culture can be manipulated to serve particular individualistic or group agendas, a phenomenon evident in many African societies, including among the amaXhosa, where certain cultural practices are co-opted to reinforce patriarchal interests. Such manipulation has significant social consequences, as these patriarchal principles are often accepted as authentic cultural norms, leading to uncritical adherence and perpetuation. As Jadezweni (2013:78) observes, "It is common knowledge that many women do not wish to change the harmful traditional beliefs because they desire to maintain the status quo." Consequently, many women remain silent in the face of oppressive practices and, in some cases, actively transmit these patriarchal norms to other women, particularly through intergenerational socialization, as elderly women impose the same expectations and restrictions on younger women. This cyclical reinforcement of gendered power structures highlights the complex interplay between culture, patriarchy, and social conformity.

"Culture as an entity, can be described as a vehicle that conveys amongst other factors the customs, traditional practices, ethos, ethnicity and way of life of that cultural group" (Mdluli, 2013:35). Thus, culture can be defined as the beliefs and values that govern the way of life of a society. Culture is socially constructed, therefore can be manipulated to benefit either party that wants to overpower the other. Herskovits (1948:17) attests to this and all that is echoed above by stating that:

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

According to Herskovits (1948:17), culture establishes the framework for the co-existence and cohesion of a community or society. An individual does not exist in isolation; rather, their identity and social existence are fundamentally intertwined with those of others. The ways in which people

conduct themselves, dress, eat, and engage in various interests are largely shared within the community, forming the basis of collective norms and expectations. Within this context, deviation from established cultural norms is often limited, as conformity is essential to maintaining social harmony and continuity. However, it is important to recognize that all shared beliefs, values, and practices are human constructs, shaped over time by social interactions and historical contingencies. As such, these cultural norms are not immutable and can be altered, challenged, or reinterpreted to reflect changing societal needs, individual agency, and evolving ethical considerations. This understanding opens space for critically examining how culture can both constrain and empower individuals within society, particularly in the context of gendered expectations and power dynamics.

Williams (1983:32) provides a transformative understanding of culture, asserting that culture is not a fixed or stagnant entity but evolves in tandem with societal development. Consequently, societies should adapt to changing circumstances, and this dynamic process should be reflected in literary texts, which often both depict reality and serve as a guide for shaping it. In light of modernisation, Jadezweni (2013:79) argues that enlightened women have a critical role to play in liberating those who remain bound by patriarchal cultural norms. He further emphasizes that if women fail to recognize and act upon the urgent need to transform these entrenched patriarchal structures, "they will be active moulders of society instead of being passive suffering victims" (Jadezweni, 2013:79). This perspective underscores the potential of literature not only as a mirror of social realities but also as an instrument for promoting cultural critique, gender equity, and the empowerment of women to actively shape and transform the societal frameworks in which they live.

1.10.4. Tradition

Tradition is closely intertwined with culture, functioning as the mechanism through which cultural knowledge, practices, and beliefs are transmitted across generations. It is defined as "the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation; it is a long-established custom or belief that has been passed from one generation to another" (Weiner and Simpson Oxford Dictionary cited in Maluleke, 2012:428). The term tradition is derived from the Latin root meaning "to hand over" (Graburn, 2001:6), reflecting its role in the intergenerational continuity of social practices. Graburn (2001:6) further observes that, historically, this handover occurred in a largely unconscious and natural manner, as older members of society transmitted customs, norms, and beliefs not as formal instruction but as embedded elements of everyday life. Tradition, therefore, was not only a means of

preserving cultural identity but also a framework for maintaining societal cohesion. As Graburn (2001:6) notes, “Tradition was the name given to those cultural features which, in situations of change, were to be continued to be handed on, thought about, preserved and not lost.” This perspective underscores the dual nature of tradition as both a stabilizing force and a potential site for negotiation, adaptation, or contestation, particularly when cultural practices intersect with issues of gender, power, and social transformation.

Linnekin (1983:242) conceptualizes tradition as inherently connected to the past while simultaneously emphasizing its fluidity, arguing that its content should be redefined and adapted by each generation to reflect the evolving beliefs, norms, and attitudes of society. This perspective positions tradition not as a static repository of customs but as a dynamic framework that can accommodate societal transformation. Linnekin’s view is particularly significant in the context of African societies, where rigid adherence to cultural and traditional norms has often perpetuated patriarchal ideologies. By embracing the fluidity of tradition, societies have the potential to reinterpret and modify customs in ways that challenge gendered hierarchies, promote equity, and facilitate cultural evolution. Such an approach enables both culture and tradition to serve as instruments of social progress rather than as mechanisms for maintaining oppressive structures, offering a pathway for addressing entrenched inequalities while preserving the continuity and relevance of communal practices.

1.10.5. Patriarchy

Facio (2013:1) observes that during the imperial period, patriarchy was commonly described as a form of political organization characterized by an uneven distribution of power between men and women, positioning women at the bottom of this hierarchy. He further contends that this narrow, structural definition no longer fully captures the scope of patriarchy, as contemporary feminist thought understands it to be far more pervasive and multifaceted. Over the centuries, patriarchy has increasingly been conceptualized as “an unjust social system that subordinates, discriminates or is oppressive to women” (Facio, 2013:1). This broader understanding encompasses not only formal political and legal structures but also cultural, economic, and social practices that reinforce male dominance and constrain women’s agency. By recognizing patriarchy as a complex and systemic phenomenon, scholars and activists are better equipped to analyse, critique, and challenge the myriad ways in which gendered power imbalances are maintained across societies and historical contexts.

Johnson-Latham (2005:1) agrees with Facio (2013:1) and adds that in this unjust social system of social structures and practices, men exploit women. To upkeep power and authority over women, men use violent means, and these range from verbal violence, manipulation, psychological, economic to physical or sexual violence (Johnson-Latham, 2005:1).

Becker (1999:24) encapsulates the above definitions of patriarchy succinctly, asserting that "patriarchy is a social system that is male-defined, male-controlled, male-centred with inevitable value placed on masculinity and masculine traits over femininity and feminine traits" (Becker, 1999:24). This definition underscores that patriarchy is not merely a political or economic structure but a comprehensive social system in which male dominance permeates cultural, social, and institutional spheres. Essentially, patriarchy manifests as the systematic subordination of women, justified through cultural and traditional norms as well as perceived physical and biological differences between men and women. By privileging masculine traits and authority, this system maintains power imbalances that shape societal expectations, restrict women's agency, and reinforce gendered hierarchies across generations. Understanding patriarchy in this holistic manner is critical for analysing how socialization, culture, and tradition intersect to perpetuate inequality and limit women's participation and empowerment within society.

Patriarchy is defined as the "rule by the head of a social unit" (Kwatsha, 2009:129). Fundamentally, it represents the concentration of social, political, and economic power in the hands of men, enabling them to dominate women and children within society. Kwatsha (2009:129) further elaborates that patriarchy constitutes "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women," highlighting its structural and systemic dimensions. This conceptualization closely aligns with the notion of hegemony, in which an individual or group asserts and maintains supremacy over an inferior group or individual, often through the normalization of power relations and societal consent. Understanding patriarchy in this manner emphasizes the intersection of power, culture, and social organization, illustrating how gendered hierarchies are maintained and legitimized across generations and within various social institutions.

In many African societies, men, as the dominant social group, often utilize culture and tradition as mechanisms to suppress and control women. Within these hierarchical structures, men are positioned at the apex and are socially constructed as possessing superior physical, emotional, financial, and psychological strength compared to women. Consequently, they assume authority over virtually all

spheres of life, including political, economic, familial, and cultural domains. Women, on the other hand, are frequently characterized as weak, emotional, nurturing, and domesticated, a framing that casts them as inherently unsuited for leadership or positions of power. This socially sanctioned division of roles not only reinforces patriarchal dominance but also legitimizes the exclusion of women from decision-making processes, perpetuating systemic inequalities and constraining women's agency. Moreover, such gendered assumptions are often internalized by women themselves, creating intergenerational cycles of compliance that further entrench patriarchal norms within African societies.

In Xhosa society, as is common in many African contexts, a woman traditionally leaves her biological family upon marriage, whereas a man remains within his natal home and is regarded as the one who continues the family lineage. This practice reflects broader patriarchal norms that prioritize male continuity and inheritance while positioning women as transient members of their marital families. Mndende (2021:206) supports this perspective in her discussion of the amaXhosa customary law of succession, explaining that:

> As the Xhosa society is patriarchal…It is the female who leaves her biological home and gets married somewhere to another clan. It is therefore the male child who must remain home to keep the tradition and the genealogy alive. It is the child born of a married woman who is considered a successor of his father. To be a successor implies being the custodian of the father's inheritance and keeping the blood genealogy of the clan going…Since the main reason for having the firstborn male as a successor is to keep the bloodline, the same cannot follow with the woman's [unmarried] children.

1.10.6. Feminism

Mdluli (2013:33) observes that feminism is a framework through which women assertively advocate for the protection and promotion of women's rights and the attainment of gender equality. She further defines feminism as "a movement that serves as an emancipator of women from the bondage of gender inequality" (Mdluli, 2013:34), emphasizing its transformative and liberatory dimensions. Building on this perspective, and applying Nkumane's (1999:19) description, feminism can be understood as a critical and dynamic approach that not only challenges existing structures of male dominance and systemic oppression but also seeks to empower women to participate fully and

equitably in social, political, and economic spheres. This conceptualization underscores feminism's dual role as both a theoretical framework for analysing gendered power relations and a practical movement aimed at promoting social justice, autonomy, and the dismantling of patriarchal barriers:

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

According to Nkumane (1999:19), feminism can be understood as a movement dedicated to achieving gender equality by challenging and transforming the ways in which patriarchal societies view and treat women. This perspective emphasizes that feminism is not merely concerned with addressing the symptoms of inequality, but with dismantling the underlying structures and ideologies that perpetuate women's subordination. Central to this approach is the advocacy for women to be recognized and represented as equals to men within all spheres of society, rather than being portrayed as passive victims or inherently inferior. Furthermore, feminism is committed to confronting and eradicating patriarchal doctrines, questioning traditional norms and cultural practices that reinforce gendered hierarchies, and promoting social, political, and economic empowerment for women. Through these efforts, feminism operates as both a theoretical framework and a practical movement aimed at fostering equity, justice, and the full realization of women's agency in society.

According to Mdluli (2013:45), "Feminism initially came into being as a political movement established to liberate women from the patriarchal social spheres." Beyond its origins as a political movement, feminism functions as an epistemology within women's movements, providing a critical framework for examining the treatment of women in society and advocating for the eradication of gender-based injustices. It interrogates the systemic, cultural, and institutional mechanisms that perpetuate inequality, aiming not only to challenge oppression but also to create conditions for women's full social, economic, and political participation. Mannathoko, cited in Meena (1999:71), further defines feminist theory as:

> Feminists question and challenge the origins of oppressive gender relations and attempt to develop a variety of strategies that might change these relations for the

> better. All feminism pivots around the recognition of existing women's oppression and addresses the prevailing unjust and discriminatory gender relations. Feminism does not just deal with the issues of justice and equality but also offers a critique of male-dominated institutions, values, and social practices that are oppressive and destructive.

Therefore, feminism can be understood as a movement dedicated to identifying, challenging, and ultimately eliminating all forms of gender-based disparities. It critically recognizes the social, cultural, economic, and political injustices that women face and rigorously examines the structures and practices through which these inequalities are maintained, including societal norms, literature, and other cultural expressions. By interrogating these systems, feminism seeks to develop strategies and solutions to address and dismantle gendered oppression, thereby promoting the empowerment, agency, and emancipation of women. In doing so, it not only advocates for equality but also encourages transformative social change, fostering environments in which women can exercise their rights, participate fully in society, and contribute to shaping cultural and institutional frameworks that are equitable and just.

It is important to recognize that not all women identify as feminists or fully understand the principles of the feminist movement, and not all women actively support the advocacy of women's emancipation and gender equality. Some women function as agents of male hegemony, meaning that they uphold and enforce patriarchal practices and ideologies, often perpetuating the subordination and marginalization of other women. Conversely, there are men who align themselves with feminist discourse, working in solidarity with women to challenge gendered inequalities and support the advancement of social justice. However, many men remain opposed to feminism, often due to misunderstandings or misconceptions about the movement. Some perceive feminism as a threat to male authority and traditional power structures, others believe that feminists harbour hostility toward men, and still others lack sufficient knowledge of the concept, resulting in resistance or antagonism. This complexity highlights that the struggle for gender equality involves a nuanced interplay of support and opposition across both genders, shaped by cultural, social, and ideological factors.

1.10.7. African Feminisms

Goredema (2010:33) defines African feminisms as a conceptual framework that enables African women to construct, assert, and sustain their identities both within the continent and in the broader

academic and intellectual spheres. She further elaborates that "African feminism is a feminist epistemology and a form of rhetoric that has provided arguments, which validate the experience of women of Africa and of African origin against a mainstream discourse" (Goredema, 2010:33). This understanding positions African feminism not only as a theoretical lens but also as a critical and emancipatory practice that foregrounds the lived realities, histories, and struggles of African women. By challenging dominant, often Western-centric feminist paradigms, African feminisms seek to articulate culturally relevant responses to gendered oppression, emphasizing the importance of context, indigenous knowledge systems, and the specific social, political, and economic conditions that shape African women's experiences. Consequently, African feminism operates both as a mode of critique and as a strategy for empowerment, enabling women to reclaim agency, assert their voices, and participate fully in shaping societal and academic discourses.

African feminisms emphasize the distinctions between African and Western women, particularly highlighting the unique triple-layered challenges which are gender, race, and class that African women encounter. This perspective acknowledges that African societies are predominantly family- and community-oriented, encompassing not only blood relations but also extended communal networks. Consequently, African feminisms are inclusive, addressing the needs and experiences of all African women, while not positioning men as adversaries solely because of gender inequalities. Instead, the movement seeks to advocate for the full inclusion of women in all spheres of social, political, economic, and cultural life and to promote the emancipation of African women from entrenched patriarchal systems. By situating the struggle for gender equality within the broader social, racial, and communal context, African feminisms provide a culturally relevant and holistic framework for understanding women's oppression, resilience, and agency within African societies.

Goredema (2010:35) contends that African feminisms emerge in relation to the distinct political eras that have shaped the continent, including the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods. She further notes that "these eras are dissimilar across African countries because the histories of the liberation struggles are different for each country. The result of this is that the definitions and experiences of feminism are different from region to region within Africa" (Goredema, 2010:35). This observation is particularly salient when considering the South African context, where Black men and women endured the unique oppression of the apartheid regime, a system of racialized subjugation that was specific to South Africa and did not occur elsewhere on the continent.

Consequently, the experiences of subordination, resistance, and the struggle for emancipation among South African Black populations differ from those of African women in other countries, illustrating the importance of situating African feminisms within the specific historical, political, and social contexts in which they develop. This contextualization underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of African feminist theory as both diverse and regionally specific, reflecting the particular challenges, cultural frameworks, and historical legacies that shape women's lives across the continent.

With the above-mentioned in mind, Africans still have other similar experiences as their cultures and traditions hold similar traits. Therefore, an umbrella term to alleviate the basic common factors that abuse, exploit, oppress and suppress women from across the continent is fundamental. Breaking the general African gender injustices, would make it easier to tackle the diverse regional and societal injustices.

Therefore, it is complex for Africa to have a single African feminist fashion. Atanga, Sibonile, Litosseliti, et al. (2013:305) attests and state that several feminisms can be identified in Africa. All African feminisms distinguish themselves from Western feminism. African feminisms acknowledge that Africans are guided by culture and tradition and are proud of the cultural diversity within the African continent. However, African feminisms argue that culture and tradition should not infringe on basic human rights and should not subjugate others. Culture and tradition should be able to adapt to modernity to accommodate the present era.

According to Oyewumi (2005:32), "African feminisms do not focus only on juxtaposing male dominance with female subordination or on fighting battles with men." Instead, the emphasis is placed on broader issues of empowerment, social and economic betterment, education, and the advancement of women within the context of the African continent. This perspective underscores that African feminisms are concerned with creating opportunities, fostering agency, and enhancing the capacity of women to contribute meaningfully to societal development. Mama (2001:6) further elaborates that African feminisms involve challenging and transforming the status quo, actively deviating from unjust norms, and promoting structural and cultural change that dismantles systems of oppression. In this sense, African feminisms operate not merely as a critique of male dominance but as a proactive framework for the holistic development and emancipation of women, advocating for their inclusion in all spheres of life while simultaneously seeking to improve the collective

wellbeing and progress of African societies.

Molubo (2020:33) observes that African feminisms are inherently inclusive, rejecting adversarial approaches that position men as enemies. Instead, they emphasize collaboration, encouraging both men and women to work together in addressing social inequalities and promoting gender equity. This perspective reflects a holistic understanding of empowerment, wherein transformative change is achieved through collective engagement rather than confrontation. Arndt (2002:32) further elaborates on African feminisms, highlighting their role in articulating culturally specific feminist perspectives that address the historical, social, and political realities of African women. By situating African feminisms within local contexts, scholars underscore the importance of cooperation, community-oriented solutions, and the inclusion of both genders in efforts to dismantle patriarchal structures and advance societal development. Consequently, African feminisms operate not merely as a critique of male dominance but as a framework for collective empowerment, social justice, and sustainable transformation across African societies as Arndt (2002:32) accounts:

> African feminisms get to the bottom of African gender relations and the problems of African women – illuminating their causes and consequences – and criticises them. It aims at discussing gender roles in the context of other oppressive mechanisms such as racism, neo-colonialism, (cultural) imperialism, socio-economic exclusion and exploitation gerontocracy, religious fundamentalism as well as dictational and/or corrupt systems.

In essence, African feminisms prioritize the specific challenges and experiences of African women, seeking to understand and address the structural, social, and cultural factors that contribute to their marginalization. They critically assess both progress and shortcomings in the pursuit of gender equity, recognizing that gender is only one of several intersecting factors alongside race, class, ethnicity, and historical context that shape women's lived experiences. African feminisms thus adopt an intersectional and context-sensitive approach, identifying systemic inequalities and proposing culturally relevant solutions aimed at redressing imbalances. By addressing these multifaceted issues, African feminisms not only advocate for the empowerment and emancipation of women but also promote broader societal transformation, fostering more equitable and inclusive communities where both men and women can participate fully and meaningfully.

Mama, in Essof (2001:124) notes that there are women who are Africans that are reluctant to call

themselves feminists or be associated with the term. This is because of reasons already mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, that these women associate the term with the Western phenomenon. They allude that they advocate for women emancipation and equality. However, they refuse to define their quest as a feministic one. These women claim that "feminism is not African and thus has no relevance to Africa's political, social and economic realities" (Essof, 2001:124).

A second school of African thought acknowledges the principles of feminism but frames them according to the concept of the African woman. Proponents of this perspective argue for the necessity of renaming the movement, while retaining the core ideologies of gender equality, empowerment, and social justice. The key distinction of this approach lies in its exclusive focus on the lived experiences, histories, and agency of African women, situating their struggles and aspirations within culturally and historically specific contexts. By doing so, this school of thought emphasizes the importance of contextualizing feminist discourse in ways that are relevant and meaningful to African women, ensuring that their voices, perspectives, and contributions are centred. This approach not only preserves the transformative goals of feminism but also aligns them with the unique social, political, and cultural realities faced by women across the African continent, thereby fostering empowerment that is both locally grounded and globally resonant.

The third school of thought, as discussed by Essof (2001:125), consists of scholars who advocate for the adoption of the term feminism while simultaneously authenticating it to reflect African realities. This approach integrates various African feminist ideologies under the term African feminisms, emphasizing the importance of contextualizing feminist thought to align with local histories, cultures, and social conditions. African feminism, according to Essof (2001:125), "guards against the cultural hegemony of Western approaches and ensures that what is local and context-specific vitally informs gender analysis, feminist practice and organisational development in Africa." By situating feminism within African sociocultural frameworks, this school of thought challenges the universalization of Western feminist paradigms and prioritizes the experiences, needs, and agency of African women. In doing so, African feminism becomes both a critique of externally imposed norms and a transformative tool for advancing gender equity, empowerment, and social justice in ways that are relevant and sustainable within the African context.

1.10.8. Gender

Kwatsha (2009:128) explains that the term gender is employed to denote the social, cultural, and

psychological dimensions of masculinity and femininity. In this sense, gender extends beyond mere biological distinctions to encompass the expectations, behaviours, and roles that societies construct based on an individual's perceived physical attributes and societal appearance. Pitcher and Wheelehan (2000:56) note that the concept of gender gained prominence during the 1970s, reflecting a growing academic and social interest in distinguishing socially constructed roles from biological sex. They further clarify that gender is closely linked to the differences between men and women, as traditionally defined by biological sex characteristics, but also encompasses the norms, behaviours, and expectations assigned to individuals within specific cultural and social contexts (Pitcher & Wheelehan, 2004:56). Thus, understanding gender requires an analysis of both the biological and socio-cultural dimensions that shape identity, behaviour, and societal roles, highlighting its significance in discussions of power, inequality, and social organization.

"Gender is also known as the amount of masculinity and femininity found in a person" (Kwatsha, 2009:128). Gender is used to highlight differences between men and women and as a result creates inequalities between the two sexes. Thus, the two sexes are unable to participate in the general aspect of society equally. Kwatsha (2009:128) notes that:

> Gender means the socially, defined capacities and attributes assigned to persons on the basis of sexual characteristics. People make gender attributions; they decide whether someone is male or female when they see them. These gender attributions form the foundation for understanding other components of gender such as gender roles (behaving like a female or male) and gender identity (feeling like a female or male).

From the discussion above, it is evident that gender constructions, like culture, are socially created and maintained, and as such, they can be manipulated to serve individual or collective interests. These constructions often impose rigid categories that fail to account for the complex and varied realities of human identity. For instance, an individual may be born with biological characteristics typically associated with males, yet exhibit traits, behaviours, or inclinations commonly associated with females, and consequently feel more aligned with a female identity. However, because of socially enforced gender norms and expectations, individuals frequently face constraints that prevent them from living authentically and openly. Such rigid constructions of gender not only limit personal freedom and self-expression but also perpetuate systemic inequities, as societal institutions and

cultural practices reinforce conformity and marginalize those who deviate from prescribed gender roles. Recognizing the fluidity and socially constructed nature of gender is therefore crucial for creating inclusive and equitable spaces in which all individuals can exercise agency and achieve a sense of belonging.

Sex is distinct from gender and should not be used interchangeably with it, as the two concepts operate on different planes. While sex pertains to the biological and physical characteristics that define males and females, gender refers to the social, cultural, and psychological constructions built around these biological differences. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:153) defines sex as relating to "the physical, biological components of masculinity and femininity," highlighting its basis in anatomy and physiology rather than in social or cultural norms. Although gender constructions are informed by biological sex, they extend far beyond it, encompassing the roles, behaviours, expectations, and power relations that societies assign to individuals. Therefore, it is essential to distinguish between sex and gender in analysis and discourse, as conflating the two can obscure the social processes that shape identity, restrict individual agency, and perpetuate systemic inequalities. Recognizing this distinction is particularly important in studies of patriarchy, culture, and feminist theory, where understanding the social construction of gender is central to analysing oppression and advocating for equity.

1.10.9. *Ukuthwala*

Ukuthwala is defined as "a preliminary procedure for a customary marriage where the young man forcibly takes an underage girl to be his wife" (Machaka, 2019:6). This practice typically occurs when a man identifies a young woman, often a minor, and takes her sometimes without her knowledge or consent. Following the abduction, the suitor reports the action to his elders, who are then tasked with informing the girl's family about the situation. The elders communicate to the girl's family that their son is interested in marrying their daughter and has taken her accordingly. Subsequently, representatives from both families engage in negotiations on behalf of the couple, discussing the terms and arrangements of the prospective marriage. While *ukuthwala* is rooted in certain customary practices, it raises significant ethical, legal, and human rights concerns, particularly regarding the autonomy, consent, and well-being of the young women involved, as well as the perpetuation of gendered power imbalances within traditional marital structures.

Wadesango, Rembe, and Chabaya (2011:121) observe that *ukuthwala* was originally practiced by

the amaXhosa in South Africa, although it has since been adopted by other ethnic groups, including the amaZulu. The term *ukuthwala*, derived from isiXhosa, literally means "to carry," reflecting the act of physically taking a woman or girl as part of the practice. Ndindwa (2014:18) further describes it as "a culturally legitimated abduction of a woman preliminary to a custom marriage." Importantly, *ukuthwala* should not be conflated with customary marriage itself; rather, it constitutes the act of seizing a woman or girl with the explicit intention of marrying her. While embedded in certain cultural traditions, the practice raises profound ethical, legal, and human rights concerns, particularly regarding consent, agency, and the reinforcement of patriarchal authority over women. As such, it remains a contentious and heavily debated aspect of South African customary practices, reflecting broader societal tensions between tradition, gendered power structures, and contemporary human rights standards.

In customary marriages, the involvement of both the bride's and groom's families are central, as they play a critical role in arranging the marriage and negotiating key matters, such as *lobola* (bride price) and other relevant cultural obligations prior to the wedding. Ndindwa (2014:18) notes that the principal objective of *ukuthwala* is to compel the girl's family to engage in negotiations that will formalize a customary marriage. Traditionally, the girl who is the subject of *ukuthwala* is expected to consent to the marriage, but she may outwardly behave as though she is reluctant in order to preserve her maiden identity and social propriety. In this way, the girl performs a form of symbolic resistance, ostensibly opposing the abduction, while implicitly adhering to the expectations of the customary marriage process. This ritualized display of reluctance reflects the complex interplay between individual agency, family authority, and cultural norms within the institution of customary marriage.

Ndindwa (2014:19) observes that there were several underlying reasons for the practice of *ukuthwala*, which she outlines in detail. These reasons reflect the complex social, cultural, and economic factors that historically shaped the practice and its acceptance within certain communities. They often include considerations related to family alliances, social status, economic arrangements, and the reinforcement of patriarchal norms. Understanding these motivations is essential for contextualizing the practice within its customary framework, while simultaneously allowing for critical analysis of its ethical and legal implications, particularly regarding the rights, agency, and well-being of the girls involved. By examining the rationale behind *ukuthwala*, scholars can better assess both its cultural significance and its contested position in contemporary South African society.

These are the several reasons outlined by Ndindwa (2014:19):

> To force the father of the girl to give consent.
>
> To avoid the expense of the wedding.
>
> To hasten the matter if the woman is pregnant.
>
> To persuade the woman of the seriousness of the suitor's intent.
>
> To avoid the need to pay immediate ilobolo where the suitor and his family were unable to afford the bride wealth.

All of the reasons outlined above predominantly serve the interests of the suitor rather than the girl involved. Even in instances where a girl consents to the practice, her safety and rights remain largely unprotected. In contemporary contexts, *ukuthwala* constitutes a severe violation of women's and girls' rights, often executed with extreme violence and coercion. Young girls, sometimes as young as thirteen, are abducted, compelled to leave school, and forced into marriages with significantly older men, frequently experiencing sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. Sloth-Nielson, cited in Ndindwa (2014:20-21), identifies three distinct forms of *ukuthwala*, each varying in procedure and severity, reflecting the complexity and adaptability of the practice across different contexts. These modern manifestations of *ukuthwala* highlight the urgent need for legal enforcement, community education, and cultural reform to protect girls from exploitation while critically examining the intersections of tradition, patriarchy, and gender-based violence in South African society.

In the first form of *ukuthwala*, the practice occurs with the knowledge and consent of the girl, involving collusion between her and the suitor. In such cases, the girl actively conspires with the suitor to facilitate the abduction. The apparent force employed during the act is largely symbolic, performed to adhere to customary expectations and ritualized procedures rather than to coerce the girl against her will. This form of *ukuthwala* reflects a negotiated and consensual engagement with cultural norms, distinguishing it from more coercive or non-consensual practices. Nonetheless, even in this consensual form, the ritual underscores the complex interplay between individual agency, family authority, and traditional practices within the institution of customary marriage.

The second form of *ukuthwala* occurs when the families of the prospective bride and groom have reached an agreement regarding the marriage, yet the girl remains unaware of such arrangements. In this scenario, the girl's consent is not sought, although the union is sanctioned by her family,

reflecting a prioritization of familial and cultural interests over individual autonomy. The third form of *ukuthwala* is wholly non-consensual, taking place against the explicit will of the girl, with neither her consent nor that of her parents or guardians obtained prior to the abduction. This coercive form of the practice constitutes a direct violation of the girl's rights and agency, exposing her to potential physical, emotional, and sexual harm. Collectively, these forms of *ukuthwala* illustrate the varying degrees of consent and coercion inherent in the practice, highlighting the complex tensions between customary traditions, familial authority, and the protection of girls' rights in contemporary South African society.

In all the aforementioned forms of the *ukuthwala* practice, the consent of the girl's elders is a prerequisite for the suitor to eventually marry her. Should the parents or guardians of the girl or young woman withhold their consent, no customary marriage can take place, and the girl is expected to return to her family. Thus, the legitimacy of a customary marriage within this context is entirely contingent upon the approval of the elders. In the first two forms of the *ukuthwala* practice, some degree of willingness is present, either on the part of the girl herself or through prior negotiation with her parents or elders before the abduction occurs. In contrast, the third form of the practice involves no prior consultation or meeting between any of the parties, rendering it entirely non-consensual. This lack of consent not only poses significant harm to the girl, exposing her to potential physical, emotional, and social consequences, but also disrupts her family's sense of agency and security, thereby exacerbating the social and ethical concerns surrounding the practice.

1.10.10. Polygamy

Polygamy is defined by Mabaso, Malope and Simbayi (2018:1) as the practice of a man taking more than one wife. They further aver that the phenomenon is popular in Africa amongst many cultural societies. Amongst amaXhosa, the practice was very popular in the past, however amaXhosa no longer practice polygamy. Green (2003:116) attests to this statement by alluding that amaXhosa men could have more than one wife and the wives were ranked according to their arrival chronological order within the husband's homestead.

For amaXhosa men, polygamy was a sign of wealth, because a man could only have multiple wives if he was wealthy. Acquiring the wives meant that the man had to send cattle to the pursued woman's elders as lobola, he had to be able to build the wives their own houses within the homestead and provide for them and their children. Therefore, the man had to be wealthy in order to fulfil all these

materialistic duties. The families of the young women were also careful not to send off their daughters to marry into poor homes.

Mabaso, Malope and Simbayi (2018:1) aver that there are many factors that perpetuated the need for polygamy in African communities. “These include higher mortality rates of men, satisfaction of sexual desires, and the need to have as many children as desired” (Mabaso, Malope and Simbayi 2018:1). Men believe that they die before women and that the number of women in the world is higher than that of men. It is also believed that men are more sexually aroused than women, therefore, cannot be involved in a monogamous relationship. Cheating and extra-marital affairs are said to be a norm for men, while women are restricted to one partner and if they do deviate from this, they are shunned and defamed by society. The most popular factor that is used to justify polygamy is the need for men to expand their families and ensure that their family lineage continues even decades after their death. Therefore, having many wives means that they will have many children (boy children to be specific) who will continue with the family’s legacy.

Polygamy is said to also assist in families whereby the first wife is barren or does not produce any boy children. The second wife fulfils these duties and if she too cannot a third wife is taken and so the cycle continues. Other men engage in polygamy to hide their infidelity. For them, marrying these women instead of having affairs with them outside their marriage seems better. The marriage renders the infidelity legitimate. In some instances, men state spiritual reasons for engaging in polygamy. For instance, one would claim that their late brother appeared to them in a dream claiming that the alive brother takes a wife in their honour. Another would say it is to grow their father’s household, and so forth.

All the above factors are mere excuses to legitimise polygamy. They demonstrate that polygamy is more about the men than the women that are involved in the practice as not much is said about the women. Existing literature and television programmes about polygamy in the present era portray women in polygamous marriages in a negative light. Women in polygamous marriages in the present era are depicted as unhappy, lonely, neglected, jealous of the other wife/wives and carrying immense resentment. For some, the only solitude is that they are financially taken care of, while others are married to poor husbands therefore are not taken of financially.

Mkhize and Zondi (2015:19) observe that polygamy constitutes a complex and multifaceted social phenomenon, as it is intertwined with a range of legal, cultural, and religious considerations. They

further contend that the complexity arises from the ways in which these spheres; religion, culture, and law intersect, often producing conflicting perspectives that either endorse or critically challenge the practice. Religious doctrines may legitimize polygamous arrangements as morally or spiritually sanctioned, whereas cultural norms can simultaneously uphold traditional family structures while imposing social expectations on those involved. At the same time, legal frameworks may either recognize or restrict polygamous unions, creating further tension and debate. Consequently, the discourse surrounding polygamy reflects broader societal negotiations between tradition, morality, and regulatory governance, making it a topic of considerable scholarly and social significance.

Those who support polygamous marriage practices justify it as a way of conserving culture. Whereas those against it raise many issues pertaining to the demoralisation of women, illnesses all parties involved may contract due to sexual intercourse amongst other issues. Polygamy is also viewed as one of the ways in which patriarchy manifests itself. The notion that the man is superior therefore, can have as many wives as he desires yet women are barred from practicing polyandry in the South African indigenous cultural societies.

Mkhize and Zondi (2015:125) state that in many instances' women are not coerced to be part of a polygamous marriage, they agree on their accord. The first wife grants the husband permission to take a second wife and relatively all the other wives that follow. The other wives also enter the marriage fully aware that there is a first wife or other wives before them and that there is a possibility of more wives to join the union. According to Mkhize and Zondi (2015:126) polygamy is not only practiced in the rural areas and that women in the rural areas are not the only ones who enter polygamous marriages. Women in the urban areas also become part of polygamous marriages. Even the educated and independent women agree to such. Therefore, the practice cannot only be viewed as a financial or material gain for women.

1.10.11. Customary Marriage

For the purposes of this study, it is essential to define customary marriage specifically in the context of amaXhosa customary practices. This focus is necessary because the study centres on the culture and traditions of the amaXhosa people. However, reference is also made to broader African cultures and traditions, as there are shared principles and general similarities that transcend the diversity of the continent's cultural practices. While African cultures are remarkably diverse, many uphold common notions regarding marriage, social obligations, and familial consent, which provide a

comparative framework for understanding the specificities of amaXhosa customary marriage within the wider African context. Recognizing these similarities allows for both a culturally specific and a more generalized analysis, situating the study within a broader anthropological and sociocultural discourse.

In amaXhosa society, customary marriage extends beyond a mere matrimonial union between a man and a woman; it is a social institution that encompasses the families of both parties as well as the ancestors. Mbatyoti (2018:33) emphasizes that, within the amaXhosa context, customary marriage is fundamentally regarded as a family matter. She further observes that traditional marriages were historically guided by specific social and economic functions, including the formation of economic alliances, the establishment of families, and the expectation that women would perform domestic duties within the household (Mbatyoti, 2018:33). In essence, marriage served as a mechanism for consolidating alliances: the family of a young woman would negotiate her marriage to a prosperous family, thereby facilitating the transfer of cattle or other forms of wealth, which strengthened inter-family ties. Additionally, the family of the groom would benefit from the bride's labour within the homestead, highlighting the reciprocal social and economic functions embedded within the institution of customary marriage.

In the in-laws' homestead, the new bride is traditionally expected to perform all domestic chores. On occasion, she may receive assistance from her sisters-in-law; however, such support is voluntary and not obligatory. During traditional ceremonies, the wife assumes full responsibility for preparing and managing the household, often beginning her duties early in the morning to cater to the entire family. The rigid division of labour along gender lines within customary marriage reinforces significant gender inequalities. Mbatyoti (2018:26) observes that customary marriage inherently perpetuates gendered disparities, as its regulations systematically differentiate the roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives, often privileging the male partner and limiting the autonomy of the female partner.

Nonetheless, regardless of the often-unjust duties, principles, and behaviours that govern customary marriage, wives frequently demonstrate agency and resilience within these structures. Many women find ways to navigate or mitigate the constraints imposed upon them, asserting their autonomy and preserving their dignity despite systemic inequalities. As Mbatyoti (2018:26) notes, "Although women have to exist under these oppressive circumstances, they still maintain their inner power and

potential moral strength, and that can be regarded as an original point of power and resilience." This capacity to resist, adapt, and exercise moral and emotional strength highlights the dynamic ways in which women negotiate the limitations of customary marriage, transforming spaces of subordination into opportunities for empowerment and self-determination.

The experiences outlined above are clearly reflected in the literary texts examined in this study. The female protagonists endure significant suffering within their respective customary marriages, contending with issues such as infidelity, abandonment, abuse, and the dominance of patriarchal authority. In particular, Nongxaki faces bullying from her mother-in-law while simultaneously grappling with her husband's abandonment of both her and their daughter. Being unemployed and reliant on her husband's financial support, Nongxaki is placed in a precarious position; his withdrawal of contact and resources forces her to assume full responsibility for her child. Recognizing that the circumstances are beyond her control, she courageously undertakes a journey back to her aggrieved parents, demonstrating resilience and agency in reclaiming a sense of security and stability for herself and her daughter. This narrative underscores the complex interplay of vulnerability and empowerment experienced by women within the framework of customary marriage.

Nolasti is constantly battling issues of abuse, demeaning patriarchal egos, and bullying from her husband. She is illtreated by her sister wives and they blame all their misfortunes and their husband's brutality on *Nolasti*. Even her mother turns against her, stating that *Nolasti* is the cause of her own demise in marriage. *Nolasti*'s brother also agrees with their mother and as a result *Nolasti* faces this battle alone. However, *Nolasti* is determined to change her situation and the situations of many women into their favour. She is not afraid to stand up for herself. *Nolasti* bravely soldiers on through the negativity around her.

Nozinto also portrays resilience. She suffers abuse, issues of infidelity and abandonment. *Nozinto* is not given a chance to mourn her husband's death. She is not awarded the chance to bury her husband the way she wants to. She is bullied by her in-laws and by her friends. However, in the end, *Nozinto* is able to rise above even though she is arrested, she feels liberated as she no longer suffers through all the issues she was facing. Her emotional freedom comes at a price and that is having her arrested.

1.11. Conclusion

This chapter serves as an introduction to the topic under investigation, presenting the foundational

elements that guide the study. It outlines the purpose of the research, providing the background context that situates the study within broader social, cultural, and academic discourses. Additionally, the chapter articulates the specific aims and objectives of the study, as well as the problem statement that initially motivated the researcher's interest in the issue. Central to this chapter is the clarification of key concepts that underpin the study; these concepts are defined with precision to ensure conceptual clarity and to provide a consistent framework for the subsequent analysis. Furthermore, the chapter offers a brief overview of the structure of the study, summarizing the content and focus of each chapter, thereby orienting the reader to the logical progression and organization of the research. By providing this comprehensive introduction, the chapter establishes a clear foundation for understanding the significance, scope, and methodological approach of the study, ensuring that readers are well-prepared to engage with the analyses and discussions that follow.

The chapter further presented the theoretical framework that this study will employ in guiding its investigation. It introduced African feminisms as the overarching theoretical lens, encompassing the diverse principles and perspectives that inform the experiences and struggles of African women. The study also acknowledges that, within the broader discourse on African women's empowerment, certain movements and scholars' express discomfort with the term "feminism," opting instead to articulate similar principles under alternative conceptual labels. These alternative frameworks, while differing in terminology, share core objectives with African feminisms, including the pursuit of gender equality, the affirmation of women's agency, and the challenge of socio-cultural and structural inequalities that affect African women. By situating the study within this theoretical context, the research underscores both the relevance and adaptability of African feminisms as a framework for analysing the intersections of culture, tradition, and gender in contemporary African societies.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The primary objective of this chapter is to present the body of literature, theoretical expressions, and critical postulations that have informed the formulation of this research in relation to its title. The study's central aim is to examine the oppression, internalized inferiority, and abuse that women may experience from other women, who, whether consciously or unconsciously, perpetuate patriarchal ideologies and practices. This objective will be pursued through a critical analysis of selected isiXhosa dramas and novels. The literary and critical sources utilized in this study illuminate the ways in which patriarchal norms are reproduced and reinforced by women within African societies, with particular attention to the amaXhosa communities of the Eastern Cape. While previous studies have engaged with the selected literary texts, this research introduces a novel dimension by critically exploring how the authors depict women who strive for gender equality and social transformation, often encountering resistance from other women who act as gatekeepers of entrenched patriarchal structures. By examining these dynamics, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex intersections between gender, culture, and power within both literary representations and broader socio-cultural contexts.

This research does not claim that women are the primary perpetrators of patriarchal practices. Rather, it seeks to investigate the ways in which women are implicated in the continuation and reinforcement of these practices, whether consciously or unconsciously. The study also aims to explore strategies through which both men and women can collaborate to challenge and dismantle gender inequalities. In particular, it emphasizes the importance of fostering solidarity among women in the pursuit of gender equality, empowerment, and emancipation. By examining these dynamics, the research highlights the potential for collective action and mutual accountability in addressing patriarchal structures, while acknowledging that sustainable social transformation requires the active participation and cooperation of all members of society.

To achieve its objectives, the literature review that follows is organized into two distinct sections. The first section focuses specifically on South African literature, with particular attention to the amaXhosa of South Africa and the ways in which their traditional and cultural ideologies shape gender roles and expectations. The second section broadens the scope to include African literature more generally, examining both the similarities and differences across diverse African societies in

relation to cultural and traditional practices affecting women. By structuring the review in this manner, the study situates the experiences of amaXhosa women within a broader continental context, allowing for a comparative analysis that highlights shared challenges, cultural nuances, and the varied ways in which African societies construct and regulate gender relations.

2.2. South African Literature

The following assertions from various critical scholars provide corroborating evidence for the ideas advanced in this study. Within this context, Made (2019:146), in an article examining two isiXhosa literary texts, including *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*, contends that patriarchy is most prominently illustrated in this drama. She further argues that, historically, women in amaXhosa society were systematically silenced, and their silence was often interpreted as tacit compliance with their own oppression. Made extends this analysis to the contemporary context, noting that even in the twenty-first century, women and girls continue to experience subordination and marginalization. She emphasizes that unemployed and uneducated women, in particular, often feel compelled to exhibit obedience to their male partners, as men frequently occupy the position of sole economic providers. This observation highlights the enduring nature of patriarchal structures and underscores the intersection of gender, socioeconomic status, and power dynamics in sustaining women's vulnerability within both historical and modern contexts.

This study differs from the aforementioned works in that it emphasizes the importance of uniting women to recognize the ways in which culture and tradition have been manipulated to serve patriarchal interests. It seeks not only to critically examine these dynamics but also to explore strategies through which women can transform patriarchal traditions in ways that benefit both men and women, promoting equity and social cohesion. While Made (2019:147) acknowledges the societal impact of conflicts among women, her focus remains primarily on the injustices perpetrated by men against women, with the aim of "exposing the stereotypes that are misleading, making people believe that gender inequality is a given thing" (Made, 2019:147). In contrast, this study extends the analysis by highlighting how women themselves may, at times, unknowingly reinforce patriarchal structures, and by proposing avenues for collective empowerment and the reconstruction of cultural practices to foster gender equality.

Segalo (2015:73), on the other hand, examines the limited transformation that has occurred in South Africa over the years, from the pre-democratic era to the post-democratic period. She acknowledges

that the South African Constitution formally recognizes women as full citizens. “However, inequality still looms as women’s lived experiences continue to be minimally recognised” (Segalo, 2015:72). Despite legal and constitutional guarantees, women remain burdened by multiple and overlapping responsibilities; for example, they are often expected to manage their households entirely while simultaneously engaging in full-time employment. This dual burden not only heightens the complexity of women’s daily lives but also restricts their meaningful participation in both public and private spheres, which continue to be structured in ways that are largely unaccommodating and exclusionary. Segalo’s analysis underscores the persistent gap between formal equality enshrined in law and the lived realities of women, highlighting the need for structural and cultural reforms to achieve substantive gender equity.

Segalo (2015:72) focuses on the persistent gender inequalities faced by women in democratic South Africa, which are perpetuated by entrenched patriarchal systems. She underscores the limited transformation in gender relations, despite the presence of a democratic constitution that, on paper, guarantees the emancipation of women and equality for all, regardless of race, gender, or class. Segalo’s analysis highlights the gap between formal legal equality and the lived experiences of women, demonstrating that constitutional provisions alone are insufficient to dismantle deeply rooted social and cultural structures that continue to marginalize and disadvantage women in both public and private spheres.

Within this framework, Segalo (2015:73) contends that true democracy and genuine women’s emancipation cannot be fully realized so long as women continue to exist in what she metaphorically describes as a “crooked room,” where systemic injustices persist in undermining their visibility and agency. She elaborates that the public sphere itself is structurally “crooked,” as women are still largely confined to lower-level positions while men predominantly occupy positions of authority and influence. In instances where women do attain higher positions, they are frequently subjected to ridicule, suspicion, or the assumption that their achievements were attained through illegitimate or malicious means. Furthermore, Segalo (2015:73) highlights the compounded marginalization experienced by black women, who face discrimination on two fronts: first on the basis of race and secondly on the basis of gender. This dual oppression underscores the intersectional nature of inequality in South Africa, where race and gender converge to intensify women’s struggles for recognition, empowerment, and substantive equality.

As mentioned previously, Segalo (2015:74) attests that many women movements were established in the interest of women and to emancipate women, yet these movements remain silent in fighting patriarchy in both public and private spaces. These movements can be deemed as patriarchy enablers. Segalo (2015:75) argues that:

> On the one hand, women belong and are identified as members of the collective in the same way that men are. Nevertheless, there are always rules and regulations, not to mention perceptions and attitudes specific to women. This may be perceived as 'conditional belonging', where women are accepted as full citizens but with limited powers within the communities to which they belong.

This study does not centralise on gender inequalities in the public sphere created by patriarchy, but indirectly observes its consequences on how women treat each other and consequently oppress each other. This study tackles the traditional and cultural customs that are manipulated for patriarchal gain. The views expressed above by the two scholars engage briefly on the objectives of this research. However, Made (2019) concentrates hugely on the primary enforcers of patriarchy and Segalo (2015) evaluates the treatment of women in pre and post democratic South Africa and the changes or lack thereof made by the democratic constitution in the work space, education and other public spheres. This study examines the engendered oppression married and unmarried women are subjected to, inflicted upon them by other women such as senior women, sisters-in-law and so forth.

In light of the above discussion, it is important to consider Mtuze's (2011) novel *uDingezweni*, which provides a compelling literary illustration of the intersection between gender, patriarchy, and cultural expectations. In the novel, three brothers inherit their parents' homestead, and while all are married, only two of their wives are able to bear children without difficulty (Mtuze, 2011:2). The wife of the third brother, however, initially struggles with conception, and as a result, she is subjected to relentless ridicule and mockery from the other wives, who brand her as barren (Mtuze, 2011:3). Her health complications are disregarded, and instead she is personally blamed for her inability to conceive, reflecting a broader cultural tendency prevalent in many African societies where infertility is perceived solely as a woman's failure. In such contexts, little consideration is given to the possibility that infertility might stem from the husband, thereby placing the burden and stigma disproportionately on women. This representation underscores the gendered double standards surrounding reproduction, where a woman's worth is often measured by her ability to bear children,

and infertility is framed as a source of shame and social exclusion.

This plight reflects a broader struggle faced by many wives, as Magona (1990:5) argues that fertility is regarded as the most valuable gift a woman can offer, particularly within the institution of marriage. Within such cultural frameworks, an infertile woman is often deemed invaluable to society, which drastically reduces her prospects of marriage. Even in instances where she does marry, the union is frequently characterized by instability, mistreatment, or eventual dissolution. What is particularly striking, as portrayed in *uDingezweni*, is that the enforcers of these harsh standards and judgments are often other women, who reinforce patriarchal ideologies by stigmatizing and marginalizing those unable to conceive. This dynamic not only illustrates the internalization of patriarchal values but also reveals the complex ways in which women may become agents in perpetuating the very systems that oppress them. Such portrayals invite a critical reflection on how cultural expectations surrounding fertility sustain gender inequality and how solidarity among women is undermined by these imposed hierarchies.

The foregoing discussion illustrates one of the reasons Tau (2017:1) contends that women often act as custodians of patriarchy by emulating its oppressive practices, internalizing its abusive laws, and transmitting them to subsequent generations. In doing so, they inadvertently perpetuate the very structures that sustain their subordination. Tau further notes that the moment a woman deviates from patriarchal norms or resists the expectations imposed upon her, she risks being shunned and ostracized by society. This response reflects the extent to which patriarchal ideologies are normalized and policed within communities, not only by men but also by women who serve as gatekeepers of cultural conformity. In this regard, Tau (2015:1) emphasizes that:

> The standard women are wired to live up to is always beyond the woman and the identity of the woman herself, it is at the disloyalty of sameness, fairness, equivalence, equality. Instead, we continue to be the gatekeepers of patriarchy, we continue to 'correct and teach' women to 'act like a woman' so that one day they will be the classical 'woman' for men and never for herself.

Tau (2017:1) further asserts that women should cease elevating men and granting them disproportionate power, as this practice remains one of the primary forces sustaining patriarchy. While Tau's (2017) analysis offers a valuable critique, it does not sufficiently engage with the historical and socio-cultural processes through which these patriarchal systems emerged, nor does it

examine in detail how such systems have been transmitted across generations and normalized as fundamental by women within society. Moreover, her analysis overlooks the underlying social, cultural, and economic factors that contribute to women shunning one another, particularly within contexts where solidarity is undermined by competition, stigma, and internalized patriarchal values. Addressing these gaps is essential for a more comprehensive understanding of how patriarchal ideologies are preserved and why women often find themselves positioned both as subjects of oppression and as enforcers of its continuity.

On the contrary, Murray (2018:71) explores how women's behaviour and sexuality are under surveillance in society. In addition, she claims that many women in society are self-conscious and afraid of deviating from any form of patriarchal norm. Murray utilizes selected literary texts to portray how, "patriarchal disciplinary measures shape the experiences of female characters in service of an inherently unequal status quo" (Murray, 2018:71). She continues to say that the female characters in the texts explored are conscious of their gendered behaviour and sexuality. They are aware that should they deviate, they will be treated with prejudice and even rejected by society. According to Murray (2018:72) society dictates the way women should live their lives and how they should conduct themselves. She argues that when women do not comply, they are faced with disciplinary measures which ensure that patriarchal power structures are obeyed.

In one of the literary texts examined by Murray (2015:72), the female protagonist suffers sexual violation, yet society shifts the blame onto her, arguing that she should have exercised better judgment than to walk alone in a notoriously dangerous area. This victim-blaming narrative reflects a pervasive cultural tendency to hold women responsible for the violence inflicted upon them. A similar pattern emerges in Mothlabane's (1994) work, where Sigqibo, enraged by Nolasti's act of self-defence, physically assaults her. Instead of condemning the perpetrator, Nolasti's sister-wives, the priest, her mother, and the wider community collectively blame her, insisting that she provoked her husband into the violent outburst. Such portrayals highlight the entrenched normalization of gender-based violence within patriarchal societies, where women are not only denied protection but are further silenced and marginalized through communal complicity and internalized misogyny.

As a result of the aforementioned dynamics, Nolasti internalizes the belief that she herself is the problem. Murray (2015:74) argues that women, when subjected to such societal prejudice, often begin to doubt themselves and their worth, leading to diminished self-confidence and self-perception.

Humm (1989:270) supports Murray's position when she asserts that women live under constant patriarchal surveillance, a system that regulates their behaviour to such an extent that they are unable to fully express or be themselves. In an effort to conform and avoid deviating from societal norms, women frequently lose a sense of individuality and autonomy. Humm further observes that this process is compounded by the reality that women not only experience judgment from men but also from one another, thereby reinforcing the very patriarchal structures that limit their freedom and agency.

While both Humm (1989) and Murray (2018) provide valuable insights, their analyses are grounded in Western ideological frameworks and therefore fail to fully capture the unconscious patriarchal attitudes that women often direct toward other women attitudes deeply ingrained through cultural and traditional teachings. Their focus remains largely limited to examining women's responses to overt patriarchal influences, particularly in relation to physical and sexual encounters. What is overlooked, however, is the subtle yet pervasive manner in which cultural norms and traditional practices condition women to internalize patriarchal values and subsequently reproduce them in their interactions with one another. This gap underscores the need for an African-centred feminist perspective that situates women's experiences within the specific socio-cultural contexts that shape their oppression and complicity.

Guzana (2000:75) re-examines the factors and contexts that contribute to the silencing of both black men and women, with a particular emphasis on women's representation in African literature. She argues that women were never truly silent; rather, specific socio-cultural and institutional factors shaped the perception of their silence. Among these, she identifies "male dominance, male control of language, informal training at home, institutions such as churches and the school which teach women to be silent, traditional values of the community, and the fear of being characterised as insane, evil, or scolding" (Guzana, 2000:75). These mechanisms of silencing are rooted in patriarchal ideologies that not only suppress women's voices but also condition them to internalize these norms and deploy them against other women. In this way, patriarchy reproduces itself intergenerationally, as women, consciously or unconsciously, enforce the very cultural and social values that limit their agency. Guzana's analysis is crucial in illustrating how silence is not an inherent characteristic of women, but rather a socially constructed tool of control that functions to maintain patriarchal order within both literature and lived realities.

Guzana (2000:75) emphasizes the importance of examining the above-mentioned factors, as they play a pivotal role in shaping and sustaining the silencing of women. Within such contexts, women often become fearful of speaking out or even demonstrating their full potential, as voicelessness is normalized and, in some cases, valorised within society. In amaXhosa communities, silence constitutes a significant aspect of women's expected behaviour and attitudes, serving as both a marker of compliance and a mechanism of control. As Guzana (2000:75) notes, "silence can be associated with power or powerlessness," depending on the context. However, in patriarchal societies where men dominate and control communication channels, women are relegated to the position of a muted group, their voices marginalized, and their perspectives overlooked. Within traditional amaXhosa culture, the ideal woman is often defined as one who embodies silence knowing when to speak, when to remain quiet, and when to unquestioningly adhere to social and familial expectations. Such constructions of gendered silence underscore the intersection of cultural values and patriarchal power in shaping women's identities and lived experiences.

According to Guzana (2000:76) women have a voice and can speak up, however are barred as means of control. She continues to state that amaXhosa women for decades have been using orature and literature to pass their messages on and to communicate their feelings and converse. "In the past and today many women accept the notion of silence, over the idea that they have been silenced. By accepting 'inferior' status they allow themselves to be defined by the dominant group" (Guzana, 2000:76). In other words, some women would allow others to project and regulate their lives for them. Guzana (2000:79) also explores the different meanings of silence for both men and women in the traditional arena. She argues that the conventions of silence are not administered equally for both men and women.

In essence, Guzana (2000:76) examines women's silence primarily as a consequence of patriarchal systems, portraying hegemony as the central source of this silence. While her analysis effectively highlights the structural mechanisms through which men exert control over women's voices, it does not fully explore the complex roles that elderly and younger women occupy within the homestead, the community, traditional gatherings, churches, schools, and other social spaces. These women, whether consciously or unconsciously, often participate in enforcing and perpetuating the very norms and expectations that silence others. By overlooking these dynamics, Guzana's study does not account for the ways in which patriarchal ideologies are transmitted and reinforced intergenerationally among women themselves, nor does it examine the social and cultural

mechanisms that enable women to police each other's behaviour and maintain existing hierarchies. Recognizing these interactions is crucial for understanding the multifaceted nature of female complicity in sustaining systems of oppression.

Satyo's (1999:166) primary objective in her article, *"Women in Xhosa Drama: Dramatic and Cultural Perspectives,"* is to examine the influence of culture on the characterization of women in isiXhosa drama. Utilizing a range of isiXhosa dramatic texts, she investigates how cultural norms and expectations shape female roles and identities within these narratives. Satyo argues that, within the texts analysed, women are frequently portrayed as heroines who endeavour to introduce new ways of thinking, although their efforts are often unappreciated or met with resistance (Satyo, 1999:166). She further asserts that these female characters actively challenge various forms of apparent injustices perpetuated by traditional systems, which function as structural mechanisms maintaining hierarchical and unequal relationships between men and women (Satyo, 1999:167). Moreover, Satyo (1999:167) emphasizes that the heroism exhibited by women protagonists in the analysed isiXhosa literary texts aligns with the concept of heroism defined by Jolobe, as cited in Jafta (1998:110), characterized as acts of bravery undertaken by an individual or group as a leap into the unknown. This framing highlights the courage and agency of women within culturally restrictive contexts, demonstrating how isiXhosa drama serves as a site for both critiquing patriarchal norms and celebrating female resilience and innovation.

It is fundamental to note Satyo's (1999:168) analysis of the isiXhosa drama *UDike noCikizwa* as it is one of the primary sources of this study. In *UDike noCikizwa*, she avers that *Cikizwa* the female protagonist is against all patriarchal tradition and cultural norms around the issue of arranged marriages. *Cikizwa* finds herself helpless and therefore, complies to these cultural and traditional laws she is against. "The tendency for women to comply and not resist is a survival strategy" (Satyo, 1999:169). According to Satyo (1999:169) women tend to comply to avoid disrespect and conflict. They also do so after their efforts of attempting to transform injustice cultural and traditional practices do not succeed. This study attempts to change this narrative as it gives hegemony power to exist and continue.

Furthermore, another drama Satyo (1999:174) explores and that is of significance to this study is *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda*. In this drama Satyo (1999:170) notes that the female protagonist suffers at the hands of her husband and therefore, turns to alcohol and promiscuity as coping mechanisms.

"*Nozinto*'s treatment breeds hatred" (Satyo, 1999:175). *Nozinto* resorts to hiring people to kill her husbands. It is inhumane to kill others, yet *Nozinto* finds her behaviour as a breakthrough because she believes that she has nothing left to lose, all her morals and innocence were taken away by her husband. She feels that the husband has taken her life as she lives yet has completely lost herself.

Satyo (1999) also analyses *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*. She states that in *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*, the last wife is a strong, independent woman who is geared for transformation. She and her neighbour are against their husband's patriarchal ideologies. She "does not even like the name given to her at her household because she associates it with slavery" (Satyo, 1999:175). Satyo (1999:176) avers that *Nolasti* argues that the names given to wives by their in-laws are a constant reminder of how brides are outsiders in that particular family.

Nolasti attempts to unionize women in her church in order for them to stand together against patriarchy. She plans to "educate them [women] in fighting for their rights and freeing themselves from the yoke of traditional mores and marginalization" (Satyo, 1999:175). *Nolasti* and her friend mention that many women are against patriarchy yet are afraid to do anything about it for fear of being deemed as disrespectful and deviant. Consequently, *Nolasti* is rejected by society for her efforts of transforming tradition.

In her analysis of isiXhosa dramas, Satyo (1999) does not sufficiently address the critical role played by other women in criticizing, discouraging, and undermining those who seek to transform traditional ideologies to align with contemporary values. By omitting this dimension, her analysis overlooks the ways in which women themselves may act as enforcers of patriarchal norms, perpetuating the very structures that constrain female agency. Furthermore, Satyo (1999) frames the women protagonists' eventual acquiescence to patriarchal authority following their unsuccessful attempts at transformation as acts of heroism and survival. While such portrayals may highlight the resilience of these characters, they can also be interpreted as mechanisms through which patriarchy sustains its power, normalizing conformity and reinforcing hierarchical gender relations. This oversight points to the need for a more nuanced critique that considers both intergenerational and intra-gender dynamics in the perpetuation of patriarchal systems within isiXhosa literary texts.

Distinct from the perspectives discussed above, Gqola (2015:2) investigates the stigmatisation of rape survivors, with particular attention to the social and cultural dynamics that perpetuate victim-blaming. She argues that women who experience sexual abuse are often ostracized by society and

held responsible for their victimization, with their behaviour, choices, and attire frequently scrutinized as justifications for the assault. Gqola notes that, "…when black women say they have been raped they are almost never taken seriously and in many instances are expected to just get over it" (Gqola, 2015:5). Furthermore, she observes that in many black households, girl children are socialized to understand rape in highly restrictive and patriarchal terms; they are taught that rape "looks a certain way," and any experience that deviates from this narrow conception is often dismissed or denied as legitimate. Gqola's analysis highlights the pervasive influence of patriarchal norms in shaping societal responses to sexual violence, illustrating how such norms not only silence survivors but also reinforce structural inequalities that disproportionately affect women and limit their agency.

Magqashela's (2006) novel *Isangxa Siyawhuza* provides a literary illustration that aligns with Gqola's (2015) observations regarding the stigmatisation of sexually abused women. In the novel, the female protagonist is sexually violated by her uncle and initially reports the abuse to her aunt, who is married to the perpetrator. Instead of offering support, the aunt accuses the protagonist of being deceitful and mischievous, thereby dismissing her claims and reinforcing her victimization. The protagonist subsequently confides in her favourite maternal aunt, only to be told that, as a woman, she lacks the authority to intervene and should maintain her position within the family hierarchy (Magqashela, 2006:25). This response underscores the patriarchal structures embedded within familial and societal systems, where women are often denied the power to challenge male authority, even in cases of sexual abuse. The aunt's admonition highlights the intersection of gender and authority, illustrating how women's social positioning is constrained by cultural norms that both silence victims and perpetuate the impunity of perpetrators.

A significant issue facing many traditional households is the pervasive culture of silence surrounding rape and other forms of abuse, particularly when the perpetrator is a family member. Girls, women, wives, and mothers often remain silent to protect husbands, brothers, boyfriends, uncles, and other male relatives, prioritizing family reputation over the victim's well-being. Abuse perpetrated within the family is frequently treated as a private matter, with the victim's experiences and safety subordinated to the desire to maintain family honour. Such incidents are often regarded as a source of embarrassment, and families may attempt to resolve the situation internally rather than involving external authorities or legal mechanisms. Consequently, abuse is commonly confined to private family discussions, and the lack of formal intervention perpetuates a cycle of silence and

vulnerability, allowing perpetrators to act with impunity and reinforcing the structural and cultural mechanisms that sustain patriarchal control.

Gqola (2015:6) argues that efforts to address and reduce the prevalence of rape must focus not only on supporting survivors but also on holding perpetrators accountable. She asserts that, "Something makes it acceptable for millions to get raped on a regular basis. That something is patriarchy" (Gqola, 2015:6). Gqola further emphasizes the necessity of confronting both the myths surrounding rape, and the societal excuses often made for perpetrators, as these cultural narratives actively sustain and normalize rape culture. According to Gqola (2015:30), society operates under the assumption that women's bodies exist primarily to provide sexual gratification to heterosexual men, thereby fostering a sense of entitlement among men to exert control over women's bodies. This entitlement is reinforced through social, cultural, and institutional mechanisms, which perpetuate cycles of gender-based violence and hinder women's autonomy. Addressing these deeply ingrained beliefs is essential for challenging the structural and ideological foundations of patriarchy and for creating a society in which women's rights, safety, and bodily integrity are respected.

Gqola (2015:30) makes two distinctions between plausibility and credibility. She defines plausibility as an individual having to produce physical evidence when raped of ripped clothes, scars and so forth. Credibility according to Gqola (2015:30) is for a certain elite. She argues that there are certain people or groups that are deemed as reliable and others unreliable. "Sex workers, wives, slave women and men are all categories of people that have at different stages been placed in the category of 'impossible-to-rape'…It means that when they were sexually violated, it was not recognised as such, legally and socially." (Gqola, 2015:39). Sex work is ethically and culturally frowned upon and deemed illegal therefore sex workers are viewed as promiscuous and engaging in activities that they should not be doing. Therefore, when raped they are told it is impossible as they bring it upon themselves. Wives and girlfriends are told that it is impossible for their partners to sexually abuse them as it is their duty to engage in sexual intercourse with them. Men are viewed as powerful therefore cannot be sexually violated or abused in any other manner. She proposes the following in order to explain how gender should operate (Gqola, 2015:39):

> Part of a violent gender power is in celebrating attributes associated with the masculine, and ordering the world in terms of opposites, or binaries. If masculine and feminine are opposites, and there is nothing in between, then when masculine

> is celebrated, feminine as its opposite has to be debased. This means those who are marked as feminine are also debased in relation to those marked as masculine. Debasement is another way of saying made to feel inferior.

The above discussion highlights that, within patriarchal cultures, gender functions to elevate and valorise masculinity, positioning it as inherently superior. Consequently, those identified as feminine are systematically subordinated, marginalized, and regarded as inherently "second best," perpetually measured against masculine ideals. Within this framework, women are socially constructed as inherently feminine and, therefore, are culturally discouraged or deemed incapable of embodying masculine traits or authority. This dynamic often compels women to expend considerable effort in conforming to patriarchal expectations, striving to please and support the dominant masculine figures in their lives. Women are thus encouraged to ensure that they are perceived as ideal companions, nurturing, and compliant, effectively reinforcing the hierarchical gender order while limiting their own autonomy and capacity to challenge oppressive structures.

Gqola (2015:67) acknowledges that there are women who protect patriarchy, and these women enablers should stop. She imposes an important question of, "at which point do violent men in this country and the women who are their cronies, stop using 'culture' as a way to justify violating us [women]?" (Gqola, 2015:73). Men even utilise violence as a threat when speaking to women. Sexual abuse is used by men as a way to demonstrate that they have power over women, and they allude that a woman's body does not belong to her. It is also a way to conflict pain, paranoia over a woman and to ensure that a woman feels vulnerable. "The manufacture of female fear works to silence women by reminding them of their capability, therefore blackmails us [women] to keep ourselves in check" (Gqola, 2015:79). Patriarchy ensures that women know their place in society and remain in their lane. According to Gqola (2015:83) men humiliate and assault women verbally in public spaces and the public does not react to this in aid of women, at times even other women decide to keep quiet and treat the assault as a norm.

The various perspectives discussed in this subsection are fundamental, as they underscore the urgent need for transformation in both the narratives surrounding women and their treatment within South African society. The scholars cited above each highlight different aspects of the negative impacts that patriarchal ideologies exert on women. Some focus on the pervasive silencing of women in African societies, interpreting it as a mechanism designed to deprive women of power while

consolidating male dominance. Others examine women's adherence to silence and compliance with patriarchal norms as strategies to avoid conflict with cultural and traditional expectations, framing such behaviour as a survival mechanism within restrictive social structures. However, these strategies often result in women unconsciously perpetuating their own subjugation, as well as reinforcing the oppression of other women. Additionally, certain scholars acknowledge the inherent strength, intelligence, and wisdom of women, while simultaneously noting the significant challenges women face in demonstrating these attributes within patriarchal contexts that consistently portray them as weak or inferior. Collectively, these analyses highlight both the resilience, and the constraints experienced by women, emphasizing the need for societal, cultural, and literary interventions that recognize women's agency and promote gender equity.

Several scholars highlight that sexual abuse remains a pervasive and devastating issue in South Africa, affecting both men and women. Women, in particular, are frequently subjected to societal judgment based on their attire, behaviour, occupation, and overall presentation, with these factors often used to justify or diminish their experiences of abuse. In rural and conservative communities, as well as within traditional family structures, girls, women, and wives are often reluctant to report incidents of sexual abuse due to fear of stigma, reprisal, or disbelief. Excuses for perpetrators of rape are widespread, further entrenching a culture of impunity. Compounding this issue, women's safety is not only compromised by men but also by other women who, consciously or unconsciously, protect or defend perpetrators, thereby perpetuating cycles of abuse. Beyond the private sphere, women are frequently devalued, belittled, and intimidated in professional and educational contexts, despite possessing intelligence, qualifications, and competencies equal to their male counterparts. These dynamics underscore the entrenched nature of patriarchal norms and systemic gender inequality, highlighting the urgent need for societal, cultural, and institutional reforms to protect women, empower survivors, and challenge the structures that enable abuse and discrimination.

It is essential to incorporate African literature in this review because, despite the diversity of African societies, many share fundamental cultural and traditional similarities, with variations in customs and practices. Importantly, patriarchal structures are pervasive across the continent, particularly in societies that were colonized, where colonial powers imposed and reinforced patriarchal norms that became embedded in existing cultural practices. Examining African literature provides critical insight into how these societal structures are represented, contested, and maintained through narrative. Furthermore, engaging with the perspectives of African feminist scholars is crucial for

understanding both the progress and the stagnation in gender transformation across the continent. Such scholarship allows for a nuanced exploration of the multiple and sometimes conflicting views on women's issues, highlighting the ways in which culture, tradition, and colonial legacies intersect to shape women's lived experiences and the possibilities for empowerment and social change.

2.3. African Literature

Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:73) asserts that the situation of women in Nigeria has not been entirely intolerable, largely due to the range of economic opportunities historically available to them. She notes that, even during the precolonial period, women actively participated in farming, fishing, herding, commerce, and industrial labour such as poultry farming, cloth-making, and craftwork, with the ability to retain the proceeds of their labour (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994:73). These economic roles provided women with a degree of autonomy and influence within their communities. In the contemporary era, many African women continue to navigate economic challenges by seizing available opportunities, including access to Western education, formal employment, and entrepreneurial ventures, in order to support themselves and their families. This demonstrates a continuity of women's resourcefulness and agency across historical periods, highlighting their capacity to adapt to changing social, cultural, and economic contexts while striving for personal and familial empowerment.

There appear to be differing attitudes and approaches among Nigerian women, a pattern that is also evident across many African societies. Some women remain in rural areas, continuing to adhere to and transmit patriarchal traditional ideologies, thereby reinforcing established gender norms. In contrast, women who migrate to urban centres often forming the working-class demographic tend to embrace economic independence and place strong emphasis on the right to work and secure financial stability for themselves and their children (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994:74). Motherhood remains a central and highly valued aspect of many African women's identities; consequently, working-class women may choose to enter into polygamous marriages as a strategic means to ensure they bear children and that their offspring have fathers present in their lives. This demonstrates the complex interplay between cultural expectations, economic agency, and pragmatic decision-making among women navigating both traditional and modern social environments.

According to Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:75), working-class women often emerge from polygamous and traditionally rooted societies, and as a result, they tend to overlook or normalize the oppression and

emotional abuse that may occur within polygamous households. She notes that these women frequently assert that it is unreasonable to expect a man to be romantically devoted to a single woman, and they acknowledge the practical utility of having another wife within the marriage. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:74) explains that older wives often encourage the inclusion of younger wives so that they themselves can engage in external duties, participating in both public and private spheres, rather than being solely responsible for domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and attending to their husbands' needs. In this way, older wives strategically arrange for younger wives to assume domestic responsibilities, a practice that, while serving the interests of the senior wives, simultaneously perpetuates patriarchal structures and can be interpreted as a form of oppression imposed upon the younger women. This dynamic illustrates the complex ways in which women may participate in sustaining systems of gendered inequality, highlighting the intersection of agency, survival, and complicity within patriarchal social arrangements.

The preceding discussion can also be interpreted as the exploitation of younger wives within polygamous households. In this context, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:75) contends that women in Nigeria experience significant oppression within marital relationships. She further identifies that the abuse of women in marriages manifests in multiple forms, encompassing social, emotional, economic, and cultural dimensions (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994:75). These various forms of oppression highlight the pervasive nature of patriarchal control, demonstrating how structural inequalities and cultural norms systematically constrain women's autonomy and agency within both domestic and societal spheres. The following insertion from Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:75) highlights this:

> The woman loses by being married, the woman as a daughter or sister has greater status and more rights within her birth lineages. However, when she gets married, she is treated as a possession, therefore, is rendered voiceless and has no rights at her husband's family. She loses her identity. She must give in to male-dominance. Men trust their mothers and sisters more, which often renders the wife more of an outsider as the husband will report and discuss matters with his mother or sister. Men in Nigeria lean emotionally on their mothers, sisters, and aunts. Therefore, in some Nigerian societies' wives become total strangers to their in-laws and are also undermined by their husbands. They have no one to confined in as they are told to

> endure marriage with its problems. As women they are supposed to ensure that their marriages are smooth, and no blame is placed upon the husband. The in-laws always side with the husband as he goes to confined in the women in his family.

Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:209) argues that one of the most significant challenges in African societies is the pervasive belief that men and women are inherently unequal. She asserts, "The woman is seen as subordinated in her very essence, to the man, in quality and specifically in marriage" (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994:209). Furthermore, she identifies the family unit as a central site of women's oppression, as it enforces gendered behaviours and expectations from an early age. Within the family, daughters are socialized to conduct themselves in prescribed ways, particularly in the presence of their fathers or other male figures. Similarly, wives are expected to regulate their speech and behaviour around their husbands and male in-laws. This conduct is widely accepted by African women as a normative way of life. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:210) contends that women must challenge these accepted norms, as well as the male gender roles that allow them to benefit from financial dependence or protection, while simultaneously advocating for equality. She asserts, "They must cease to want to exploit men financially or to burden the men within the family while talking about equality" (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994:210). She further suggests that women should be prepared to assume equal financial responsibility within relationships, thereby fostering a more balanced distribution of power and accountability and contributing to the dismantling of entrenched patriarchal structures.

Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:211) further identifies a distinct group of women in Africa who can be characterized as anti-feminist, whom she terms 'The Married Women Incorporated.' She explains, "These married women are afraid to shake the status quo, they are afraid and want security through men, they are harsher on other women than men are; they cling to the vanishing respectability of being married" (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994:211). These women often perceive themselves as more privileged within the patriarchal system, deriving social status and authority from their marital position. However, membership in this group is contingent upon their ability to conceive children. Women who marry but do not bear children frequently experience a loss of respect both within society and from their in-laws, highlighting how reproductive expectations are central to maintaining social standing and reinforcing patriarchal hierarchies. This dynamic illustrates how women, in their pursuit of social legitimacy and security, may participate in sustaining oppressive structures that limit the autonomy of other women.

Drawing from Ogundipe-Leslie's (1994) analysis, it is evident that significant progress has been made regarding the inclusion of women in various societal domains, including education, employment, and political participation. However, deeply entrenched patriarchal ideologies continue to pose significant obstacles within the domestic sphere, limiting the full realization of women's autonomy and empowerment. The persistent societal emphasis on marriage further hinders efforts toward gender equality and the broader emancipation of women, as social status and legitimacy remain closely tied to marital and reproductive roles. Additionally, patterns of women-on-women oppression and abuse remain prevalent, often perpetuated through the subconscious internalization of patriarchal norms. In such contexts, women may unwittingly reinforce their own subjugation by imposing restrictive expectations on other women, thereby maintaining hierarchical structures that sustain gendered inequality across both private and public spheres.

Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) primarily focuses on married women and their attitudes toward other women, particularly within polygamous households, as well as on Nigerian working-class women. However, her analysis provides limited insight into the experiences of rural women who have never been formally employed, whose husbands migrate to urban areas for work, leaving them behind in the care of in-laws and maintaining contact only sporadically. In some cases, husbands return home infrequently or not at all. Although this practice has been relaxed in several African societies, including among the amaXhosa, there remain numerous families where husbands and wives reside in different cities or provinces due to work commitments. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) also does not address the plight of young women compelled into arranged marriages, nor those who endure prolonged abuse and torment from their husbands to the extent that their identities and sense of self are eroded, sometimes resulting in the internalization of violence and suffering. Furthermore, such women are often deprived of opportunities to pursue personal ambitions or romantic relationships, constrained simply by the societal expectations imposed upon them because of their gender. This highlights the need for a more comprehensive examination of the varied experiences of women across socio-economic and geographic contexts, as well as the complex ways in which patriarchal structures manifest and perpetuate oppression.

To further examine African literature that addresses the phenomenon of women subconsciously perpetuating patriarchal ideologies upon other women, this study explores Nwapa's (1992) novel *One is Enough*. Nwapa investigates societal attitudes, particularly those of mothers-in-law, toward married women and the culturally entrenched expectations surrounding motherhood within the

African context. In her novel, Nwapa (1992) portrays the life of a young married African woman living in rural Nigeria, highlighting the pressures, responsibilities, and constraints imposed upon her by both family structures and broader societal norms. Through this narrative, the novel offers a critical lens on how cultural and patriarchal expectations shape women's roles, relationships, and agency within domestic and community spaces, while also illustrating the ways in which women may enforce or internalize these norms, often at the expense of other women.

The central female protagonist, Ameka, experiences profound personal and social challenges as she struggles to conceive a child for her husband. Her mother-in-law exerts immense pressure on her, ultimately denigrating her worth by labelling her ineffective as both a wife and a woman. In collusion with Ameka's mother-in-law, her husband secretly marries another woman, who subsequently bears him two sons. Throughout this period, Ameka's mother-in-law demonstrates a complete lack of concern or support for her, openly insulting her by branding her barren and thereby reinforcing societal stigmas surrounding infertility. This narrative vividly illustrates the intersection of familial expectations, gendered oppression, and the cultural valorisation of fertility, highlighting how women can be both victims of patriarchal structures and instruments through which these structures are perpetuated.

Ameka is portrayed as a well-educated and financially independent businesswoman, demonstrating significant competence and stability in her professional life. She provides substantial financial support to her husband, contributing meaningfully to the household economy. Despite her contributions, her husband, embodying the archetype of a proud African man, conceals the extent of her financial assistance from others, particularly his mother. This concealment reflects deeply ingrained patriarchal notions of male authority and pride, whereby acknowledging dependence on a woman is perceived as a challenge to masculine status. Consequently, Ameka's economic agency is both undervalued and invisible within the domestic sphere, illustrating the complex interplay between gender, power, and societal expectations in patriarchal contexts.

Ameka's aspirations for marriage were central to her personal ambitions from a young age. As she matured, she experienced repeated disappointment when several young men in her life failed to propose, choosing instead to pursue other women. Consequently, when she eventually met her husband, Ameka became determined to fulfil her long-held vision of an ideal life. She sought to demonstrate that a woman's ambitions could encompass marriage, the establishment of a home she

could call her own, a loving and cherished partner, and children to complete the union: “show everybody that a woman’s ambition was marriage, a home that she could call her own, a man she would love and cherish, and children to crown the marriage” (Nwapa, 1992:1). This portrayal underscores the cultural and societal significance attributed to marriage and motherhood within the African context, illustrating how women’s personal aspirations are often framed in relation to domestic and familial roles.

The above suggests that Nwapa (1992), in her novel, critically engages with the traditional ideology that positions marriage as the ultimate achievement for a woman, thereby implying that all African women should aspire to enter into marital unions. The novel further illustrates how mothers actively socialize their daughters to conform to societal expectations, teaching them behaviours, manners, and strategies intended to attract male attention and secure a marriage proposal. Through this depiction, Nwapa highlights the ways in which patriarchal cultural norms are transmitted intergenerationally, shaping women’s ambitions and reinforcing the centrality of marriage as a marker of social value and personal success. Moreover, the novel underscores the broader social pressures that constrain women’s agency, demonstrating how individual desires and aspirations are often mediated by cultural imperatives and familial expectations.

Nwapa (1992) highlights the boldness and resilience of African women through the characters of Ameka’s mother and aunt. Although both women are married, they assert that marriage is not central to their sense of identity or fulfilment. Their unions were motivated primarily by the desire to become mothers and establish a stable home for raising children, rather than by romantic love for their husbands. Ameka’s mother exemplifies female agency, as she successfully manages her own business and encourages her daughters to pursue independence and self-sufficiency. She takes pride in her other daughter, who balances entrepreneurship with motherhood, demonstrating the possibility of achieving both economic and familial responsibility. Ameka’s mother advises her to cultivate strength, self-reliance, and independence: “Her mother brought them up to be independent, but she did not emphasise marriage. She had several children no doubt, but her emphasis was on self-determination and motherhood” (Nwapa, 1992:23). Through these portrayals, Nwapa (1992) underscores the significance of female independence and competence as essential characteristics that enable women to resist and challenge patriarchal norms, illustrating the transformative potential of self-sufficiency in redefining women’s roles within society.

The lead female protagonist ultimately liberates herself from the constraints of her marriage by divorcing her husband and relocating to a different city to begin an independent life. She demonstrates a resolute determination to succeed professionally and personally without relying on a male partner. In a significant reversal of conventional gender dynamics, Ameka strategically utilizes men for her personal and professional advancement. Nwapa (1992) illuminates a broader social reality in many African societies, where men in positions of power exploit young women by offering employment, contracts, or capital in exchange for sexual favours. In a striking subversion, Nwapa portrays Ameka as consciously reversing this dynamic: she willingly engages in transactional relationships with men, using them as instruments to advance in the business world. Unlike typical societal expectations where men initiate sexual advances, Ameka dictates the terms, timing, and nature of these interactions, asserting full control over these arrangements. This portrayal challenges traditional patriarchal norms and presents a bold vision of female agency, highlighting how women can navigate and manipulate power structures to achieve autonomy and professional success in a male-dominated society.

Ameka's sister engages in a relationship with a married man who is temporarily separated from his wife, who is in Europe pursuing a four-year educational qualification. She strategically uses this influential and wealthy man to bear children and simultaneously leverages his social and professional connections to enhance her own business profile. Ameka's mother expresses pride in her daughter's resourcefulness, framing her actions as astute and pragmatic, while simultaneously criticizing the man's wife as "foolish" for prioritizing her education over maintaining her marital and domestic role. This portrayal underscores the complex ways in which women navigate patriarchal structures, often employing unconventional or morally ambiguous strategies to assert agency, secure economic stability, and advance social standing. Nwapa's narrative thus illuminates the intricate interplay between gender, power, and resourcefulness, highlighting how women may manipulate existing societal hierarchies to their advantage, even within morally contested frameworks.

Ameka eventually becomes pregnant and finds fulfilment in the birth of her twin children, despite the societal and moral complexities surrounding the fact that she is impregnated by a Catholic priest. In response, her best friend distances herself from Ameka, accusing her of deliberately seducing the priest and placing full blame on her, thereby exemplifying the ways women often police and judge each other within patriarchal frameworks. In contrast, the women who stand unwaveringly by Ameka are her mother, her sister, and members of her Cash Madams' Club, a collective of single mothers

who have risen to prominence as leading businesswomen in Lagos. These women are not only economically independent and socially influential but have also successfully entered spaces and roles traditionally dominated by men, challenging prevailing gender hierarchies. Nwapa's depiction of this supportive female network underscores the transformative potential of women's solidarity, illustrating how collective empowerment and mentorship can enable women to navigate systemic constraints, resist patriarchal judgment, and assert agency in both personal and professional spheres.

Nwapa's novel portrays the modern African woman as strong-willed, bold, independent, and ambitious. She is unapologetic in her pursuit of personal and professional success, demonstrating a determination to thrive despite societal constraints. However, she encounters numerous obstacles, including patriarchal oppression, women who perpetuate cultural and traditional norms to belittle and control her, and societal perceptions that seek to define and limit her identity. Among the most formidable challenges is the societal emphasis on motherhood as central to a woman's value. Both Nwapa and Ogundipe-Leslie illustrate that, in many African contexts, motherhood is highly prized; women and wives who do not bear children are often stigmatized, marginalized, or labelled as barren. Fertility is thus not merely a personal concern but a social imperative, intimately tied to a woman's status, legitimacy, and perceived worth within marriage and society at large. This emphasis on motherhood underscores how cultural and patriarchal expectations continue to circumscribe women's autonomy, positioning reproduction as both a responsibility and a measure of female identity, even for women who otherwise demonstrate independence and agency.

A comparable perspective is presented by Buchi Emecheta in her novel *Second-Class Citizen* (1994), in which the girl child, women, and wives are depicted as subordinate members of a patriarchal African society. The narrative follows the lead female protagonist from childhood, illustrating how gender inequality and prejudice shape her experiences from an early age and persist throughout her life. Emecheta (1994) emphasizes the protagonist's courage and resilience from the outset, portraying the systemic barriers she faces, including the denial of educational opportunities. Preference is given to her younger brother, who is allowed to attend the best schools solely because of his gender, while the protagonist is confined to domestic duties. She is expected to remain at home, learning household chores and sewing under the guidance of her mother, reinforcing the societal belief that a girl's role is strictly domestic. Through this portrayal, Emecheta critiques entrenched patriarchal norms, highlighting how gendered expectations limit women's access to education, personal development, and opportunities for social mobility, thereby perpetuating their status as "second-class citizens"

within both the family and broader society.

A similar perspective is advanced by Buchi Emecheta in her novel *Second-Class Citizen* (1994), where the girl child, women, and wives are consistently depicted as subordinate within a patriarchal African society. The narrative traces the life of the lead female protagonist from childhood, demonstrating how gender-based discrimination and prejudice shape her experiences from an early age and continue to affect her throughout her life. Emecheta (1994) foregrounds the protagonist's courage and resilience, emphasizing her determination in the face of systemic barriers, including the denial of educational opportunities. Her younger brother is granted access to the best schools solely because of his gender, while she is confined to domestic responsibilities, expected to remain at home learning household chores and sewing under her mother's supervision. This arrangement reinforces societal norms that prescribe domesticity as the primary role of girls, marginalizing their intellectual and personal development. Through this depiction, Emecheta offers a trenchant critique of entrenched patriarchal structures, illustrating how culturally sanctioned gender expectations restrict women's access to education, economic independence, and social mobility. Consequently, women are systematically positioned as "second-class citizens," both within the family unit and in the wider society, highlighting the pervasive and enduring nature of gender inequality.

Adah marries an educated man and secures employment, quickly becoming the primary breadwinner for both her household and her in-laws, as her husband pursues further studies. Through her diligence, Adah attains financial stability and rises to a well-paying position, demonstrating ambition, resilience, and strategic foresight. She meticulously saves with the goal of facilitating her husband's education in the United Kingdom, eventually following him there with their children. However, life in the United Kingdom marks a dramatic shift in her circumstances. Her husband transforms into an abusive, arrogant, and oppressive figure, perceiving Adah primarily as a provider of children and financial support. She assumes the full responsibility for his sustenance, education, and household needs, effectively placing her own dreams and ambitions on hold to support his aspirations. Despite these challenges, Adah ultimately reclaims her autonomy, asserting her right to pursue her personal ambitions and prioritize her children's well-being. By leaving her husband, she demonstrates agency, resilience, and a refusal to be confined by patriarchal expectations, highlighting the capacity of African women to navigate oppressive domestic and societal structures while reclaiming control over their lives.

Emecheta (1994), in *Second-Class Citizen*, portrays the strength, intelligence, and resilience of a woman throughout her life, from birth to adulthood. The novel critically engages with the entrenched cultural preference for male children in many African societies, where families often prioritize having boys, particularly as first-borns. Boys are traditionally viewed as the custodians of the family lineage, expected to carry on the family name and inheritance, whereas girls are anticipated to marry and join their husband's family, thereby contributing to the growth and prosperity of another household. As discussed in the previous chapter, male children typically become the primary beneficiaries and sole heirs of their father's estate, reinforcing gendered disparities in wealth, power, and social status. Through this lens, Emecheta illuminates the systemic privileging of boys over girls and underscores the structural challenges that women face, highlighting the social and familial obstacles that must be navigated to assert autonomy, agency, and equality.

Another significant issue that Emecheta (1994) highlights is the role of mothers and sisters-in-law in perpetuating patriarchal authority within the family. These female relatives often align themselves with the husband or brother, reinforcing male dominance and policing the behaviour of the wife. In the novel, the husband frequently reports his wife's perceived transgressions to his mother and sisters, who then reprimand her and dictate how she should conduct herself, while rarely holding the man accountable for his actions. This dynamic illustrates how women can become instruments of patriarchal control, upholding cultural norms that dictate that a woman must be submissive, domesticated, fertile, and perpetually supportive of her husband. By portraying this complicity, Emecheta exposes the mechanisms through which gendered hierarchies are maintained, demonstrating that women's subordination is often reinforced not only by men but also by other women who internalize and enforce these societal expectations.

Emecheta (1994) illustrates how women can also be breadwinners, and this has become a norm in modern society, where there are single mother households, households with unemployed men and households with women earning more than their male partners. In such homes, women find themselves as providers, protectors, and everything else as the men's egos do not allow them to do anything else besides becoming abusive, trying to show their physical power over the woman. The following analysis by Mutanda (2007) utilises literary texts also written by one of the first- generation feminists, Mariama Ba. She asserts that Mariama Ba's work illustrates some of the "direct and indirect roles played by some women in the sustenance and perpetuation of patriarchal oppression" (Mutanda, 2007:90). She focuses on women subjugation caused by age, generational gaps, teachings,

education, exposure and experience. Mutanda (2007:90) argues that women should unite and utilise the little power available to them if they want to overcome the challenges they face.

According to Mutanda (2007:9), it is incorrect to hold the view that men are the only source of gender inequality. She argues that men are viewed as though they "oppress, mistreat and exploit women by inhibiting and restricting their self-realisation" (Mutanda, 2007:91). Thus, she stresses the need to investigate the other factors that contribute and perpetuate patriarchy. To explore this issue, Mutanda (2007) uses Mariama Ba's novels, namely, So Long A Letter and Scarlet.

Mutanda (2007:91) affirms that women tend to victimise themselves and others, they imprison themselves subconsciously. She employs Ogundipe-Leslie's (1994:36) words to bring this point across as she states that:

> Women are shackled by their own negative self-image and centuries of the interiorization of the ideologies of patriarchy. Her own reactions to objective problems, therefore, are often self-defeating and self-crippling. She reacts with fear, dependency complexes and attitudes to please and cajole where more self-assertive actions are needed.

In this context, Mutanda (2007:92) considers Mariama Bâ's literary texts particularly suitable for her investigation, as they portray women who are confined by the very patriarchal structures that they inhabit. The central theme across these texts is the pervasive influence of religious and traditionalist family systems, which exert significant pressure on younger generations to conform to patriarchal norms, customs, and taboos. This pressure is especially pronounced in relation to marriage, where women are expected to adhere to socially prescribed roles, obligations, and behavioural codes. Bâ's works critically illuminate how these intergenerational and institutionalized expectations restrict women's autonomy, perpetuate gendered subordination, and reinforce the maintenance of patriarchal authority within both private and public spheres.

Mutanda (2007:92) confines her investigation to the family unit, as the texts under consideration primarily focus on familial relationships and the institution of marriage. Through the experiences of the female protagonists in *So Long a Letter*, Mutanda (2007:94) concludes that Mariama Bâ delineates two distinct categories of women in African society. The first category comprises women who exhibit boldness and agency, actively seeking to emancipate themselves from entrenched patriarchal practices and asserting autonomy within both familial and social contexts. The second

category consists of women who suppress their agency, remaining silent and compliant under patriarchal coercion, thereby perpetuating their own subjugation. Bâ's narratives thus highlight the divergent ways in which women navigate patriarchal constraints, illustrating the complex interplay between individual agency, cultural norms, and structural oppression in African societies.

In *So Long a Letter*, the female protagonists are both married, each to her respective husband, and share a strong Islamic background. However, the influence of Western education shapes their perspectives, leading them to initially diverge from certain traditional Islamic marital practices. Despite this, traditional norms reassert themselves when both of their husbands choose to engage in polygamy. One of the protagonists openly rejects her husband's decision to take a second wife, asserting her agency by leaving the marital home. She takes her children with her and relocates to another city, embarking on an independent life. Through this narrative, Mariama Bâ highlights the tensions between cultural tradition, religious expectation, and individual autonomy, illustrating how educated and empowered women navigate patriarchal structures while striving to assert control over their personal and familial destinies.

Mutanda (2007:94) contends that the actions of the first female protagonist exemplify the qualities of a committed feminist: she is resilient, assertive, and fully aware of her personal agency, refusing to tolerate disrespect or subjugation. In contrast, when the second female protagonist encounters a similar challenge in her marriage, she chooses to remain within the polygamous arrangement, rationalizing her decision as a sacrifice made for the sake of her children. This character is described as "the prototype of the objectified woman, always wronged but eternally forgiving, preferring to suffer from emotional paralysis rather than incur society's wrath or lose the custody of her children" (Adebayo, 1995:105, cited in Mutanda, 2007:96). Through this juxtaposition, Bâ and Mutanda illustrate the spectrum of female responses to patriarchal oppression, highlighting the interplay between societal expectations, maternal responsibilities, and individual agency. The analysis underscores how some women internalize and perpetuate traditional gender norms, while others actively resist and redefine their roles within both familial and societal frameworks.

Scarlet Song presents a thematic concern similar to the previously discussed literary texts, focusing on "the plight of women in African marriages" (Mutanda, 2007:98). The novel explores an interracial marriage between a black Senegalese man and a white French woman, foregrounding the cultural, familial, and societal tensions that shape their union. Despite the disapproval of the woman's parents,

she chooses to pursue the marriage, asserting her personal autonomy and challenging traditional expectations. Similarly, the man's mother initially expresses reservations about the union but ultimately permits her son to marry the woman he loves. Through this narrative, the novel interrogates the intersections of gender, race, and cultural norms, highlighting the pressures faced by women who seek to navigate both personal desire and societal expectations within the context of marriage.

Soon after the marriage, the husband decides to take a second wife, proceeding with the union despite the first wife's clear disapproval. In this decision, he receives the support of his mother, who reinforces patriarchal authority within the family. The mother-in-law targets the first wife with racially charged insults, portraying her as lazy, uncultured, and unworthy of respect. Rather than offering protection or guidance, the mother-in-law actively oppresses and humiliates the first wife, perpetuating gendered and racial hierarchies within the household. This dynamic highlights the ways in which women can enforce patriarchal norms against other women, sustaining systemic oppression and constraining the autonomy of wives, particularly in intercultural and polygamous marital contexts. The narrative underscores the intersection of gender, race, and tradition in shaping women's lived experiences within African family structures.

"Ba exposes the patriarchal oppression of women, denouncing certain masculine behaviours in her novels, Ba also examines critically the role of some women - especially those of the older generation - in a couple's life, revealing comportment that contributes to victimising the wife" (Mutanda, 2007:100). She exposes the patriarchal pressures in marriage and how women react to them, arguing that in most cases women choose to remain in abusive, oppressive, and suppressive marriages with flawed justifications.

Lare (2014:103) on the other hand approaches with a different angle. She argues that most African literary texts portray the injustices created against women by hegemony based on sex and do not mention the social constructs of gender that give rise to patriarchal ideologies. She utilises the works of Efo Mawgbe, a Ghanaian playwriter to justify her argument. Lare (2014:103) argues that Efo Mawgbe's plays, "seeks to revisit gender relationships in Africa in literary texts by revisiting some African customs that deny power, identity and inheritance right to women" (Lare, 2014:103). She analyses In The Chest of a Woman, which is an African play that portrays some of the Akan traditional customs that oppress women. According to Lare (2014:104) the author of the play blames

Afrocentrism for the sustainability of patriarchy. She applies Paul Simpson's (2005:145) definition of Afrocentrism which is explained below:

> Afrocentrism describes a male centred worldview wherein male activities are evaluated positively and female activities negatively. The principle extends even to explanations of language itself, so that usages that are attributed to men are regarded more favourably than those attributed to women.

The article explores African customs that promote patriarchal ideologies, the manner in which hegemonic legacy can be debunked in favour of development and Mawgbe's construction of African womanhood. The drama text analysed interrogates Ghanaian culture on two forms, one being its contemporary relevance and secondly its status of women in their traditional society. It portrays the lives of Ghanaian women, who are denied their inheritance and family property in both literature and society. This is a case that was recently controversial in South Africa, where Princess Mphephu was not recognised to take over her father's throne because of the fact that she is a woman (Ntlama, 2020:6). The throne was given to her father's half-brother instead.

Thus, Lare (2014:107) declares that as is the case in South African indigenous tradition, in the Akan tradition men are the sole heirs and are placed at the top of the social life hierarchy. Men's transgressions are overlooked. However, when women deviate from the norm, they are publicly humiliated and punished (Lare, 2014:108). "Women under patriarchy have been objects of oppression by men through the process of socialisation into gender roles" (Fishburn, 1995:19). Lare (2014:108) further states that male hegemony creates the false impression that men are superior to women. "Male dominance and centredness unveils misogynist language use" (Lare, 2014:109). And the misogynist language can be coined as linguistic sexism. This misogynist language is powerful as Lare (2014:109) argues that men make language, and it controls reality which makes men control women. This statement is corroborated by most African proverbs that are negative towards women but positive towards men. Thus, through the use of language, women have been suppressed and discriminated upon.

The perspectives advanced by Akanle (2020) align closely with those of Emecheta (1994), particularly regarding the role of women as breadwinners in contemporary African societies. Akanle (2020:398) notes that the position of primary financial provider in many African households was historically dominated by men. However, the increasing educational attainment and professional

participation of women have led to a significant shift, with more women assuming the breadwinner role within their families. Despite this transformation, Akanle (2020) observes that African literature, particularly Nigerian texts, seldom represents women in this capacity. In her study, Akanle (2020:398) critically examines the implications of female breadwinning for family dynamics, exploring how women's economic agency influences household stability, decision-making, and gender relations within Nigerian familial contexts. This analysis underscores the evolving economic and social roles of African women, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities associated with women's increasing financial autonomy.

Akanle (2020:399) contends that "female breadwinning is an emerging and growing phenomenon in urban Sub-Saharan Africa and it is bound to have implications that need to be understood." While African women historically engaged in trading activities and maintained independent sources of income, these earnings were typically subsumed under male authority within the household. Women would contribute their income to the family, and such households were generally perceived as dual-earner households, with the man as the primary breadwinner. Even in cases where women earned more or contributed more financially, men rarely acknowledged this, thereby maintaining the perception of male economic dominance. Akanle's analysis highlights the evolving dynamics of gendered economic roles in African societies, revealing both the persistence of patriarchal norms and the gradual shift toward recognizing women's financial agency and autonomy.

Thus, Akanle (2020:399) argues that women as breadwinners in Africa can be viewed as a challenge to culture and tradition. She further states that female breadwinning threatens men's position within the family. "Female breadwinning is related to marital infidelity and overall negative family/marital outcomes, as feminine economic antagonistic tendencies confront instituted expected breadwinning masculinity" (Akanle, 2020:399).

Akanle (2020:401) conducted interviews with couples in Nigeria to explore perceptions surrounding female breadwinning. Many respondents articulated that the phenomenon of women serving as primary financial providers was culturally inappropriate. They argued that this arrangement contravenes traditional norms, undermines male authority within the household, and negatively affects men's self-esteem. Furthermore, some couples expressed concerns that female breadwinning could foster a sense of disrespect from women toward men, thereby disrupting established power dynamics and hierarchical structures within the family (Akanle, 2020:401). Akanle's findings

highlight the tension between evolving economic realities and entrenched patriarchal expectations, illustrating how women's growing financial autonomy challenges culturally sanctioned notions of male dominance and household authority.

Even the children of these couples perceived the phenomenon of female breadwinning as inappropriate, justifying their views by referencing cultural norms that designate men as the primary providers responsible for the well-being of their families. Akanle (2020:403) further reports that girls interviewed in the study expressed a desire to be gainfully employed in the future, not to assume the role of sole provider, but rather to assist their husbands in supporting their families. This perspective reflects the deep-rooted cultural conditioning that shapes gender expectations from an early age, reinforcing the belief that financial provision is inherently masculine. Akanle's findings highlight the intergenerational transmission of patriarchal values, emphasizing how both societal norms and familial teachings contribute to the ongoing negotiation of gender roles and the limited acceptance of women's economic autonomy within African households.

Through Akanle's (2020:403) findings it is evident that in many of the Nigerian families interviewed the situation did not begin as females being breadwinners but due to certain circumstances that occurred along the way, the wives found themselves being breadwinners. These circumstances might be that the husband was retrenched, others became ill and as a result unable to work, and so forth. Some wives argued that their in-laws did not approve of them having to financially provide for their households. Other wives accepted the situation as a temporary situation and that their husbands would find employment again and resume their breadwinner roles (Akanle, 2020:403). While other wives claimed that there would be no stability or love in a marriage where the woman is a breadwinner because of the enormous responsibility and work she would have. Also, the constant disrespect the man who is unemployed and unable to provide for the family would be facing.

The above findings indicate that women in many African societies continue to perceive themselves as inferior and subservient to men. Many hold the belief that African culture and tradition inherently position women as subordinate, with distinct and separate roles assigned to each gender within the family structure, roles that should not be transgressed. Women are expected to be supportive, nurturing, caring, and domesticated partners, while men are regarded as the primary providers and protectors. Even in households where women are educated and gainfully employed, they often continue to rely on their husbands financially to secure societal recognition and respect, adhering to

traditional norms that define a "proper" African woman by her dependence and subservience. This dynamic underscores the persistence of patriarchal ideologies, revealing how cultural and societal expectations continue to shape women's self-perception, constrain their autonomy, and perpetuate gendered hierarchies despite increasing female economic empowerment.

The aforementioned notion of distinct roles for men and women in African society is also evident in Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions*. Within the narrative, male characters explicitly articulate the societal expectations imposed upon women, emphasizing their prescribed roles regardless of the women's level of education or personal aspirations. These expectations reinforce the perception that women's primary functions are domestic and supportive, subordinated to male authority and decision-making within both the family and broader community. Dangarembga's work critically interrogates these gendered norms, illustrating how patriarchal structures constrain women's autonomy, limit their opportunities, and shape their self-perception from a young age, while also highlighting the tensions that arise when educated women attempt to navigate or resist these entrenched societal expectations.

In her novel, Dangarembga (1989) critically examines the intersecting issues of race, gender inequality, and class in Zimbabwe during the post-colonial period. The narrative explores how these social hierarchies shape individual identities, limit opportunities, and perpetuate systemic oppression, particularly for women. Dangarembga appropriates the title *Nervous Conditions* from Frantz Fanon's introduction to *The Wretched of the Earth*, which asserts that "the condition of the native is a nervous condition" (Fanon, 1968). By invoking Fanon, Dangarembga situates the experiences of her characters within broader discussions of colonial and post-colonial subjugation, while simultaneously highlighting the psychological and social pressures imposed by both patriarchal and colonial structures. The novel thus foregrounds the compounded marginalization faced by women, illustrating how gender, race, and class intersect to produce a pervasive sense of instability, tension, and internalized oppression within post-colonial Zimbabwean society.

Dangarembga's (1989) *Nervous Conditions* refers to the influence that imperialism has on girls and women of the African continent portrayed by her female protagonists, as they battle to redefine themselves in a white man's world. This nervous condition is caused by what Fanon labels as 'native intellectual'. However, according to Mountain (2017:1) this is interesting as Fanon's native intellectual belongs to the African man and in Dangarembga's (1989) novel it is represented by

educated African women, who are torn in between the Western emancipated and intellectual world and the traditional and patriarchal African world. “Frantz Fanon describes the intellectual native as a man between two worlds” (Mountain, 2017:1). There are three phases in which Fanon states the intellectual natives undergoes and these are cited in Mountain (2017:1) as follows:

> The native intellectual will develop through firstly, complete assimilation into the Western culture. Secondly, is a remembrance or recognition of the past, his childhood, the culture torn apart by imperialism. From this remembrance will spring a hatred, an anger in the native intellectual. The anger will also bring about the third phase in which the native intellectual becomes the ‘awakener’ of the people. He draws attention to the oppression and leads his people in the fight, which will inevitably be violent.

According to Fanon (1968), the process of intellectual recognition and validation is largely framed in relation to men, as the use of masculine pronouns in his analysis suggests. However, in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s (1989) novel, *Nervous Conditions*, this dynamic is subverted, as the intellectual “natives” are represented not by men but by women specifically Tambudzai, Nyasha, and Maiguru, Nyasha’s mother. Maiguru, though married to Babamukuru, an affluent and highly educated man, is herself equally accomplished, holding a master’s degree comparable to his. Despite her academic achievements and intellectual capacity, Maiguru remains constrained within patriarchal structures, exemplified by her lack of control over her own salary. Similarly, Tambudzai and Nyasha, though recipients of Western education and demonstrably intelligent, are denied the reverence, authority, and social recognition accorded to Babamukuru. This disparity underscores the gendered dimensions of intellectual and cultural valuation, revealing how women’s education and competence are often diminished or rendered invisible within patriarchal frameworks.

Tambudzai, a fourteen-year-old girl, struggles to assert her individuality and resist living in the shadow of her brother. She comes from a socioeconomically disadvantaged family, where her uncle serves as the primary breadwinner, despite also supporting his own household. When her uncle travels to England for a period of five years, the family’s financial resources become even more constrained, resulting in Tambudzai being withdrawn from school. In contrast, her brother is encouraged to continue his education, reflecting the gendered prioritization of educational opportunities within the family. This differential treatment is rooted in patriarchal and cultural norms,

whereby male children are valued as the carriers of family honour and future social mobility. Consequently, the family takes pride in investing in the boy's education while making sacrifices that limit Tambudzai's academic advancement, highlighting the intersection of gender, economic scarcity, and societal expectations in shaping educational trajectories.

Tambudzai forces to go back to school but her father is against the notion. He makes a comment that astonishes Tambudzai by rhetorically asking her, "Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables" (Dangarembga, 1989:15). The author simply demonstrates the principles of traditional Zimbabwe and general African patriarchal society here. The idea that a female's purpose is to be domesticated, to marry and take care of the husband and children even though women have been proving time and again that they are capable of more than just that. Tambudzai tells her mother about her father's sexist comments, but her mother takes his side in the following statement from Dangarembga (1989:16):

> Or could it be? Aren't we the ones who bear children? When it is like that you can't just decide today that you want to do this, tomorrow I want to do that, the next day I want to be educated! When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to take them. And these days it is worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other. Aiwa! What will help you, my child, is to learn to carry your burdens.

In the statement above, Tambudzai's mother attempts to dissuade her from insisting on returning to school, articulating a worldview in which women are expected to prioritize the welfare of their family members, particularly men over their own aspirations. This reflects a broader pattern in which many African elderly women impose significant responsibilities on girl children, reinforcing traditional gender roles and expectations of female self-sacrifice. However, Tambudzai resists this socialization; she is determined to distinguish herself from her mother and the other women in her village who have acquiesced to patriarchal hegemony. Demonstrating agency and resourcefulness, she cultivates her own mealies and plans to sell them in order to fund her education. Through her initiative, Tambudzai succeeds in returning to school, despite facing mockery and criticism from her mother. Her perseverance underscores the tension between entrenched gender norms and individual resistance, highlighting the ways in which young women negotiate, challenge, and sometimes transcend the limitations imposed by traditional societal expectations.

Following the death of Tambudzai's brother, she is taken in by her educated and affluent uncle, providing her with the opportunity to attend a mission school and receive a higher quality education. This intervention is primarily motivated by the desire to ensure that she acquires the skills and qualifications necessary to secure gainful employment and, ultimately, to attract a suitable suitor. Within this framework, her education and professional prospects are closely linked to the accumulation of a respectable bride price, which in turn is expected to elevate her family from poverty. In contrast, the support given to her brother's education was premised on different social imperatives: it aimed to cultivate him into a man of social superiority and high esteem, akin to their uncle, thereby ensuring that his family would enjoy respect, status, and financial security within the broader community. This juxtaposition underscores the gendered rationales underpinning educational investment, revealing how societal expectations allocate opportunities and resources differently for males and females based on culturally prescribed roles and anticipated contributions to family welfare.

Tambudzai observes the stark contrast in how education and intellectual achievement are valued along gendered lines within her family. Her uncle, Babamukuru, commands respect and admiration from all members of the household, including her own father, primarily because of his academic credentials; an honours degree from South Africa and a master's degree from England. In contrast, his wife, Maiguru, who possesses equivalent qualifications, is denied the same level of esteem and recognition. Her respect within the household is largely conditional, extended only by the other wives, including Tambudzai's mother, out of deference to Babamukuru rather than acknowledgment of her individual intellect and accomplishments. Maiguru is thus primarily identified in relation to her husband, rather than as a highly educated and capable woman in her own right. Similarly, her daughter, Nyasha, is often labelled as rebellious, disobedient, and indecent because of her assertive and emancipated character, despite demonstrating intellectual acumen comparable to her mother's. This juxtaposition underscores the persistence of patriarchal norms that systematically marginalize women's achievements, highlighting the tension between gender, education, and social recognition in the household and the broader cultural context.

Maiguru endeavours to conform to the expectations of a "proper African wife" by prioritizing her husband's needs and maintaining the appearance of domestic compliance. In doing so, she effectively silences her own voice in matters concerning household decisions, ceding authority to Babamukuru, who exercises unilateral control over both domestic and financial affairs, including her salary. During

family gatherings, such as the Christmas holidays in the village, the burden of cooking and other domestic responsibilities falls disproportionately upon Maiguru, as she is married to the primary provider of the extended family. This dynamic provokes gossip and judgment from the other wives, who accuse her of arrogance or superiority due to her husband's status, failing to recognize the structural constraints that limit her autonomy. In reality, Maiguru resents these imposed rules and possesses little to no agency within her own household, effectively rendering her a subordinate figure despite her education, intelligence, and capabilities. This situation illuminates the intersection of patriarchy and marital hierarchy, demonstrating how women can be simultaneously central to family maintenance and yet systematically marginalized within the same social structure.

Nyasha expresses strong disapproval of her mother's silence in the face of the oppression and subjugation she endures within the household. Despite her daughter's objections, Maiguru consistently admonishes Nyasha, insisting that tradition prohibits both her and her daughter from challenging the authority of the head of the family. This dynamic highlights the generational tension between resistance and compliance within patriarchal structures. Both Nyasha and Tambudzai, along with Maiguru, navigate a complex social and ideological terrain in which Western values and education, acquired through European schooling, intersect with traditional patriarchal norms. Consequently, they find themselves constrained and often conflicted, trapped between the emancipatory possibilities offered by Western ideologies and the restrictive expectations imposed by culturally sanctioned hierarchies. This tension underscores the broader struggle of African women and girls to assert autonomy and challenge oppressive structures while negotiating deeply ingrained cultural and familial obligations.

Eventually, Maiguru asserts a measure of agency by confronting her husband regarding her lack of control over her own salary, which he allocates to her in-laws without her consent. She articulates her frustration and anger at being compelled to provide for her extended family while her own children experience deprivation, highlighting the inequitable distribution of power and resources within the household. In an act of partial emancipation, Maiguru temporarily removes herself from the oppressive domestic environment by packing her belongings and leaving her husband. This act represents a significant, albeit constrained, challenge to the patriarchal structures that have historically subordinated her. However, her husband ultimately locates her and retrieves her, illustrating both the limitations imposed on women's autonomy within patriarchal households and the persistent tensions between individual agency and entrenched cultural and familial expectations.

Maiguru's actions underscore the complex negotiation of power, resistance, and compliance that women often navigate in contexts where education and intellect coexist with systemic subordination.

An opportunity arises for Tambudzai to attend a private school, yet Babamukuru initially expresses disapproval, arguing that such an education might negatively influence her character, rendering her "loose" and indecent. This response reflects prevailing patriarchal anxieties regarding female autonomy and the perceived moral risks associated with intellectual and social mobility for girls. However, Maiguru challenges her husband's assumptions, reminding him of the perspective articulated in Dangarembga (1989:180), thereby advocating for the importance of education in shaping Tambudzai's future and emphasizing that intellectual development should not be constrained by gendered stereotypes or moralistic restrictions. Her intervention illustrates the tension between traditional patriarchal control and the emancipatory potential of education, highlighting how women navigate and sometimes contest the limitations imposed upon younger female family members. This can be found in Dangarembga (1989:180):

> I don't think that Tambudzai will be corrupted by going to that school…Don't you remember when we went to South Africa everybody was saying that we, the women, were loose…It wasn't a question of associating with this race or that race at that time. People were prejudiced against educated women. Prejudiced. That's why they said we weren't decent. That was in the fifties. Now we are into the seventies. I am disappointed that people still believe the same things. After all this time and when we have seen nothing to say it is true. I don't know what people mean by loose woman – sometimes she is someone who walks the streets, sometimes she is an educated woman, sometimes she is a successful man's daughter, or she is simply beautiful. Loose or decent, I don't know.

Dangarembga's work addresses a range of issues that continue to affect African women in contemporary society. It highlights the disproportionate effort women must exert to achieve respect and recognition, often working twice as hard or more than men to be taken seriously. Despite their capabilities, women frequently remain confined to domestic labour and are socially defined primarily in relation to their husbands, unless they actively strive to assert their individuality and independence, as exemplified by figures such as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and numerous other African women who have challenged patriarchal constraints. Even when women succeed in reclaiming their

identities and asserting agency, they may still face marginalization or hostility from other women within society, as illustrated by the treatment of Maiguru by the other wives. Similarly, Nyasha, her daughter, experiences alienation from her peers at school due to her open-mindedness, assertiveness, and determination. Her classmates perceive her as rebellious, uncultured, and presumptuous, reflecting a resistance to deviations from established cultural and patriarchal norms. This tension underscores the broader social mechanisms that enforce conformity and punish difference, revealing how entrenched gender expectations continue to shape interpersonal relationships, social hierarchies, and women's experiences within both domestic and public spheres.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

2.4.1. African Feminisms

In an article providing a brief overview of a conference on African feminisms held a decade prior, Essof (2001:124) defines feminism as the belief in the inherent equality of women and men. Similarly, Molubo (2020:32) describes feminism as "a concept designed to emancipate women from all oppressions of patriarchy," emphasizing its role in challenging systemic inequalities and promoting social justice. Despite this, numerous African women scholars assert that they do not identify as feminists per se, even though they embrace the underlying principles of gender equality and the liberation of women from hegemonic social, cultural, and political ideologies. This stance reflects the nuanced ways in which African women negotiate global feminist discourses while situating them within local cultural, historical, and socio-political contexts. It also highlights a critical distinction between adopting feminist ideals and the label "feminist," which some perceive as externally imposed or incongruent with indigenous frameworks of gender justice and women's empowerment.

According to Essof (2001:124), one reason some African women scholars are hesitant to identify as feminists is the perception that "feminism is not African and thus has no relevance to Africa's political, social and economic realities." This critique reflects concerns that Western feminist frameworks may not fully account for the specific historical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts of African societies. Others recognize the significance of feminism as an ideology that confronts gender inequality but argue for a different terminology that better resonates with local realities, suggesting the need to "name [the quest] differently" (Essof, 2001:124). These considerations contributed to the emergence of African and Black women's movements, which collectively coined

the term African feminisms to articulate a framework that addresses both gender oppression and the broader socio-political conditions affecting African women. By developing a distinctly African perspective, these movements aim to reconcile the principles of gender equality with the lived experiences, cultural values, and historical circumstances unique to African societies, thereby creating a more contextually relevant and inclusive approach to women's liberation.

The reluctance to fully embrace feminism as a universal framework for advancing African women's struggles can be traced back to first-generation African women scholars, who argued that the lived experiences of Black and African women differ significantly from those of European women. As Thiam (1986:112) notes, "Institutionalised polygamy flourishes in Black Africa, sexual mutilating practices flourish, forced marriages, child brides…" all of which represent pressing issues that African women continue to face, often concealed or legitimized under the guise of tradition. The literary texts analysed in this study reflect some of these realities through their lead protagonists. For example, *Nongxaki* is compelled into an arranged marriage as a young girl (Belebesi, 1976), while *Cikizwa* in *UDike noCikizwa* (1988) ultimately commits suicide after being coerced by her father and paternal aunt into a forced marriage. Similarly, *Nolasti* in *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* (1994) experiences oppression and subjugation within a polygamous marriage, suffering not only under her husband but also from the constraints imposed by her sister wives, the community, and even her mother (Mothlabane, 1994). In *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda* (1997), *Nozinto* confronts gender stereotypes and unfair treatment from both men and women within her social context. These narratives collectively illustrate how patriarchal interpretations of African cultural and traditional ideologies perpetuate systemic inequality and marginalization, highlighting the necessity of contextualized frameworks such as African feminisms that address the specific socio-cultural realities and structural oppressions experienced by African women.

In this context, it is important to note that the aforementioned challenges do not encompass the full spectrum of struggles faced by African women; they must also contend with issues commonly experienced by European women (Thiam, 1986:112). Thiam (1986:112) further identifies two distinct psychological dimensions of exploitation and oppression that African women are compelled to navigate, which she categorizes as follows:

> Firstly, where women who are oppressed and exploited do not understand the situation, and remain in thrall, as passive victims-this is the case with a good many

> Black women, whether traditionalists or not. Secondly, is the case where exploitation and oppression are partially understood and give rise to theorizing, sometimes leading to movements for the liberation of women.

The significance of the aforementioned statement is evident in the literary texts examined for this study, which feature representations of both types of African women identified by Thiam. In *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*, the sister wives of the lead protagonist, *Nolasti*, have internalized patriarchal principles to such an extent that these norms function as subconscious beliefs, shaping their behaviour and perceptions. As a result, they view *Nolasti's* liberal ideologies as threatening and respond with prejudice and hostility. Similarly, in *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda*, the lead female protagonist, despite striving to assert her autonomy against patriarchal constraints, is ill-treated by her female peers, who, although educated and well-informed, align themselves with hegemonic structures. Across these texts, strong, liberal women endeavour to challenge entrenched systems and propose alternative ways of thinking. Examples include *Nolasti*, who seeks to unite church women in a collective quest for liberation from patriarchal oppression; *Nongxaki,* who defies her parents to marry the man she loves; *Cikizwa*, who ultimately commits suicide rather than submit to an arranged marriage; and *Nozinto*, who retaliates against her husband and the patriarchal order by orchestrating his death. In each case, these women encounter resistance, highlighting the pervasive power of hegemonic norms and the formidable obstacles faced by those attempting to subvert them. The texts thus illuminate the complex interplay between individual agency, social conditioning, and systemic oppression within patriarchal African societies.

These two levels of psychological subjugation experienced by African women are rooted in the threefold oppression to which they are subjected. First, due to their gender, African women are dominated by men within patriarchal societies, facing systemic limitations on their autonomy and social agency. Second, their socio-economic status exposes them to exploitation under capitalist structures, affecting women who are financially dependent on men as well as those from the working class. Third, their race subjects them to colonization and marginalization within their own land, compounding the layers of oppression they endure (Thiam, 1986:118). As Thiam (1986:118) asserts, "the Black African woman's struggle cannot find a place in any scheme which derives the specificity of women's problems, and which only sees their solution in a struggle for national liberation." This highlights the insufficiency of approaches that fail to account for the intersecting dimensions of gender, class, and race in African women's experiences. Consequently, African feminism is as

essential as Western feminism, yet the latter cannot adequately represent or advocate for African women without a thorough understanding of their distinct threefold oppression. African feminism, therefore, provides a context-specific framework that addresses the unique structural, cultural, and historical realities shaping African women's lives, emphasizing both emancipation and the pursuit of social justice within local and global contexts.

Gqola (2001:15) contends that postcolonial feminisms aim to break new ground by developing innovative definitions and coining new terminologies that more accurately reflect women's participation in discourses on gender equality. She emphasizes the diversity of feminist expressions both within Africa and across the Diaspora, highlighting the need to recognize the varied ways in which women engage with, interpret, and challenge patriarchal structures. According to Gqola (2001:15), language functions as a critical tool not only for articulating these distinct feminist perspectives but also for assigning labels to women and their social roles. Consequently, she argues that women's activism can adopt multiple terminologies while still representing the same fundamental discourse of empowerment and resistance (Gqola, 2001:17). This approach underscores the importance of contextualized frameworks in feminist theory, recognizing that the struggles, strategies, and expressions of women may differ according to historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts, yet converge in their shared pursuit of gender justice and equity.

Gqola (2001:17) also maintains that all African women emancipation discourses have a central theme of valuing the everyday experiences and past experiences of African women. "There is clearly diversity within, and among the ranks of Black women who identify similarly. There are variations on which specific traits can be seen as central to each of these spaces" (2001:18). Where for instance, in traditional matrilineal cultures such as that of the Igbo people in Nigeria women were not always subjected to oppression and subordination by men only but by other women as well (Atanga, Sibonile, Lissoletile, et al., 2013:304). This is portrayed in Amadiume's book called, Male Daughters and Female Husbands (1987). The literary text depicts the life of the Nnobi people who are also known as the Igbo in Nigeria where, "traditionally some infertile [heterosexual] women married other women in order for them to have access to land and other resources, including powerful political positions" (Amadiume, 1987:90). In such marriages, the woman wife would get impregnated by a man who, is in essence, her husband that could not biologically bear children, however the men who impregnated these women would be stripped off the right to claim those children (Atanga, Sibonile, Lissoletile, et al., 2013:304).

Within the literary texts examined in this study, the four female lead protagonists exemplify distinct forms of resilience and strategies of resistance against patriarchal domination. In *Nongxaki Nezakhe* (1976), the young protagonist, despite her youth, chooses to resist her family's arranged marriage through subtle, strategic means after an unsuccessful attempt to voice her objections to her paternal aunt. She outwardly complies with all preparations for the marriage while secretly planning to marry the man of her choice on the designated day. In *UDike noCikizwa* (1988), the female protagonist initially succumbs to the pressures of a forced marriage but later courageously confronts her paternal aunt and subsequently her father, openly challenging them before a full congregation. In *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* (1994), the female protagonist exhibits bold and radical resistance from the outset. As the breadwinner of her household, she asserts herself in decision-making processes, acts independently, and mobilizes other women to collectively challenge patriarchal norms and work toward gender equality and cultural transformation. In *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda* (1997), the female protagonist adopts a more desperate and aggressive strategy, driven by the exhaustion and frustration engendered by a system that permits her husband to oppress and abuse her. Across these texts, the protagonists' diverse approaches highlight the varied ways in which African women negotiate, contest, and subvert patriarchal authority, demonstrating both individual agency and collective resistance in the pursuit of empowerment and social change.

In all of the aforementioned literary texts, the female protagonists deploy a range of strategies aimed at transforming patriarchal cultural practices and traditional norms, simultaneously seeking to liberate themselves and other women from hegemonic constraints. These strategies vary in form and intensity; from subtle, strategic compliance to overt confrontation and radical activism reflecting the complex ways in which women negotiate power within patriarchal systems. As Gqola (2001) and Atanga (2013) assert, while the specific methods and terminologies employed in these quests for liberation may differ, the underlying objective of African feminisms remains consistent: to challenge gendered oppression, promote equality, and reconfigure societal structures that perpetuate women's subordination. This underscores the adaptability and contextual specificity of African feminist praxis, highlighting how women across different historical, cultural, and social settings develop diverse but convergent approaches to achieving autonomy, social justice, and the dismantling of entrenched patriarchal hierarchies.

It is within this framework that Guy-Sheftall (2003:31) identifies the diverse forms of activism undertaken by African women and categorizes their efforts under the umbrella of African feminism.

She contends that their "discursive, imaginative and activist projects are important sites of resistance among African women in various cultural contexts and they compel us to re-imagine what is meant by 'feminism in a global context'" (Guy-Sheftall, 2003:31). This perspective highlights the significance of African women's initiatives as both locally grounded and globally resonant, emphasizing that their strategies, though culturally specific, contribute to broader conversations about gender equality and women's liberation. By foregrounding African women's experiences, agency, and innovative approaches to challenging patriarchal structures, Guy-Sheftall underscores the necessity of expanding conventional understandings of feminism to accommodate diverse cultural realities, histories, and social conditions. These discursive and activist interventions not only redefine the parameters of feminist thought but also illuminate the transformative potential of African women's collective and individual struggles against intersecting systems of oppression. It is fundamental in this context to define African feminism and to do so, this study utilises Boyce Davies and Adam Graves (1986:8) definition of African feminism as:

> …[It] recognises a common struggle with African men for the removal of the yokes of foreign domination and European/American exploitation. It is not antagonistic to African men but challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspects of women's subjugation which differ from the generalized oppression of all African peoples…It recognises that certain inequalities and limitations existed/exist in traditional societies and that colonialism reintroduced others…

The above conceptualization of African feminism aptly captures the struggles undertaken by the female protagonists in the selected literary texts. Notably, these protagonists are not positioned as antagonistic toward men; rather, they seek to collaborate with those men who are amenable to transformation and the pursuit of gender equality. For example, in *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* (1994), the female protagonist persistently engages with her husband to address issues of male dominance and inequality within the household, even consulting a male pastor to seek equitable solutions, thereby striving to foster collaboration between men and women in achieving social and domestic justice. In *Nongxaki Nezakhe* (1976), the protagonist asserts her right to autonomy, particularly in making decisions regarding her marriage, challenging imposed authority while seeking to construct a family life on her own terms. Similarly, in *UDike noCikizwa* (1988), the female protagonist resists coercion into an arranged marriage, advocating for her right to build a family with the man of her choice rather than being treated as powerless or invalid. In *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda* (1997), *Nozinto's* struggle

concentrates on securing her husband's love, affection, attention, appreciation, and respect, emphasizing the pursuit of emotional and relational equity within the marital domain. Across these texts, the protagonists' efforts reflect the broader principles of African feminism: a commitment to challenging patriarchal domination while seeking collaboration, fairness, and mutual recognition in social and familial contexts.

The female protagonists in the selected literary texts demonstrate a clear awareness of the patriarchal, cultural, and traditional norms that deny them equitable treatment in society, paralleling the privileges afforded to men. They are also cognizant of the additional constraints imposed by colonialism and foreign domination, which further entrenched systemic inequalities. For instance, in *Nongxaki Nezakhe* (1976), the introduction of formal education by colonial authorities was initially presented as a privilege exclusively for boys. Girls, in contrast, were expected to remain at home to receive instruction in domestic tasks from their mothers, while boys were provided with education geared toward public labour and economic productivity. By the time this gendered educational policy was relaxed, older women, including *Nongxaki's* mother, had internalized these norms and adapted them as customary practice. Consequently, *Nongxaki* was prohibited from attending school for an extended period, illustrating how colonial interventions, patriarchal traditions, and internalized social norms intersected to limit women's access to education and broader social advancement.

In *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* (1994), *Nolasti* notices that her Western manager and her husband treat each other differently and socialise in a different manner. Thus, as much as she learns immensely from her European manager, she also tells her that culturally they are different therefore, there are certain things that she would not do or partake in due to their cultural differences. In *UDike noCikizwa* (1988), Western Christian values of marrying in a church saves *Cikizwa* from marrying a man she does not love however, she recognises how foreign the concept is. As much as these women attempt to transform culture and tradition, they also acknowledge its principles and merely want to transform the oppression and subjugation that they face in the hands of patriarchy. Boyce Davies and Adam Graves (1986:10) further state that African feminism:

> Acknowledges its affinities with international feminism but delineates a specific African feminism with certain specific needs and goals out of the concrete realities of women's lives in African societies…[It] examines African societies for institutions which are of value to women and rejects those which work to their

> detriment and does not simply import Western women's agendas. Thus, it respects African woman's status as mother but questions obligatory motherhood and the traditional favouring of sons…It respects African woman's self-reliance and the penchant to co-operative work and social organisation…It understands the interconnectedness of race, class and sex oppression.

Another definition that aligns with those previously discussed and is particularly relevant to this study is offered by Ata Aidoo, as cited in Nnaemeka (1998:47). Aidoo defines African feminism as the advocacy for both the political and social independence of the African continent and the emancipation of African women, with the broader objective of ensuring that women have access to the full benefits and opportunities that their environment can provide. This definition underscores the dual focus of African feminism: addressing systemic and structural inequities at the continental level while simultaneously promoting the personal, social, and economic empowerment of women. It emphasizes the interconnection between the liberation of women and the broader pursuit of societal transformation, highlighting the role of African feminisms in challenging patriarchal, colonial, and socio-economic barriers to achieve holistic development and equitable participation in all spheres of life.

It is also essential to acknowledge and define another form of African feminism, which, although labelled differently for reasons discussed by previous scholars, shares the same fundamental objective of promoting the emancipation and empowerment of African women. This variant, known as Africana Womanism, will be defined and examined below, as the female protagonists in the literary texts analysed for this study demonstrate characteristics consistent with its principles. Africana Womanism emphasizes the centrality of African women's experiences, highlighting the interconnected struggles against gender, racial, and socio-economic oppression, while prioritizing family, community, and cultural cohesion. By incorporating this framework, the study recognizes the multifaceted strategies and qualities exhibited by these literary protagonists in resisting patriarchal and hegemonic structures, illustrating how their actions align with broader ideologies that seek to advance women's agency and social transformation within African contexts.

2.4.2. African Womanism

African Womanism is a theoretical framework coined by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1985) to

capture the unique experiences and challenges faced by African women. Ogunyemi emphasizes that the concept encompasses a broad spectrum of issues, including "in-law problems, older women oppressing younger women, [and] women oppressing their co-wives" (Arndt, 2000:714). These dynamics are vividly reflected in the literary texts selected for this study, where the female protagonists frequently confront similar forms of intra-gender and familial oppression, highlighting the persistence of patriarchal and social hierarchies within domestic and community settings. Furthermore, these issues are not confined to the literary sphere; they continue to resonate in the experiences of contemporary African women, illustrating the ongoing relevance of African Womanism as both a theoretical lens and a practical framework for understanding and addressing the intersecting forms of oppression that affect women across generations. By situating the literary analysis within this framework, the study underscores the enduring nature of these social challenges, and the strategies women employ to navigate and resist them.

In *Nongxaki Nezakhe* (1976), the protagonist *Nongxaki* experiences oppression and emotional abuse at the hands of her mother-in-law, reflecting the complexities of intra-gender power dynamics within patriarchal family structures. The mother-in-law deliberately seeks to make *Nongxaki's* marriage difficult, insisting that she remain with her in-laws while her husband works in a different province. During this period, the husband fails to provide adequately for *Nongxaki* and their child, leaving her in a vulnerable and precarious position. When *Nongxaki* attempts to seek her husband, her mother-in-law reacts with indignation, accusing her of attempting to undermine the relationship between mother and son rather than fulfilling her expected role as an obedient wife and daughter-in-law. Furthermore, the mother-in-law articulates her disapproval by claiming that Nongxaki was not properly educated as a young woman regarding the duties and comportment of a "proper" wife prior to her marriage. This scenario exemplifies how patriarchal norms are reinforced not only by men but also by older women, who perpetuate expectations of female subservience and compliance, thereby maintaining hierarchical structures and controlling younger women's behaviour within the domestic sphere.

Nongxaki's mother further expresses disapproval toward her daughter-in-law for choosing to follow her husband to reside in another province. She criticizes *Nongxaki's* comportment, labelling her an "improper wife" and attributing her behaviour to inadequate upbringing. According to her mother-in-law, *Nongxaki* failed to internalize the norms expected of a young bride, as evidenced by her waking late, inability to competently perform household chores, and frequent hosting of friends in

the homestead activities deemed inappropriate for a married woman within the cultural and patriarchal framework of the family. This critique underscores the role of older women in enforcing traditional gender expectations, illustrating how patriarchal values are perpetuated intergenerationally and how women can become agents of control, policing the behaviour of younger women in accordance with societal norms.

African Womanism addresses the multiple and intersecting dynamics of oppression that African women endure, offering frameworks for empowerment and strategies to challenge and transform patriarchal systems. Through African Womanist ideologies, women have found ways to strategically manipulate cultural and traditional practices similarly to how these norms were originally used to reinforce patriarchy, but in these instances, the objective is to subvert and challenge patriarchal authority. For example, Ogunyemi, as cited in Arndt (2000:716), observes that some women in Nigeria enter polygamous marriages for their own strategic advantage. Within such arrangements, these women seek to mitigate the oppressive aspects of marriage by creating autonomous spaces, such as maintaining their own households, raising their children independently, and exercising a degree of control over their domestic and social lives while their husbands are preoccupied with multiple households. This illustrates how African women creatively navigate existing socio-cultural frameworks to assert agency, achieve independence, and resist patriarchal domination, demonstrating the practical and adaptive dimensions of African Womanist thought in addressing women's lived realities.

In an interview with Arndt (2000:717), Ogunyemi asserts that African Womanism recognizes and engages with existing cultural practices and traditions, yet simultaneously empowers women to reinterpret and transform these norms to serve their own interests and facilitate liberation from patriarchal oppression. Within this framework, African Womanism advocates for the retention of positive cultural values, such as *Isihlonipho* (the practice of respect), while rejecting interpretations that impose subjugation on women. Similarly, polygamy, when approached through the lens of African Womanism, is envisaged as a marital arrangement that should not solely benefit the husband but also provide agency, security, and well-being for the wife. This approach illustrates the adaptive and emancipatory potential of African Womanism, highlighting how women can strategically negotiate and reshape cultural traditions to challenge systemic inequalities, assert autonomy, and promote more equitable social and familial structures.

In the polygamous marriage portrayed in *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* (1994), the wives are ideally entitled to rights equal to those of the husband. Nolasti exemplifies the application of African Womanist principles as she challenges the ways in which tradition perpetuates prejudice against women and seeks to reform these practices for the collective benefit of all family members. She actively mobilizes other women to participate in this transformative quest, demonstrating the power of collective action and solidarity in confronting patriarchal norms. In this context, Ogunyemi (1985:96) partially defines African Womanism as:

> Black-centred. It is accommodating. It wants meaningful union [sic] between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men will change from their sexist stand. This ideological position explains why women writers do not end their plots with feminist victories.

The foregoing aligns closely with Boyce Davies and Adam Graves' (1986) conceptualization of African feminism. However, Ogunyemi (2000) emphasizes the importance of adopting a distinct terminology to ensure that men do not perceive themselves as being alienated or positioned as adversaries. This strategic renaming can potentially transform male perceptions, fostering collaboration with women in the struggle to dismantle gender inequality. Ogunyemi further stresses the necessity of demonstrating that the patriarchal system itself is problematic, rather than merely individual behaviours. In the literary texts, older women such as *Cikizwa's* paternal aunt in *UDike noCikizwa* (1988) and the married women in *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda* (1997) must come to recognize that patriarchy is not synonymous with tradition, but rather constitutes a system that infringes upon women's rights. As Ogunyemi notes, "culture still makes the difference to our attitudes, to what should be done" (Ogunyemi in Arndt, 2000:722), underscoring the potential for cultural reinterpretation to challenge oppressive norms and facilitate gender equity. This perspective highlights the role of both intergenerational dialogue and culturally grounded advocacy in advancing African feminist and womanist agendas.

Ogunyemi further contends that naming is a profoundly significant process, particularly within African contexts, where names carry cultural, historical, and social meaning. Consequently, individuals should not allow others to define their concepts or adopt terminology without understanding its origins and implications. Ogunyemi (2000:721) emphasizes that, in African cultures, every name conveys significance; therefore, it is crucial for African women to develop

conceptual frameworks that resonate with their cultural and traditional experiences. She also underscores the importance of recognizing that, on a global scale, African men too face oppression, even though within domestic settings they often occupy positions of authority. This dual reality necessitates the inclusion of men in discussions of gender equality and feminist discourse, fostering collaborative approaches that challenge patriarchal structures while acknowledging the broader socio-political constraints affecting both women and men. By situating African feminist and womanist thought within culturally meaningful frameworks, Ogunyemi highlights the need for strategies that are contextually grounded, inclusive, and capable of generating systemic social transformation.

According to Kolawole (2002:96), African Womanism is a crucial ideology for African societies because it is inclusive and culturally grounded, placing significant value on both cultural heritage and the integrity of the family structure. This emphasis is evident in the literary texts analysed for this study, where the family occupies a central role within the narratives and reflects its importance in amaXhosa culture. For instance, despite enduring numerous challenges within her marriage, Nolasti in *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* (1994) demonstrates a strong commitment to maintaining her family unit. She experiences deep emotional pain when her son visits her in distress, a consequence of the ongoing conflicts between her and her husband. Out of concern for her child's well-being and the preservation of the family structure, Nolasti chooses to return to her husband, illustrating the prioritization of familial responsibilities over individual grievances. This narrative underscores the African Womanist principle that women's empowerment and agency can coexist with a commitment to family cohesion, highlighting the nuanced ways in which women navigate cultural expectations, personal autonomy, and relational obligations.

In *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda* (1997), *Nozinto* is driven by profound feelings of anger and resentment due to her husband's disregard for and abandonment of their family. Her actions are largely motivated by the pain and suffering he has inflicted upon both her and their children. During the course of her court proceedings, *Nozinto* reflects on the impact of her decisions on her children and the circumstances surrounding their father's death. She experiences a complex mix of emotions, including guilt for having removed him from their lives and for disrupting the family structure, yet she simultaneously reminds herself that her actions were undertaken for the broader welfare of the family. The prolonged deterioration of the family unit is a central source of her anguish, underscoring the weight of cultural and social expectations placed upon women to maintain familial cohesion.

This narrative illustrates how African Womanist thought can be applied to interpret women's actions as both a response to patriarchal neglect and a strategic effort to protect and prioritize the well-being of the family, even in contexts of moral and emotional complexity.

In *Nongxaki Nezakhe* (1976), *Nongxaki* leaves the familiarity and comfort of her rural home to search for her husband in an unfamiliar province, taking their infant child with her. Despite enduring considerable suffering, she perceives her struggles as justified, motivated by the desire to reunite and preserve her family. *Nongxaki* even persists in an abusive and oppressive household controlled by her in-laws, demonstrating remarkable resilience and self-sacrifice for the sake of familial cohesion. Although she initially departs due to the harsh treatment she faces, she ultimately returns to her husband, prioritizing the restoration of her family unit over personal grievances. Similarly, in *UDike noCikizwa* (1988), *Cikizwa* contemplates ending her life because she is denied the opportunity to establish a family with the man she loves. Initially, she is willing to marry a man she does not love solely to fulfil her family's expectations and secure her father's approval, even at the cost of enduring the pain of a loveless marriage. These narratives illustrate that, despite the oppressive circumstances they face, both *Nongxaki* and *Cikizwa* place profound value on family, employing their resilience and strategic choices as mechanisms to preserve, restore, and protect their familial structures. Such depictions highlight the intersection of personal agency and familial responsibility within African Womanist frameworks, demonstrating how women navigate complex social and cultural expectations to sustain family unity.

Another fundamental principle of African womanism is that it embraces the activism of all African women who have been either ignored or recognised in the struggle for emancipation of all African people. It "critically examines the limitations of feminist theory and helps to explain, comprehensively, the ideas and activism of some African women who have contributed to womanist theory" (Dave, 1998:516). In essence Ogunyemi (1986:63) defines Womanism as:

> A philosophy that celebrates Black roots, the ideals of Black life, while giving a balanced presentation of Black 'womandom'. It concerns itself as much with the Black sexual power as with the world power structure that subjugates Blacks.

African Womanism does not solely represent African women on the continent but also encompasses Black women across the Diaspora, acknowledging the shared histories of oppression, resilience, and resistance. As Gqola (2001:125) asserts, "Womanism, as a self-rooted and self-identified concept,

provides a single gendered, single racial space for solidarity and struggle among Black women." This framework creates an inclusive space that fosters collective identity, mutual support, and coordinated activism, enabling Black women to challenge intersecting forms of racial, gendered, and socio-economic oppression. By centralising the lived experiences and agency of Black women, African Womanism simultaneously affirms cultural heritage and encourages the development of context-specific strategies for empowerment and social transformation. It thus operates not only as a theoretical lens but also as a practical guide for resistance, community building, and the pursuit of equity within diverse African and diasporic contexts.

2.5. Conclusion

Synthesizing the discussions in this section, it is evident that South African African-language literature, particularly isiXhosa literature, often foregrounds the systemic injustices that render women passive or "silent vessels" within patriarchal structures. This body of literature frequently draws comparisons between the treatment of women during the apartheid era and the post-apartheid period, critically examining the extent to which constitutional reforms and legislative changes have translated into meaningful social, economic, and political transformation for women. Furthermore, these literary works acknowledge instances in which women have gained access to spheres of influence that were previously restricted or where their participation was minimal, thereby highlighting both progress and ongoing disparities. Nevertheless, the literature consistently underscores that significant challenges remain, emphasizing the need for sustained efforts to achieve genuine gender equality and to dismantle entrenched patriarchal norms that continue to limit women's autonomy, agency, and representation in various aspects of society.

The literature analysed in this study also underscores the pervasive and persistent gender inequality crisis across Africa. It highlights the reality that women are often required to work twice as hard as men to demonstrate their competence in professional, social, and political spheres traditionally dominated by men. Despite their contributions in both public and private domains, women are still expected to fulfil domestic responsibilities, including household labour and caregiving roles as mothers and wives. This dual burden underscores the structural and cultural constraints that continue to impede women's full emancipation. Consequently, these works raise critical questions regarding the true extent of women's liberation in democratic South Africa, challenging assumptions that legal and constitutional reforms alone are sufficient to achieve gender equality. They emphasize the need

for comprehensive societal transformation that addresses both systemic inequalities and deeply ingrained cultural norms that perpetuate women's subordination.

The literature discussed in this section illustrates that, even during the apartheid era, numerous women's organizations were established in solidarity with Black South Africans to combat systemic injustices and oppression. In the post-apartheid democratic era, these movements committed themselves to advancing gender equality and promoting the emancipation of women from entrenched hegemonic structures. However, as Gqola (2015:6) observes, women's movements have, at times, exhibited forms of prejudice against other women. For instance, members of the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL), the largest women's organization in South Africa, publicly supported former President Jacob Zuma during his rape trial. Some members of the movement criticized the young woman's dress and behaviour, effectively attributing blame to her for the alleged assault. This incident highlights the complexities and contradictions within women's movements, revealing how internalized patriarchal attitudes and societal norms can influence even organizations dedicated to women's rights, thus underscoring the ongoing challenges of achieving genuine solidarity and gender justice.

In many cultural contexts, women's social value is often assessed based on their comportment, attire, and reproductive capabilities. Women experiencing fertility challenges are frequently stigmatized and labelled as barren, while those who bear children outside of marriage are subjected to derogatory characterizations, including being perceived as promiscuous, morally deficient, or socially inferior. Within such patriarchal frameworks, married women often position themselves as superior to single or unmarried women, reinforcing hierarchical distinctions based on marital and reproductive status. Despite trends of declining marriage rates and rising divorce rates among the amaXhosa, marriage continues to be regarded as a marker of social prestige, particularly within traditional households. This cultural emphasis on marital status and reproductive performance illustrates how entrenched gender norms and societal expectations continue to shape women's identities, social standing, and perceived moral worth.

The analysis of African literature reveals that certain culturally prescribed traits continue to define what is considered a "proper" African woman, often emphasizing obedience, dignity, silence, and other characteristics that reinforce gender hierarchies and social subordination. Women are expected to understand and maintain their designated roles within the family structure, with respect contingent

upon adherence to these prescribed norms. Central to these expectations are fertility, strategic discretion in speech, and unwavering support of men to facilitate their success. In essence, women are often positioned as caretakers and promoters of men's ambitions, tasked with sustaining domestic and emotional labour while prioritizing the achievements and social standing of male family members. Such portrayals underscore how cultural narratives continue to perpetuate patriarchal ideals, shaping both the lived experiences of women and societal perceptions of female value and propriety.

In certain African societies, such as Nigeria, women are increasingly seizing opportunities for education, economic advancement, and social participation. However, these gains coexist with persistent and conflicting attitudes toward gender roles. Women in rural areas often continue to uphold and transmit patriarchal ideologies to younger generations, reinforcing traditional expectations of female subservience and domesticity. Even in contexts where women assume the role of primary breadwinner, many still frame this responsibility as temporary, asserting that it is ultimately the prerogative of men to provide for the family once they are financially capable. This ambivalence highlights the enduring influence of patriarchal norms on women's self-perceptions and societal expectations, revealing the tension between progressive agency and culturally ingrained gender hierarchies. Such dynamics underscore the need for both structural and cultural transformation to fully empower African women and normalize equitable participation in economic and social spheres.

Another significant theme that emerges from the African literature examined in this section is the centrality of childbearing in defining women's social value and identity. The texts illustrate that women often prioritize fertility to such an extent that they willingly enter polygamous marriages, despite being fully cognizant of the oppressive and patriarchal dynamics inherent in such arrangements. This decision is frequently motivated by the desire to bear children with their husbands, reflecting the societal expectation that women's primary role is reproductive and that their legitimacy or social acceptance is closely tied to their ability to produce offspring. Consequently, women subject themselves to structural inequalities and personal hardships, highlighting the tension between cultural obligations, personal aspirations, and the systemic limitations imposed by patriarchal institutions. These narratives underscore the enduring influence of reproductive expectations on women's agency and the complex strategies they employ to navigate oppressive social structures while striving to fulfil culturally sanctioned roles.

In certain African societies, wives are frequently positioned as outsiders within their marital households, particularly when husbands confide in their female relatives, who often maintain contentious relationships with their sisters-in-law. This dynamic places considerable strain on the marital relationship, as husbands share confidential information regarding the marriage with their relatives, effectively granting them insight and influence over domestic affairs. In contrast, wives are typically prohibited from discussing marital matters with their own family members, being instructed instead to maintain secrecy and endure hardships silently. This asymmetry reinforces patriarchal control, subordinating women's voices while privileging male authority and the perspectives of extended kin. Such practices not only perpetuate systemic inequities within marriages but also limit women's agency and support networks, compelling them to navigate complex social hierarchies while adhering to culturally imposed norms of endurance and compliance.

Another critical issue highlighted in the African literature reviewed is the persistence of internalized gender inferiority among African women, which often stems from societal expectations and relational hierarchies. Women who accept men as primary providers frequently become financially dependent on them, creating a power imbalance that men may exploit. This dependency enables men to exercise control over women's lives, often justifying unequal or disrespectful treatment. Consequently, some women internalize the belief that their subservience and compliance are owed to men as repayment for financial support, reinforcing cycles of obedience and submission. This dynamic illustrates how economic dependence, coupled with deeply ingrained patriarchal norms, sustains gender inequities and limits women's agency, highlighting the urgent need for both structural reforms and cultural shifts to empower women and promote equitable relationships.

Another issue highlighted in the African literature is the structuring of the African family unit, which assigns specific roles and expectations to each member based on age and gender. From a young age, girls are socialized to adhere to behavioural codes that differ markedly from those imposed on boys, while mothers and fathers are also expected to fulfil distinct, culturally prescribed roles. These role distinctions often contribute to the subordination of girls and women, reinforcing notions of male superiority and female inferiority. Boys are granted greater privileges and autonomy, being positioned as heirs responsible for continuing the family lineage, whereas girls are primarily viewed as future wives, expected to marry and integrate into their husband's family. Such culturally entrenched role differentiation not only legitimizes unequal treatment but also perpetuates systemic gender hierarchies, limiting women's opportunities for self-determination and reinforcing patriarchal

control within the domestic sphere.

Throughout the literature review, it becomes evident that many of the patriarchal norms governing women's behaviour originate from male authority but are often enforced by women upon other women. Girls are socialized by their mothers, who themselves were trained by their mothers, mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, and other elder women within the community. This intergenerational transmission of patriarchal values ensures the continuity of gendered hierarchies, with women acting as enforcers of the very systems that constrain their own autonomy. Consequently, these women can be understood as subliminal agents of patriarchal culture, perpetuating social norms that maintain male dominance while limiting female agency. This phenomenon underscores the complexity of internalized oppression, illustrating how patriarchal structures are sustained not solely through overt male authority but also through subtle, socially sanctioned practices among women themselves.

CHAPTER 3: BEYOND FEMINISM

3.1. Introduction

This chapter is foundational to the development of the study, as it seeks to elucidate the concept encapsulated by the phrase "beyond feminism," which serves as the central focus of the research. In an effort to establish a nuanced understanding aligned with both the literary texts analysed and the theoretical framework employed, the chapter begins by providing a Western, general perspective on feminism. While several definitions are offered, reflecting the variations among scholars and schools of thought, they share a common objective: the advocacy for gender equality and the challenge of patriarchal structures. Subsequently, the chapter provides a concise historical overview of the emergence of women's liberation movements that incorporated feminist principles. This historical contextualization demonstrates that, although not all women's movements explicitly identified as feminist, their courage, resilience, and strategic actions in contesting patriarchal systems effectively embodied the core tenets of feminism. By bridging theoretical discourse with literary representation and historical praxis, this chapter establishes a framework for understanding the study's central inquiry into the evolution and contextualization of gendered struggles within African societies.

Thirdly, this chapter provides extensive accounts of the bold and transformative acts of South African Black women across the precolonial, colonial, apartheid, and post-apartheid eras, highlighting both the resilience of ordinary women and the extraordinary contributions of celebrated struggle heroines. By examining these historical and contemporary examples, the study seeks to illuminate the intelligence, courage, and strategic agency that Black women have consistently demonstrated, even when operating under the intersecting oppressions of racism, class inequality, gender-based injustices, and patriarchal cultural norms. These accounts underscore the multifaceted nature of women's resistance, revealing how acts of defiance, leadership, and perseverance were not only instrumental in challenging systemic oppression but also in shaping social, political, and cultural landscapes. Through this lens, the chapter emphasizes the centrality of women's audacity and resilience as a critical aspect of understanding the broader struggle for equality and empowerment within South African society.

Lastly, this chapter will, drawing on the data and analyses presented in the preceding subsections, provide a detailed explanation of the significance of the phrase "beyond feminism" as it is applied in

this study. This concept does not reject feminism as a theoretical framework, nor does it dismiss Western scholarship or feminist ideologies; rather, it offers an opportunity to explore progressive and contextually grounded approaches to addressing the challenges faced by women, particularly Black South African women. The focus is on fostering unity among women and subsequently engaging men in collaborative efforts, recognizing that sustainable solutions to gender inequality require the active participation of both sexes. The chapter also highlights the courageous and strategic contributions of women who operated under the most oppressive regimes, demonstrating resilience, audacity, and intelligence in the pursuit of social justice. Finally, the chapter will examine the female protagonists in the literary texts analysed, illustrating how their actions embody the principles of "beyond feminism" through acts of boldness, astuteness, and transformative agency, as interpreted within the chosen theoretical framework and the textual material. This approach underscores the potential for culturally and historically informed strategies to advance gender equality while honouring the legacy of women's resistance and empowerment.

3.2. Defining Feminism through the Western Perspective

Grimshaw (1986:7) asserts that feminist ideologies gained significant prominence in the West during the 1900s, particularly in the 1960s, coinciding with the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement. Nevertheless, the struggle for women's political and social equality predates this period, with organized efforts tracing back to the 1800s. During this era, Western women began actively resisting hegemonic powers and advocating for equal rights. Grimshaw (1986:8) notes that these early feminist movements were partly a response to the "upheavals in the modes and means of production and in social relationships," which were precipitated by the Industrial Revolution. This period transformed Western society from a rural, subsistence-based economy to one organized around household and community-centred production, thereby giving rise to capitalism. The shift to industrial capitalism prompted widespread urbanization, as economic activity became concentrated in cities where the means of production were located. It also led to the formation of social classes, the establishment of formal careers, and the creation of new economic opportunities. However, these emerging economic structures were dominated by men, who controlled the most significant and profitable sectors of production, reinforcing gendered hierarchies and limiting women's access to positions of economic and social power.

The second factor contributing to the emergence of feminist ideology was the "growth of egalitarian

political ideals" (Grimshaw, 1986:8). During this period, there was an increasing number of individuals advocating for equality, and European politics were characterized by vigorous campaigns against monarchy and tyrannical rule. Despite these shifts, political spheres remained overwhelmingly male-dominated. As Grimshaw (1986:9) observes, influential philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau actively excluded women from political participation, arguing that women's supposed emotionality and irrationality rendered them unfit for political engagement. This exclusion catalysed the rise of pioneering women such as Mary Wollstonecraft in the 1800s. According to Grimshaw (1986:9), Wollstonecraft's seminal work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, challenged prevailing assumptions by asserting that no logical justification existed for denying women access to political life. She critiqued the pervasive reasoning used to discredit women's abilities and capabilities, emphasizing that evolving social conditions created opportunities to interrogate women's status and advocate for their inclusion in political and public spheres. These developments marked a foundational moment in the articulation of feminist ideology, linking the pursuit of gender equality to broader struggles for social and political justice.

As a result of growing awareness of systemic gender inequities, women's liberation movements emerged, with increasing numbers of women recognizing and challenging their social and political marginalization. This momentum contributed to the proliferation of women's suffragette groups, particularly during the 1960s. The resurgence of the feminist movement in the late 1960s in the United States was largely spearheaded by middle-class white housewives, including prominent figures such as Betty Friedan (hooks, 1998:1844). hooks (1998:1844) notes that these women, despite having access to higher education, often married immediately after completing their studies, thereby limiting their ability to pursue sustained professional careers. Those who attempted to balance work and family responsibilities frequently encountered obstacles, such as pregnancy and childcare, which curtailed their professional trajectories. Friedan (1963:28) observes that, although many women expressed contentment in their domestic roles following World War II, younger women increasingly resisted these limitations, with some even leaving college for fear that continued education would impede their marital prospects. Nevertheless, these women harboured aspirations beyond domesticity, demonstrating an emergent desire for personal fulfilment, intellectual engagement, and broader participation in public and professional life, which laid the foundation for the modern feminist movement.

According to Friedan (1963:30), women in the United States during the 1950s were socialized to

embrace the roles of perfect mothers and devoted wives. She observes, “They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for” (Friedan, 1963:30). Women were expected to devote their daily lives to routine domestic chores, yet over time, many began to experience a profound sense of dissatisfaction and unfulfillment. Friedan (1963:63) identifies this phenomenon as “the problem that has no name,” describing the pervasive yet unarticulated frustration experienced by women confined to domestic spheres. This growing awareness of personal and societal constraints contributed to the emergence of the modern suffragette and feminist movements, as women collectively sought avenues for self-expression, intellectual engagement, and broader social, political, and economic participation. The rise of these movements marked a critical shift in challenging entrenched patriarchal norms and advocating for women’s rights across multiple spheres of life.

An increasing number of women recognized the necessity for political participation and equitable opportunities comparable to those afforded to men, which contributed to the rise of feminist movements. Feminists are defined by Mitchell and Oakley (1986:8) as individuals who assert that women experience discrimination on the basis of their sex, possess specific needs that are often neglected, and require social and political interventions to address these inequities. While such interventions can be radical in nature, transformation need not always be confrontational; changes may also be achieved incrementally through the reform or development of existing policies in ways that do not appear antagonistic. According to Mitchell and Oakley (1986:49), feminism as an ideology seeks to promote individual and collective emancipation through the mobilization of women in solidarity. It emphasizes the recognition of diversity among women and encourages unity, even if this involves smaller groups of women who share similar interests and experiences, thereby contributing to broader systemic change within society. This approach underscores feminism’s dual commitment to both inclusivity and pragmatic strategies for social, political, and economic equality.

Tuttle (1986:7) aligns with previous definitions of feminism, asserting that “anyone who recognizes women’s subordination and seeks to end it, by whatever means and on whatever grounds” qualifies as a feminist. She further contends that “feminism is a living, a changing movement not a theory but a worldview as not all feminist writers share the same vocabulary or common references” (Tuttle, 1986:7). However, this study diverges from Tuttle’s conceptualization, positing that feminism should

be understood as a coherent theoretical framework in which the core principles remain consistent across the spectrum. While interpretations and applications of feminist thought may vary, the fundamental objective achieving gender equality and challenging systemic patriarchy remains constant, providing a unifying theoretical foundation for the study of women's experiences and activism.

The term *femina* originates from Latin, denoting the possession of female qualities, while *feminine* specifically refers to a woman in Latin (Tuttle, 1986:107). At its inception, the term feminism was employed in reference to "the theory of sexual equality and the movement for women's rights" (Tuttle, 1986:107). Feminism is a dynamic and evolving philosophy; although its core principles remain consistent, its doctrines continue to adapt in response to changing social, political, and cultural contexts. Consequently, multiple streams of feminist thought have emerged, each addressing specific dimensions of women's experiences. One of the central objectives of the ideology, as Tuttle (1986:108) emphasizes, is to "analyse the reasons for and dimensions of women's oppression, and to achieve liberation," thereby providing both a critical framework for understanding systemic inequality and a blueprint for transformative action.

Beasley (1999:3) contends that feminism is an innovative and continually evolving theoretical framework, incorporating new ideas and responding to contemporary social and political challenges. She asserts that many academic and political journals predominantly discuss the works of male theorists, thereby reinforcing the dominance of male-centered ideologies. This systematic exclusion of women's perspectives, according to Beasley (1999:3), constitutes a form of institutionalized misogyny. In South Africa, as in other parts of the world, women are sometimes appointed to high-ranking positions as symbolic representatives of gender equality, yet they remain controlled and constrained, with their authority undermined to ensure compliance with existing power structures. Even when occupying prominent roles, women are frequently ridiculed, ignored in decision-making processes, and marginalized in organizational hierarchies. Feminism, therefore, seeks to address these inequities by challenging entrenched patriarchal norms and reforming Western traditional thought, which has historically been heavily influenced by male domination (Beasley, 1999:5). Through such critique and intervention, feminism aims to create genuine opportunities for women's empowerment and meaningful participation in social, political, and economic spheres.

Like many other scholars, Beasley (1999:20) recognizes the diversity within feminist thought,

acknowledging its multiple variations and interpretations. She defines the ideology as "revealing the partial and sexualized character of the existing theoretical knowledges" (Beasley, 1999:5), emphasizing the ways in which traditional theories have historically marginalized women's perspectives. Similarly, Abercrombie et al. (1999:96) describe feminism as a doctrine asserting that women are systematically disadvantaged in modern society and advocating for the establishment of equal opportunities for both men and women. Porter (1991:19) further defines feminism as "a perspective that seeks to eliminate the subordination, oppression, inequalities, and injustices women suffer because of their sex," highlighting its central objective of challenging entrenched gender-based hierarchies and promoting social, political, and economic equity. Collectively, these definitions underscore the multifaceted nature of feminism while emphasizing its consistent commitment to addressing systemic inequalities and advancing the status of women in society.

According to hooks (2000:1) it is essential to define feminism within the boundaries that do not view men and women as enemies. She defines the term as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (hooks, 2000:1). This description best suits African feminism that is centred around both sexes as men and women worked together through many regimes in combat against the colonialist and many other racial cruelty regimes. It does not regard men as the enemy but views sexism as an obstacle. The following abstract by Oyewume (2003:2) attests to this:

> Feminism is primarily concerned with the liberation of women. Given the aforementioned historical occurrences and the fact that in many African societies the category women cannot be isolated raises the question of the relevance and value of Western feminism.

All of these definitions are significant as they demonstrate the comprehensive and adaptive nature of feminism. The ideology evolves in response to the social, cultural, and political norms of each historical period. Despite these shifts, a consistent reality persists women have been, and continue to be, marginalized and oppressed. A central theme emerging from the aforementioned definitions is that feminism seeks to liberate women from all forms of gender-based injustice, inequality, and stereotyping. It recognizes the systemic subjugation of women and originates from the need to confront the oppression, abuse, and alienation imposed by patriarchal societies. In essence, feminism provides both a critical framework for understanding women's experiences and a transformative agenda aimed at achieving social, political, and economic equity.

Murphy (1995: ix) contends that women have made significant strides in overcoming the structural barriers imposed by patriarchal systems. He asserts that "this movement toward emancipation has now reached a point where collaboration, rather than antagonism, must characterize the relations between the sexes" (Murphy, 1995: ix). Furthermore, Murphy emphasizes that contemporary developments within the feminist movement increasingly intersect with humanist principles, highlighting both the differences and similarities between the sexes. This approach fosters cooperative engagement, enabling men and women to work collectively toward the achievement of gender equality while promoting mutual understanding and respect in social, political, and economic spheres.

It is important to note that the majority of first-generation Black Americans and people of colour advocating for women's liberation in the West during this period did not identify themselves as feminists. Their struggle was distinct from that of middle-class white women, whose feminist activism largely focused on political inclusion, such as securing voting rights and attaining equal career opportunities with men. Middle-class white women typically had access to education and the resources to pursue further studies, whereas Black Americans were systematically denied educational opportunities. Their struggle was not rooted in boredom or domestic dissatisfaction but in the compounded oppression of racial and gendered discrimination. Black women faced exploitation and marginalization not only from the dominant white society but, at times, from white women themselves, who claimed to advocate for the rights and independence of all women, yet often excluded women of colour from their movements. This historical context underscores the intersectional nature of oppression, and the unique challenges faced by women of colour within the broader feminist discourse.

According to Mohanty (1991:52), white women have exercised hegemonic influence over women of colour in the West for centuries. Consequently, many women of colour have been, and in some cases remain, reluctant to identify with feminism, perceiving it as a predominantly white construct, given that the term and its early conceptualizations were largely shaped by white women. This, however, does not diminish the significant advocacy and activism undertaken by women of colour prior to the emergence of these feminist movements. Although they did not label themselves as feminists, these women actively fought for the well-being of their communities, the liberation of all people of colour, and the recognition of gender inequalities, while often prioritizing racial justice as central to the broader struggle for women's emancipation. Their activism reflects an intersectional understanding

of oppression, in which both race and gender are inextricably linked.

Mohanty (1991:56) avers that Western women often make the mistake of binding black women and women of colour into one category. They view these groups of women as powerless. Western white feminists have a tendency of viewing third world black women as victims, they insinuate that third world black women are all moulded by the same pain and oppression. Below Mohanty (1991:59) explains how Western feminists view African women as victims and separate from African men. They are viewed as existing separately from men and men are viewed as their oppressors and enemies. Their shared colonial and (in South Africa) Apartheid history and experiences are erased as though they did not exist. African men and women are treated as though they do not co-exist, as though they have no relationship at all. Mohanty (1991:59) explains:

> When 'women of Africa' as a group (versus 'men of Africa' as a group?) are seen as a group precisely because they are generally dependent and oppressed, the analysis of specific historical differences becomes impossible, because reality is always apparently structured by divisions-two mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive groups, the victims and the oppressors.

Consequently, the struggles of Western women cannot be equated with those of Black American women or African women, as their geographical contexts, historical trajectories, and lived experiences differ substantially. While African societies may share certain traditions, cultural practices, norms, and historical backgrounds, these commonalities do not imply uniformity. South African Black women, for example, have not necessarily endured the same forms or degrees of subjugation and oppression as women in other regions of the continent. Thus, although parallels exist, these struggles are analogous rather than identical, reflecting the diverse sociopolitical and cultural realities across different contexts.

In Africa, women have historically fought alongside men against colonialism and apartheid; therefore, framing women exclusively as the oppressed and men solely as the oppressors is both simplistic and problematic. Such a perspective overlooks the traditional coexistence and collaborative roles of the sexes within African societies. Black men and women frequently united in resistance against various colonial regimes, demonstrating collective agency and shared struggle. It is within this historical and cultural context that this chapter proceeds to examine the audacious and resilient South African women, highlighting their sustained advocacy for equality, inclusion, and

emancipation across social, political, and economic domains.

3.3. Women resilience in South Africa

Black women in South Africa have played a central role in the struggle for liberation, working in tandem with Black men. Their activism is evident across multiple domains, including literature, music, political engagement, and other forms of public discourse. This section examines Black South African women's activism, emphasizing that they did not initially define their struggle in feminist terms, as the ideology was perceived as Western and largely disconnected from their lived experiences. For Black South African women, feminism was often seen as a foreign construct that failed to account for their unique historical, social, and cultural realities. Additionally, the marginalization of Black women was compounded by White women, who, as members of a racially dominant group, frequently reinforced exclusionary practices within the feminist movement, further underscoring the intersectional challenges faced by Black women.

Mohanty (1991:52) supports this distinction by asserting that White women in the West have historically exercised hegemonic influence over women of colour while advocating for women's rights under the banner of feminism. Consequently, Mohanty (1991:52) contends that Black and White women cannot be understood as characterizing feminism in the same way. For White women, particularly in the West, the struggle primarily centred on political inclusion and attaining opportunities equivalent to those of their male counterparts. The Suffragette movement, for instance, emerged partly from the dissatisfaction of educated housewives who were constrained by domestic expectations (Mohanty, 1991:53). In contrast, Black women in Africa, and specifically in South Africa, were actively engaged in the struggle for national liberation alongside Black men as political activists. Their objective was not to gain inclusion but to secure the emancipation of their nation. Accordingly, their struggle was directed not against Black men but against colonial and, subsequently, Apartheid regimes, reflecting a fundamentally different context and set of priorities within their activism.

While actively engaged in struggles for political and national independence, African women have simultaneously been framed as passive victims by Western women, a narrative that persists to the present day. Western feminist discourse often homogenizes African women, portraying them as uniformly oppressed and powerless, irrespective of their diverse historical and sociocultural contexts (Mohanty, 1991:56). As Mohanty (1991:59) asserts, "When 'women of Africa' as a group (versus

'men of Africa' as a group) are seen as a group precisely because they are generally dependent and oppressed, the analysis of specific historical differences becomes impossible, because reality is always apparently structured by divisions two mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive groups, the victims and the oppressors." This oversimplified dichotomy neglects the complex realities of African women, obscuring their agency, resilience, and active participation in liberation movements.

The prevailing narrative of victim and perpetrator presents Black men and women as adversaries, suggesting that women, perceived as 'biologically' weaker, are consistently overpowered by men. Such a portrayal implies that harmonious coexistence between Black men and women is unattainable. However, this perspective is inaccurate, as the historical, cultural, and traditional contexts of African societies, particularly in South Africa, emphasize interdependence and collaboration between the sexes rather than constant conflict (Mohanty, 1991:65). This misrepresentation overlooks the active roles Black men and women have historically played together in struggles for liberation and social justice.

It is vital to state that prior to the arrival of the colonialists and missionaries in Africa, some African societies included women in political and economic power, and they awarded women leadership roles (Geister, 2004:18). Some African societies were matrilineal. Geister (2004:18) avers that traditional African societies were interdependent rather than individually focused therefore, men and women were not separate entities. Traditional African societies were focused on maintaining, "the harmony and well-being of the social group rather than that of individuals" (Geister, 2004:18). Thus, political involvement in those African societies did not exclude any gender. According to Geister (2004:19) colonialism and its capitalism changed the African system of women leadership as it penetrated the family unit's means of production.

African women were now barred from owning means of production, their men had to go work in order to support their families. Such was the situation in South Africa, where there was a sudden influx into the urban areas, with Black men going to work in the mines for long periods, while their wives remained back home in the rural areas with the children dependent upon the husband's salaries. If not so, a majority of the women would migrate to the urban areas to become domestic workers. To further its agenda, the colonialists codified customary law into British administration that allowed for the manipulation of tradition and culture by rural elderly men to favour their patriarchal interests (Geister, 2004:20). Influenced by Western culture, African men took advantage and utilised cultural

and traditional principles to exert influence and power over women (Geister, 2004:20). However, Black women retaliated instead of allowing men to victimise them. Geister (2004:20) attests to this when she avers that African women were not passive pawns in the new patriarchal African societies. Nevertheless, because they were not united in their quest against patriarchy, as some subconsciously were conditioned into believing that these newly adjusted patriarchal principles were tradition, failed. When patriarchy and colonial power affirmed themselves, women fought to make a living for themselves, despite the other women who viewed the forced and manipulated cultural systems as a norm. Those in urban areas deviated from what was viewed traditionally the norm and that which was deemed as taboo by becoming prostitutes and brewing traditional beer (Geister, 2004:21). She continues to express that beer brewing was then appropriated by the state as counter resistance to women but Black women in South Africa did not take this resistance lightly. "In Durban and Rand townships women rioted against municipal beerhalls and bans on home-brewing in 1928 and into the 1930s, often resulting in violent clashes with the police" (Geister, 2004:20).

These protests intensified women's political activism throughout South Africa. Women in urban areas married to miners politically worked together with their husbands in protesting for higher wages for their husbands (Geister, 2004:20). Women became committed and radical to the labour struggle than their husbands. "Women and women's issues continued to influence the demands of the African Mine Workers Union throughout the 1940s and 1950s and women continued to support strikes in 1955 and 1956" (Geister, 2004:20). Prior to 1994, customary marriage was not recognised legally as it involved multiple wives (polygamy) in some instances. Thus, Andrews (2001:327) accedes that wives had no rights during this period. Black women were unable to buy houses, to receive full custody of their children and attain proper education. "For those women who remained in the rural areas or the homelands, their livelihoods depended on absent husbands or sons sending meagre allowances" (Andrews, 2001:327).

Women worked in solidarity with their fellow men because the wage labour affected them as much as it affected their husbands. Urban women were not the only ones who actively participated in these struggles. Women in the rural areas also fought patriarchy and wage labour hikes by threatening to stop working on commercial land and focus on their kin land (Geister, 2004:21). Women protests increased while their control over the means of production decreased. Things had changed drastically for women in the rural areas during the colonial era as patriarchal principles heightened. Men became the sole actors in the public sphere. "In South Africa, for example, where women could be appointed

as headmen and chiefs in exceptional cases, colonial preference to give men such positions closed whatever avenues existed before" (Geister, 2004:21). Thus, the ownership of the means of production by the colonialists, who utilised majority male power made Black women dependent on men instead of that which was traditionally the culture whereby men and women in African societies were interdependent of each other. Women identities were now shadowed by men as they, "remained linked to men as long as women could not support themselves" (Partpart, 1986:156). This is the reason Geister (2004:21) argues that the colonial state was the spear engineer that created gender distinctions and reinforcing indigenous gender stratifications in Africa.

Despite the above-mentioned, women participation in nationalist movements increased in the 1950s and 1960s throughout Africa (Geister, 2004:22). Women's issues during this era were overshadowed by the struggle for national independence. According to Geister (2004:23) in South Africa during the apartheid era, women played a pivotal role in the liberation struggle. "Women's specific interests were subordinated under national agendas" (Geister, 2004:23). Women believed that their individual independence as a gender would be determined by their emancipation from colonial rule.

"The common exploitation and oppression of men and women based on colour has led to a combined fight against the system instead of a battle against men for 'women's rights" (Copenhagen, 1980:15). Women that formed part of the liberation movements thought it absurd to be fighting for their rights whilst all Black people were under subjugation. Women such as Ruth Mompati and Frene Ginwela argued that the fight against patriarchal value systems would have to follow once all Black people were liberated and treated as human beings (Geister, 2004:65). These women were well-aware of the issues of gender inequality and injustices, they expressed that they knew these issues would not automatically be resolved once national emancipation was achieved.

Black women in South Africa had been involved in liberation movements from as far as the colonial period. They had organised the Orange Free State Women's Anti-Pass Laws march in 1913 (Geister, 2004:66). This very march was repeated in 1956 by a different generation of Black women. "From 1918 onwards African women were organised in the ANC's Bantu Women's League" (Geister, 2004:66). However, they were denied voting and decision-making rights within the leadership structures of the movement until 1943 (Geister, 2004:66). This illustrates that there were gender inequalities within the liberation movements however, women overlooked these and were adamant to make their mark. Women formed the ANCWL in 1943 and were granted full membership in the

movement, meaning that they now had equal rights as men within the movement. However, they were limited to what was viewed as women's work, these included fundraising and catering duties for the movement (Walker, 1982:90). "Mothers ideals also dominated women's participation in the defiance campaigns of civil disobedience in the 1950s particularly against pass laws" (Geister, 2004:66).

Women were adamant to fight for the abolishment of Pass Laws more than men because the laws restricted women's working vicinity. Women saw the need to form an alliance separate from men, therefore they formed the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) in 1954, which was a joint organisation of the ANC women and women of other movements that were Indian and White (Boswell, 2020:33). The FSAW held the view that, "the existing, male dominated political organisations were unlikely to meet their needs as women" (Wells, 1993:133). Thus, the formation of the organisation which based women's needs around domestic roles and upheld the notion of motherhood. According to Geister (2004:67) the reasoning behind this notion was that as mothers they had to rise to the forefront to secure a better future for their children. This was problematic as it excluded those who were not mothers. Nevertheless, the movement did amazing work and still assisted their men in the liberation movements as Hellen Joseph argued that "separationist feminist liberation was not the focus of the movement's activities" (Joseph, 1993:45).

Dube (2020:4) agrees with the above-mentioned statement made by Joseph when she asserts that Black women during the post-colonial and Apartheid era utilised what she terms the 'First Things First' approach. She defines this approach as basically women "focusing on colonial oppression to the exclusion of gender discrimination" (Dube, 2020:4). Many Black women during these periods can be noted as using this approach. Women not only in the political arena but in the arts as well such as Mirriam Makeba, who endured tremendous gender inequalities and abuse in her music career as a woman and in her marriage, however in her memoirs, Makeba documents her experience in exile and of being an activist for national liberation through her music (Makeba, 1987). "I ask that my people, at home may be freed from bondage" (Makeba, 1987:249).

Black women authors also did the same thing, which was to use the 'First Things First' approach. One particular author is Loretha Ngcobo whose second novel, And They Died In The Struggle (1990), also uses this approach. The female protagonist in the novel endures immense oppression, discrimination, and abuse as a woman but despite all that, she still views her problems all stemming

from being Black in a racially oppressed nation (Boswell, 2020:61). She flourishes as an activist in her community to fight for racial injustices instead of gender injustices (Dube, 2020:4). This illustrates that Black women during the Apartheid era suffered "from both apartheid and patriarchy, but she certainly puts aside patriarchal oppression, whilst fighting for the freedom from apartheid" (Dube, 2020: 4).

Dube (2020:4) further argues that this 'First Things First' approach is the root of the continuous injustices and abuse upon women as Black women fail to recognise that the colonisers established structures to hinder Black people, and Black men utilise those very structures of the colonisers to oppose Black women. For instance, the banning of women from receiving formal education and later on restricting girls and young women to study specific degrees that would enable them to become nurses, caregivers, social workers, and educators. Despite all these women still participated in the struggle in large numbers, fighting for the emancipation of the Black nation at large.

"Women left their homes and children for episodes or a lifetime of political struggle and imprisonment precisely in order to protect their homes and children" (Geister, 2004:67). FSAW's charter was very impressive, and it stated that women should be treated equally as men. It stipulated that FSAW was aware and against the oppression of women performed by customs as this hinderance affected the entire nation and its struggle for liberation. "FSAW was unique in South Africa, and the statements and demands it gave rise to were nothing short of revolutionary at the time, not only in South Africa" (Geister, 2004:68).

The Federation of South African Women (FSAW) "laid the basis for the broad mass women's movements affiliated to the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the 1980s and the Women's National Coalition (WNC) in the early 1990s" (Geister, 2004:68). While the women of FSAW were acutely aware of their specific struggles as women and mothers, they were simultaneously cognizant of the broader national struggle and the distinctions between Western and Third World contexts. Consequently, they recognized the necessity of collaborating closely with men to achieve both gender-specific and national objectives, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of intersectional struggle within a socio-political framework.

In the 1960s liberation movements were forced into exile as many were banned. Women's movements also went into exile as well but in the 1970s the radical Black Consciousness movement was formed by students in the township schools (Geister, 2004:68). The Black Consciousness

movement's agenda was clear as at its forefront were race and class issues. Gender was not part of their agenda, "women entered the movement as Black people" (Ramphele, 1992:215). Thus, the women part of the Black Consciousness movement formed the Black Women's Federation (BWF) in 1975 (Geister, 2004:68). She further states that the BWF was formed to mobilise women to fight against racial discrimination. Ramphele (1992) avers that there were incidents of sexual harassment against women within the Black Consciousness structures. There were also emotional abuse incidents by Black men on Black women. At times the male comrades belittled female comrades. However, many of the female comrades utilized this conduct by their fellow comrades to build up more confidence and political strength, continuously working on showing their male comrades that they are of equal strength.

During the aforementioned period, feminism emerged as a significant mass movement in the West; however, many South African women comrades were dismissive of it. They contended that "the Feminist movement was dismissed as a 'bra-burning' indulgence of bored, rich white Americans" (Ramphele, 1992:217). This perspective was informed by several factors previously discussed in this chapter, including the perception that Western feminism did not reflect the historical, social, and political realities of women in the Global South.

According to Gqola (2001:134) the Black Consciousness Movement was formed in a cultural environment where women were viewed unimportant. "The language didn't have space for women partly because it was a language borrowed from a culture, English culture, which never accepted women really as full citizens" (Ramphele, 1998:92 in Gqola, 2001:134). She continues to state that the BCM ideology rested solely on the premise that race is the primary oppressive force denouncing all other forms of oppression present. To illustrate that the BCM dogma was mainly based on US Black American Consciousness, Gqola (2001:134) refers to Kimberly Yates (1997:16-17):

> It is of significance that at the time of the Black Consciousness Movement, the activist has available a ready-made masculinist discourse that had been used by many Black nationalist struggles in other parts of the world, particularly Negritude and the US Black Power Movement…In addition to reading South African writers of the time…the activists were also reading the writings of activists from other Black movements around the world.

The aforesaid issue is problematic because the adaptation of the US Black Power Movement,

Negritude organizations, and other Black movements across Africa often fails to recognize the diverse experiences of oppression among Black populations. As Gqola (2001:136) observes, "the experiences of gender, class, geographical location, and sexual orientation were not perceived as consequential enough to warrant inclusion into the discourse of the doctrine." While the Black Consciousness Movement emerged as a beacon of hope for many Black South Africans, purporting to advocate for the emancipation of all Black people, its patriarchal tendencies and persistent neglect of gender inequalities and injustices against women constituted significant obstacles to achieving comprehensive liberation for the Black community.

Many women within the Black Consciousness Movement, as well as members of the South African Students' Organisation, critically questioned the movement's approach to gender issues. As Gqola (2001:136) notes, Mamphela Ramphele, a prominent member of the movement, highlighted that women were formally included in the organisation; however, discussions regarding gender as a political and structural issue were largely absent. This omission reflected the patriarchal undercurrents within the movement, which limited women's ability to fully participate in shaping its policies and agenda. Consequently, while women were present and active in political mobilization, their unique experiences of oppression and the gendered dimensions of struggle were often sidelined, demonstrating a need for more inclusive and intersectional approaches within liberation movements.

Within the Black Consciousness Movement, the division of labour was largely determined by the gender of its members. As Gqola (2001:137) highlights, the Preamble to the Constitution of the Allied Black Women's Federation, published in the *Black Review* (1975/76:143), articulated the self-defined roles of Black women as follows: Black women were primarily responsible for the survival and maintenance of their families and played a central role in the socialization of the youth, ensuring the transmission of Black cultural heritage. This framework emphasized the necessity of presenting a unified front, while redirecting the role of motherhood toward the broader fulfilment of the Black community's social, cultural, economic, and political aspirations. Such responsibilities, while critical to the liberation struggle, also reinforced gendered expectations that limited women's recognition as political agents in their own right.

Gqola (2001:138) argues that women within the BCM complained that they were expected to be active, to participate in the overall running of the Black Consciousness Movement, yet they were also expected to be subservient and respect the regulations set by the male members. Despite all these

trials, several audacious politically empowered women emerged within the Black Consciousness Movement and from The South African Students' Organisation. These women "resisted the supportive and nurturing mould through which female participation in BC was framed" (Gqola, 2001:137).

From the 1980s women in South Africa began to move away a little from the racial issue and acknowledge gender as a separate issue. However, they did not prescribe to Western feminism as it had no basis in their struggle. Women organisations originated across South Africa and one significant structure was the United Women's Organisation (Geister, 2004:71). Within the UDF men were made aware of women's issues. However, some of the women within the movement were unhappy by the fact that men were the ones addressing these issues (Geister, 2004:71).

Consequently, urban South African women deemed it essential to organise collectively as women, providing a platform to share their experiences and safeguard against the marginalisation described by Fanon as the condition of 'second-class' citizens in the emerging socio-political landscape. However, this organisation inadvertently created class divisions among women, as those in rural areas and the uneducated were largely excluded from these new networks. Particularly, the abandonment of the motherism strategy recognizing that not all women were mothers or aspired to motherhood further intensified the separation among women, highlighting tensions between urban and rural, educated and uneducated women within the broader struggle for empowerment (Geister, 2004:71).

The Natal Organisation of Women (NOW) was also formed in the 1980s and it advocated the subjugation of women (Geister, 2004:72). However, NOW was in direct conflict with the Inkatha Women's Brigade as the Brigade still upheld traditional values of the IFP which regarded women as subordinates who, according to traditional family values, were to be strong for their children and husbands (Geister, 2004:72). The Inkatha Women's Brigade was not political. Many of the traditional and Black women's movements did in no way define themselves as feminist organisations and this was strategically done in order not to scare men away or have them frowning or disapproving of the cause (Geister, 2004:73).

Black women across the continent joined anti-colonial movements, alongside Black men. Many were influenced by their roles as mothers, attempting to fight for a better future for their children. "…Moving into the public arena of the struggle resulted for women in increased self-confidence and

sharpening of skills in identifying aspects of their own oppression" (Geister, 2004:39). Black women's participation in the struggle as activists gave them the confidence to recognise and fight further for their own emancipation as women.

Many of the women who joined the 1950s nationalist movements were women who had migrated to urban areas. Therefore, they no longer subscribed to the full traditional doctrine but still held it as the basis of their lives. Thus, it was simple for them to recognise patriarchy as a strategy by the colonial powers to divide Black men and women. Urbanisation forced women to move from ethnical boundaries "to a more trans-ethnic identity as Africans which helped them question the structures of custom, and traditional authority" (Geister, 2004:39). Thus, those in the urban areas became more vocal and active than those in the rural areas.

Coloured and Indian women were also subjected to subjugation by the apartheid government: however, they were a little advantaged than Black women as, "they were not subject to influx control laws, and, therefore, had greater rights of labour mobility, and were at least able to maintain the resemblance of an undisturbed family life" (Andrews, 2001:328). While Black women's husbands worked in the mines far from home, the wives working at times a 'sleep-in' worker with their children taken care of by extended family.

In response to the systemic subjugation of women in South Africa, women formed strategic alliances to advocate for the inclusion of gender equality policies within the democratic framework. By the late 1980s, the focus of women's political activism gradually shifted from being exclusively directed towards the liberation of all Black South Africans to addressing issues of gender equality, highlighting the dual struggle against both racial and gender-based oppression (Andrews, 2001:329).

Women joined uMkhonto weSizwe, the ANC's guerrilla wing and received same training as men (Geister, 2004:51). She further asserts that the women's part of the MK was viewed as brave and strong by the people in the townships for having endured the robust physical training as men in the MK camps. Little did people know that despite the massive number of women who were part of the guerrilla wing, not many women were part of the leadership of the structure. Women were given the less dangerous and strenuous tasks such as "the monitoring of supplies and arms, nursing and telecommunication" (Geister, 2004:52). Thus, it is evident that women were oppressed within these structures, however, did not pay much attention to this as they focused on national liberation.

By the late 1980s the need to address women issues grew within the ANC structures and the other national movements. Geister (2004:75) avers that even the men within the ANC addressed these, leaders such as Oliver Tambo recognised gender inequality issues and addressed the need for the emancipation of women and gender equality. South African women insisted that their concerns be included in the Convention for a Democratic South Africa negotiations agenda (Andrews, 2001:326). Initially, gender injustice and the eradication of women oppression were not on the agenda of the CODESA negotiations. According to Andrews (2001:326) women subjugation was hardly addressed in anti-apartheid political movements. However, because of the women from the different women's movements, "South Africa's transformation included a commitment to changing many aspects of women's lives" (Andrews, 2001:326).

"The National Council of Women lobbied major political parties during the constitutional negotiations to ensure women's issues were addressed and committed to the principle of gender equality" (Andrews, 2001:329). They actively drafted a women's charter to guarantee representation in the negotiations and the Constitution (Andrews, 2001:329). Consequently, the democratic South African Constitution enshrines non-sexism and the protection of women from gender-based inequalities (Andrews, 2001:335). Legislation such as the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act, the Domestic Violence Act, and the Employment Equity Act further safeguards women's rights (Andrews, 2001:339), while institutional structures monitor progress toward gender equality (Andrews, 2001:339). Despite these measures and Constitutional Court rulings against patriarchal practices, substantial work remains to fully emancipate women from stereotypes, oppression, discrimination, and abuse in South Africa.

Ironically, the very women who advocate for gender equality and the emancipation of women from patriarchal systems often perpetuate discrimination against other women. Those who exercise their reproductive rights, such as the termination of pregnancies, are frequently judged and ostracized. Married women may discriminate against single women, while traditional women often display prejudice toward urban and educated women. Women engaged in sex work are heavily stigmatized. Consequently, Black women are increasingly divided, with classism emerging as a significant factor. Even women affiliated with structures historically committed to transformation and the promotion of women's rights have, in some instances, become obstacles to the broader struggle for women's emancipation.

Dube (2020:4) concurs with earlier scholars in asserting that Black women during the colonial, post-colonial, and apartheid periods adopted a "First Things First" approach, prioritizing the broader struggle against colonial and racial oppression over gender-specific issues. This strategy entailed addressing one struggle at a time, often relegating gender concerns to secondary importance. For example, Miriam Makeba, a renowned songstress and activist, focused her biography on her experiences in exile and her role as a musical activist in the fight for national liberation (Makeba, 1987:249). She states, "I ask that my people at home may be freed from bondage" (Makeba, 1987:249), emphasizing that her music reflected her life and commitment to combating apartheid. While Makeba could have addressed issues relating to her personal experiences as a Black woman such as marital abuse or discrimination abroad, her primary concern remained the emancipation of her people. This underscores the tendency among Black women of the era to prioritize collective liberation over individual gender struggles.

Several Black women authors were actively writing as early as the late 1800s. Boswell (2020:29) notes that some of these women published their works in Black newspapers, which were predominantly dominated by prominent Black male authors such as S.E.K. Mqhayi, Sol Plaatjie, J.J.R. Jolobe, among others. Much of the literary output by Black women during this period took the form of oral literature, poetry, essays, petitions, and other forms of written expression. These works have since been excavated, documented, and preserved to ensure the historical and cultural contributions of Black women writers are recognized and maintained (Boswell, 2020:29).

Masola (2020:14) concurs with the aforementioned observations, asserting that Africans utilized newspaper writing as a form of resistance against colonial domination, with both Black men and women actively contributing to the political discourse of the period. However, the Black women who were able to participate in literary expression predominantly belonged to the elite class, having gained access to education and literacy through colonial missionary training (Masola, 2020:14). Colonial authorities imposed their laws and ideological frameworks in South Africa, establishing the country as a colony while providing unequal educational opportunities for European children compared to Black males and females (Masola, 2020:15). Black women were granted access to limited formal education, often directed towards careers as educators, caregivers, social workers, and related professions, primarily through Christian missionary schools. Within this context, the earliest substantial body of poetry authored by a Black woman was produced by Nontsizi Mgqwetho, who between 1920 and 1929, composed a significant corpus of isiXhosa poetry (Boswell, 2020:30).

Boswell (2020:31) further asserts that Nontsizi Mgqwetho's poetry was inherently political, addressing the sociopolitical conditions faced by Black people under colonial domination. Her works emphasized the need for solidarity among Black communities in resisting White supremacy and systemic oppression. In addition, many Black women actively participated in political movements, making significant contributions to the struggle for liberation against colonial and apartheid regimes. As Masola (2020:16) observes:

> There are examples of women who chose to be subversive, such as Bertha Mkhize, who became a prominent political activist in the 1900s. Before Bertha Mkhize's prominence, there were women such as Charlotte Maxeke and Nontsizi Mgqwetho who chose to leave their homes and participate in public discourse when they became involved in cultural and political production.

The above discussion illustrates that Black women actively participated in the struggle against White supremacy, not only through formal political structures such as guerrilla wings and organized political movements, but also through literary expression, in which many excelled. They wielded the pen as a tool of resistance, challenging oppression and asserting their agency. Despite enduring systemic injustices based on gender, Black women demonstrated solidarity with their male counterparts in the broader struggle for liberation. Although significant disparities existed between rural, uneducated women and elite, educated women, Black South Africans collectively worked toward emancipation from Western colonial domination, thereby engaging in a form of activism that extended beyond conventional feminist frameworks.

Black rural women in the 1800s also emerged as influential figures, employing their intellectual and spiritual capacities to support the amaXhosa in resisting colonial imperialism. Notable among these women were Nongqawuse and Nonkosi, prominent amaXhosa spiritualists (Pieres, 1989:79). According to Gqoba in Pieres (1989:80), Nongqawuse was recognized as a seer, "She was initiated into the speciality in the standard way" (Brownlee, 1997:143). Nongqawuse was believed to possess the extraordinary ability to communicate with divine powers, a gift she utilized both to heal and to challenge patriarchal traditional systems. She was entrusted with the monumental task of confronting entrenched patriarchal norms an endeavour that historical scholars, often guided by patriarchal agendas, ridiculed during her lifetime and in subsequent centuries. Nongqawuse was frequently misrepresented as the "cattle killer" and dismissed as a naïve young girl who deceived her nation.

Scholars, including Pieres (1989), interpreted her narrative as a myth surrounding the amaXhosa cattle-killing of 1856–1857, rather than recognizing her as a courageous young woman exhibiting early forms of feminist agency; a perspective that warrants further discussion. According to Pieres (1989:79) Nongqawuse and her cousin, Nobanda were in the fields chasing birds away from eating crops when two strangers appeared to her with the following message:

> There should be no cultivation, but grain pits must be dug, new houses must be built, and great cattle enclosures should be erected. Cut out new milk sacks and weave many doors from buka roots. So says the Chief *Naphakade*, the descendant of *Sifubasibanzi*. The people must leave their witchcraft for soon they will be examined by diviners.

The message delivered to Nongqawuse is said to have originated from the divine visitors, and its significance lies in how Nongqawuse has been interpreted by Pieres (1989) and other historical scholars. Pieres (1989:79) explains that Nongqawuse conveyed the message to the amaXhosa as instructed by the divine visitors; however, her account was largely disbelieved, primarily because she was a child and, secondly, because she was a girl. Pieres further narrates that the divine visitors appeared again, instructing Nongqawuse to relay the message to her uncle, Mhlakaza, and to secure his presence. This indicates that, due to Nongqawuse's gender and youth, the divine visitors may have perceived her as lacking the authority necessary to influence the community. In contrast, Mhlakaza, as an elder and a man, commanded respect and credibility, ensuring that the message would be received and acted upon by the amaXhosa people. This episode underscores the gendered dynamics of authority and trust within the socio-cultural context of the amaXhosa, highlighting how patriarchal structures shaped the reception of spiritual and social messages.

Shortly thereafter, prominent amaXhosa leaders, including King Sahili, King Hintsa, and other influential figures of the amaXhosa kingdom, traveled to the Gxarha River, where Nongqawuse was to meet with the divine visitors (Pieres, 1989:87). The entire community depended on Nongqawuse to relay the messages from the divine Strangers, as she was the sole intermediary capable of communicating with them. This reliance on a young girl, considered by the patriarchal amaXhosa social hierarchy to occupy the lowest familial position likely challenged the perceptions of male authority within the community. To these men, Nongqawuse ostensibly lacked power and status, yet the community's dependence on her underscores the tension between spiritual authority and socially

constructed gender roles in the amaXhosa society.

The above illustrates the remarkable power and influence wielded by Nongqawuse, despite her youth and gender, as even men of high standing within the social hierarchy heeded and acted upon the messages she conveyed from the ancestors. Her authority, however, was met with scepticism, resulting in hesitation, backlash, and the proliferation of myths surrounding her persona. Of particular significance are the deliberate fabrications propagated by certain patriarchal men and women, which sought to discredit her, obscure her achievements, and erase the truth of her leadership and spiritual role within the amaXhosa community. This tension underscores the intersection of gender, age, and authority in a patriarchal society confronted with a female figure of exceptional influence.

Moreover, as argued by Bradford (1996:361) cattle were associated with men therefore, men were weary of being told by a girl child to kill their cattle. Nonetheless, they slaughtered their cattle after Mhlakaza rallied most of their men to do so, with over 400 000 cattle slaughtered in the amaXhosa society (Bradford, 1996:360). There were many ways to receive cattle, and the most central way was through marriage, where a young woman's family would receive cattle from her in-laws upon marriage as lobola. Thus, cattle were associated with men, making men powerful as cattle were a sign of wealth amongst amaXhosa family lives. And cattle continue to be a sign of power and wealth in the rural and traditional spheres.

As Bradford (1996:361) asserts, "cattle continue to be conceptualised as objects entirely within the male domain." Consequently, men frequently questioned the legitimacy of Nongqawuse's authority, perceiving her as a young girl with no rightful role in matters traditionally reserved for men, such as cattle management. Such a perspective, however, overlooks the broader cultural context in which cattle were not solely tied to male authority but were also central to women's social and economic positioning. Within Xhosa society, cattle were deeply intertwined with marriage and rites of passage, serving as the foundation for lobola payments and thus representing family wealth and continuity. Young women, particularly those who had undergone initiation and other coming-of-age rituals, were integral to this system, as their marriages directly influenced the circulation and accumulation of cattle within families. Nongqawuse, therefore, was not detached from these processes; rather, she was inherently linked to them, making her involvement culturally and socially justified. Her role reveals the dissonance between patriarchal assumptions of exclusion and the realities of women's embeddedness in socio-economic and ritual structures, exposing the limitations of male-dominated

interpretations of authority and legitimacy.

Sources indicate that Nongqawuse did not adorn herself with red ochre, a customary practice among Xhosa women, nor was she yet married despite being of marriageable age (Bradford, 1996:363). As Bradford (1996:363) observes, "She…ensured she was not sexually attractive to Xhosa men." This deliberate deviation from societal norms demonstrates that Nongqawuse consciously positioned herself outside the conventional expectations for young women, who were typically encouraged to enhance their appearance to attract suitors and secure marriage, thereby bringing cattle and wealth to their families, particularly to their fathers. Her choice signifies a rejection of normative gendered practices and highlights her independence and focus on spiritual and communal responsibilities rather than personal or familial gain.

Nongqawuse emerged as a formidable figure at a remarkably young age, a reality that unsettled many patriarchal men and women, particularly the colonial authorities who were deeply entrenched in patriarchal ideologies and sought to impose them on the amaXhosa (Pieres, 1989). Her association with the ancestors further amplified the perceived threat, as the colonialists likely recognized that the messages she conveyed carried significant spiritual and social authority. Such influence had the potential to disrupt their strategies for subjugating the amaXhosa and undermining their control over the land, positioning Nongqawuse not only as a spiritual intermediary but also as a symbolic and practical adversary to colonial ambitions.

In her prophecies, Nongqawuse warned against contaminated cultivation of crops by evil/wicked hands. According to Bradford, (1966:363) incest, adultery and fornications were part of the witchcraft that Nongqawuse prophesied against. And these were activities that amaXhosa men were known to partake in. "She had an explanation connecting pollution of cattle to male sexual offences" (Bradford, 1966:363). Nongqawuse was warning men against their impure ways. Thus Bradford's (1996:363) analysis of Nongqawuse's prophecies and what could have made it complex for men to give an exact account of what happened then to place the entire cattle-killing upon Nongqawuse and viewing her as a naïve little girl who deceived the amaXhosa nation. Bradford (1996:363) states that:

> In a society where marriages were arranged, her [Nongqawuse] claim that adultery contaminated men were sweeping. Married men typically had lovers, for which wives could obtain no redress. Very many husbands were now being indicted as unclean. Incest, moreover, referred way beyond the immediate family, to liaisons

> in the same clan. Nongqawuse also had an unheard-of injunction for men seeking relationships with widows. Widows were married to the dead, she said, they 'should not be touched by other men.' If Nongqawuse made any original contributions to the innumerable millenarian prophecies, then these apparently centred around promiscuous men, engaging in sex that defiled them and the animals symbolically linked to female reproductive capacities.

Building on the above, it can be argued that men naturally felt intimidated by Nongqawuse's authority and thus sought reasons to undermine and discredit her. Her age and gender provided a convenient basis for their dismissal of both her person and her prophecies, as these factors aligned with prevailing patriarchal notions that denied women, especially young women, any legitimate public voice. For many men, her influence was particularly threatening because it exposed their vulnerabilities and challenged their authority, an affront made even more unsettling given that it came from a young woman who defied traditional expectations. Moreover, resistance to her message can also be understood as a refusal to relinquish entrenched patriarchal privileges and practices. By discrediting Nongqawuse, men could preserve their dominance and continue with their exploitative practices unchallenged. In this sense, the hostility directed toward her was not merely about disbelief in her prophetic claims, but rather about safeguarding male power and silencing a woman who dared to disrupt established gender and power hierarchies.

Nongqawuse's concerns regarding adultery, incest, and fornication are notably absent from most historical sources. Bradford (1996:363) further observes that Nongqawuse's challenge to patriarchal power is scarcely acknowledged in the wider historiography. Instead, the dominant narrative that persists is the myth of Nongqawuse and the great cattle-killing, which has largely overshadowed other dimensions of her life and contributions. This selective memory reflects not only the silencing of women's voices within patriarchal structures but also the deliberate shaping of history to minimize women's influence in moments of resistance. Nongqawuse's bravery, visionary strength, and her defiance of both patriarchal and colonial authority remain underrepresented, reducing her to a figure of controversy rather than recognition. By focusing almost exclusively on the cattle-killing episode, historical scholarship has perpetuated a narrow and often distorted interpretation of her legacy, thereby erasing the full scope of her role as a spiritual leader and cultural disruptor. This omission underscores the necessity of reinterpreting Nongqawuse's story through feminist and decolonial lenses in order to recover the silenced aspects of her agency and significance.

It is recorded that Nongqawuse refused to engage with chiefs and other powerful amaXhosa men in facilitating their connection with the "new people" brought by the divine strangers. She further urged women to cease working the fields for their own individual gain (Bradford, 1996:366). Such actions directly challenged established patriarchal authority and traditional gender expectations, positioning her as a figure of disobedience in the eyes of conservative amaXhosa men. Her boldness in calling out the men's distasteful practices, while simultaneously issuing new instructions as a young woman, destabilized the patriarchal order and provoked resentment. Significantly, her spiritual gift was consistently overlooked, despite the fact that male diviners of earlier eras were accorded respect and legitimacy for similar roles. Unlike her male counterparts, Nongqawuse was met with scepticism, resistance, and vilification, a response that underscores how her gender and youth intersected to delegitimize her authority. This differential treatment reveals both the entrenched patriarchal dynamics within amaXhosa society and the extent to which Nongqawuse's spiritual leadership was deliberately undermined to maintain male dominance.

Through her acts of courage in voicing what was traditionally silenced especially by a young woman of her time, Nongqawuse embodied a form of resistance that transcended conventional notions of feminism. Her defiance of entrenched patriarchal ideologies in an era where women's deviation from prescribed gender norms was virtually unthinkable demonstrates a radical assertion of agency. Without affiliating herself with any feminist movement, nor consciously intending to establish one, Nongqawuse nevertheless enacted principles that symbolized feministic traits. Importantly, her challenge was not directed at men as individuals but at the oppressive patriarchal structures and practices that constrained both women and society at large. In this way, Nongqawuse's stance can be interpreted as an early, organic articulation of gendered resistance, one that disrupted male-dominated authority while simultaneously carving space for women's voices in political, spiritual, and cultural domains.

Many other amaXhosa women demonstrated equal bravery and strength to Nongqawuse during the 1700s and 1800s wars against colonial invasion. However, the historical record offers little recognition of these women's heroic contributions, thereby marginalizing their significance in liberation struggles. Webb (2019:297) concurs, asserting that both amaXhosa and KhoiKhoi women played pivotal roles in these wars, yet their involvement has been largely ignored or erased. He further argues that gender in African military history has been systematically neglected, in part because "source material is fragmentary and generally written from both male and colonial

perspectives. As a result, the agency African women displayed is often overlooked" (Webb, 2019:197). This exclusion reflects not only patriarchal historical biases but also the colonial tendency to diminish African women's resistance in order to reinforce stereotypes of passivity. Recognising the overlooked roles of these women is thus critical in reframing African military history to reflect the depth of women's agency and their indispensable contributions to anti-colonial resistance.

The dominant narratives recorded about women during these wars largely emphasize their experiences of devastation, including widespread death, destruction, and dislocation. Historical accounts frequently highlight that women and children bore the brunt of the violence, suffering immense trauma and hardship. Many women were subjected to sexual violence, while others were forced into exploitative labour following the deaths of their male relatives, leaving them vulnerable and destitute in the wilderness. Such accounts underscore the intersection of gendered violence and colonial aggression, which systematically targeted women both as symbolic bearers of community continuity and as a means of weakening entire societies. These atrocities can be traced back as early as 1702, during the colonial battles against the amaXhosa and two KhoiKhoi villages in the east, marking the beginning of a long history of women's disproportionate suffering in colonial and frontier conflicts.

An unnamed source was recorded stating how the systematic destruction of their crops and the seizure of their herds resulted to the starvation of women and children. "Without milk-our corn destroyed, - we saw our wives and children perish" (Webb, 2019:299). The situation worsened during the attack of Maqoma's people in 1823, where more women and children were killed despite the British vowing not to kill women and children. As the colonial and British racial attitudes solidified, their acts became harsher and as such would capture women who accompanied their men fighters, the women were captured and interrogated (Webb, 2019:299). In the following abstract Webb (2019:300) illustrates how difficult life became for amaXhosa women during these wars:

> Even when they were not killed as a deliberate policy, Xhosa women were forced to accompany fighters into the bush when their homesteads were burnt, their livestock looted, and their crops destroyed. They had no safe havens to which they retreat. They attempted to eke out livelihoods in the forests and mountains as best as they could.

Women assumed the critical role of primary caregivers during these wars, tending to be wounded

men and ensuring their survival under dire circumstances. Despite the fact that their material belongings were often looted and carried away by colonists as souvenirs (Webb, 2019:300), they persevered in creating spaces of resilience and continuity for their communities. While historical narratives frequently cast amaXhosa women solely as victims of these conflicts left destitute after the deaths of their male relatives, and themselves succumbing alongside their children to the harsh consequences of war it is equally important to recognize their active participation. Many women directly engaged in the struggles in diverse capacities, demonstrating bravery, resilience, and skill comparable to that of their male counterparts. Their involvement challenges reductionist portrayals of women as passive sufferers and instead positions them as central agents in the wars against colonial invasion.

Webb (2019:302) highlights the significant role of amaXhosa women in these wars through the example of Yese, the mother of King Ngqika. Yese is portrayed as a bold and unconventional figure who, in defiance of established cultural norms, took the initiative to *lobola* her husband rather than being paid dowry for, thereby challenging traditional gender expectations within amaXhosa society. This act alone reflects her agency and willingness to disrupt patriarchal conventions. Moreover, Yese was not only an influential wife but also a formidable mother and political strategist. Webb (2019:302) and other sources affirm that she played a pivotal role in shaping her son's leadership, urging him to "throw off the authority of his uncle and regent, Ndlambe, and defeat the forces of not only Ndlambe but of the young Xhosa king, Hintsa, as well." This underscores her influence as both a matriarch and a political actor. Yese's example illuminates how amaXhosa women were not merely passive observers but critical agents in shaping political outcomes and military strategies, illustrating the often-overlooked power of women in traditional African societies. Her actions embody the intersection of personal agency, maternal influence, and political engagement, situating women as central figures in both the private and public domains of resistance.

Yese was also renowned as a powerful traditional healer who played a significant role in amaXhosa political history, particularly during the period when her son, Ngqika, rose to recognition as king (Webb, 2019:302). Her influence extended beyond the spiritual domain, positioning her as both a cultural and political force within the amaXhosa kingdom. In addition, Webb (2019:302) notes that Sutu, Ngqika's wife, emerged as a prominent political actor in her own right. Sutu's ability to mediate between the amaXhosa leadership and the missionaries illustrates the critical role women played in facilitating dialogue across cultural and political divides. Furthermore, Webb (2019:302) documents

that many other women were entrusted with similar responsibilities, being deployed by male leaders to engage in delicate negotiations with colonial representatives. Notably, during the 1819 war, Makhanda sent two unnamed women to initiate negotiations with the missionaries. These examples underscore the strategic use of women's roles in diplomacy and negotiation during times of political tension and conflict. They further reveal that women were not confined to domestic or supportive functions but were integral to the survival and political manoeuvring of their communities, thereby complicating the patriarchal narrative that often sidelines women's agency in African history.

Other women recognized for roles similar to that of Sutu as emissaries include, among others, Maqoma's sister, Nonibe (Webb, 2019:302). Additionally, women occupied prominent positions as traditional leaders, prophets, and war doctors, exemplified by figures such as Nongqawuse, who has been discussed previously. Notably, the most renowned female war doctor is arguably Nita of the Gcaleka, who led the assault on the fortification at Bika in 1877; she was killed during the attack, and her head was subsequently severed and preserved in lime (Webb, 2019:303).

Many amaXhosa women undertook espionage on behalf of their male counterparts within British camps, sometimes going so far as to engage British men in order to obtain strategic intelligence. During the war of 1850–1853, for example, women clandestinely delivered supplies of food and ammunition to combatants in and around the Waterkloof (Webb, 2019:303). More broadly, throughout the colonial wars, amaXhosa women assumed diverse roles that extended beyond direct combat; they provided leadership in specific circumstances, facilitated transport and commissariat arrangements, smuggled provisions and ammunition, gathered intelligence, and acted as emissaries (Webb, 2019:309).

Therefore, amaXhosa women during these wars were not merely passive victims; they actively collaborated with their men, contributing in diverse and strategic ways. They transcended the roles of victimized widows and mothers, working collectively to ensure the survival of their children and to protect their men from being killed without resistance. Some even risked their own lives by seducing British soldiers to gather intelligence or by stealing from them in order to weaken enemy forces and safeguard their land.

In the 1800s, amaXhosa women exemplified a form of agency that can be described as extending beyond conventional feminist frameworks, particularly in the context of missionary incursions aimed at imposing patriarchal structures upon a largely matriarchal society. While missionaries sought to

disempower the amaXhosa through religious and social conversion, the local population often pursued their own objectives. As Tisani (1992:67) notes, during the 1840s the rate of African baptisms was low despite significant relocation to mission stations, suggesting that many moved primarily for practical benefits rather than spiritual conversion. A striking example cited by Tisani (1992:67) is that of Maqoma's mother, who relocated to a mission station in 1838 to obtain land near a furrow constructed by the missionary Kaper, rather than out of religious conviction.

Life on the mission stations required the amaXhosa to adhere to the rules imposed by the missionaries, which "affected their perceptions of gender roles" (Tisani, 1992:67). The missionaries introduced formal education and literacy, systematically recording information; however, as noted in various sources, references to amaXhosa women in church records were minimal or entirely absent. The limited accounts that do exist tend to portray amaXhosa women as troubled or morally deficient, in need of salvation (Tisani, 1992:67). Such representations served the missionaries' interests by eliciting greater financial support from European donors for their work.

One of the primary reasons for the limited references to women in church records during this period is that early church writers were predominantly men (Tisani, 1992:67). As a result, these records largely reflect male perspectives, deliberately excluding the voices and experiences of women. The writings of amaXhosa women from this era are scarce and survive mostly through the reminiscences of family members or second-hand accounts. For instance, Mina, one of the early amaXhosa women converts in 1799, is known primarily through such mediated narratives. This absence of direct female testimony not only obscures the lived experiences of amaXhosa women but also reinforces a historical narrative in which men's actions and viewpoints dominate, marginalizing women's contributions to religious, social, and political life within the mission context.

The portrayal of mission stations that reached the broader public was constructed almost entirely through the writings of male missionaries. This representation has largely persisted due to the scarcity of alternative sources, leaving scholars with a narrative dominated by male perspectives. As a result, missionary records emphasize an overwhelming male presence and authority within the mission stations, often minimizing or entirely omitting the roles, agency, and experiences of amaXhosa women. This selective documentation not only shapes historical understanding of mission life but also reinforces gendered hierarchies, presenting a skewed view in which women appear peripheral rather than central to the social, religious, and economic activities of the mission

community.

However, the apparent male dominance within mission stations was not unchallenged and faced subtle forms of resistance from women. As Tisani (1992:69) notes, in the initial stages, missionaries were eager to educate all who sought instruction; yet, once the system became formalized, educational opportunities were largely restricted to males. Girls and women were often confined to learning domestic skills deemed appropriate for their gender, such as sewing, cooking, and household management, while access to literacy, religious instruction, and broader academic knowledge was limited. Despite these constraints, amaXhosa women found ways to navigate and, at times, subvert these restrictions, asserting their agency within the tightly controlled educational and social structures imposed by the missionaries.

The exclusion of women and girls from the primary centres of learning was both gradual and inexorable. Once schools were established and operational, a sex-differentiated curriculum was systematically implemented, privileging academic instruction for boys while confining girls to domestic training. This curriculum emphasized skills such as sewing, cooking, and household management, reinforcing traditional gender roles and limiting women's access to literacy, critical thinking, and broader educational opportunities. By institutionalizing such differentiation, the mission system not only constrained the intellectual development of amaXhosa girls but also perpetuated a social hierarchy that positioned men as the primary bearers of knowledge and authority, thereby shaping long-term gendered power relations within the community.

It is striking that, according to Tisani (1992:70), amaXhosa girls often demonstrated greater eagerness and attentiveness in scholarly pursuits than their male counterparts. Despite this, when a teaching and catechist seminary was established at Lovedale in 1841, enrolment was exclusively limited to male students. Various factors, including the demands of cattle herding and other responsibilities, contributed to the low participation of male amaXhosa children in formal schooling. In response to these circumstances, several women missionaries began advocating for the formal education of girls, recognizing both their intellectual potential and the need to provide broader educational opportunities for amaXhosa women (Tisani, 1992:70).

AmaXhosa women grabbed the opportunities presented to them and an elite amaXhosa women breed was birthed by this, women such as Noni Jabavu, Nontsizi Mgqwetho and many others. It can be argued that the educational opportunities awarded to male Africans in these mission stations birthed

a great generation of educated males with power awarded to them by the missionaries to preach the gospel, become teachers, writers, interpreters, catechists, and furthermore (Tisani, 1992:71). However, women did not just sit back. According to Tisani (1992:71) there were women who actively participated in the abovementioned activities as well. Not much is said about these women. As indicated in the following statement by Tisani (1992:72):

> The women, who had always taught the young about family history, family praises, iintsomi [folktales] and other genres of the local oral tradition, simply expanded their repertoire to include Christian teachings.

The above demonstrates that, although amaXhosa women were largely illiterate prior to the arrival of missionaries, they possessed a rich and dynamic repertoire of skills and knowledge. They excelled as performers, adept at singing, storytelling, and conveying teachings orally through the effective use of language. Beyond these cultural contributions, amaXhosa women also played important prophetic roles, offering guidance and warnings to their husbands and children about potential dangers. Their oral literacy and spiritual authority highlight the sophisticated ways in which women exercised influence and transmitted knowledge within their communities, challenging contemporary assumptions that literacy and intellectual authority were the exclusive domain of men.

Although historical records from the 1700s and 1800s often make scant mention of them, amaXhosa women exerted considerable influence within their communities. They navigated and challenged social barriers even while operating in the shadow of male authority. As matriarchs, they held significant roles in decision-making, social organization, and spiritual guidance until the arrival of missionaries, who sought to impose patriarchal structures that undermined traditional gender relations and weakened the collective power of African men and women. Both in the precolonial period and during the missionary era, amaXhosa women demonstrated agency that transcended contemporary notions of feminism, collaborating strategically to assert their presence and authority. At mission stations, despite systemic restrictions and gendered obstacles, they actively sought to demonstrate their capabilities, thereby making enduring contributions to their communities' social, cultural, and spiritual life.

The struggle of women in South Africa, as in many parts of the world, has unfolded in distinct historical phases, encompassing the precolonial era, the postcolonial period, the apartheid regime, and the subsequent post-apartheid democratic era. As noted above, women's strategies and

approaches varied across these periods, yet a unifying thread persists: the pursuit of emancipation from hegemonic and oppressive structures. During the apartheid era, the primary focus of resistance was the comprehensive liberation of all Africans from the discriminatory, oppressive, and violent policies of the apartheid state. Within this broader struggle, however, there emerged a notable intensification of women-centred social movements advocating for gender equality, particularly from the late 1970s through the 1980s, signalling a growing recognition of the intersection between national liberation and women's rights.

Hassim (2006:3) marks the rise of women's movements in South Africa as a pivotal phenomenon for South African social movements. She states that this phenomenon gave power to other social movements, arguing the importance of strong social movements. Hassim (2006:4) defines a strong social movement as follows:

> A movement that has the capacity to articulate the particular interests of its constituencies and to mobilise those constituencies in defence of those interests, it is able to develop independent strategies to achieve its aims while holding open the possibility of alliance with other progressive movements.

Thus, a strong social movement ought to possess autonomous political power in order to achieve its objectives. When affiliated with structures that are already in power, social movements tend to be side-lined and their cause is either diluted or completely shoved. This is the case with the feminist social movements in South Africa. Although, articulated previously in this study, the gender equality social movements in pre-apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa did not categorise themselves as feminist social movements. Theirs speaks to the feminism that is defined by Hassim (2006:5) as:

> Direct political dimension, as it is not only aware of women's oppression but seeks to confront male power in all its dimension…Feminism is to examine the ways in which power operates within and between the political, social and economic spheres of specific societies.

The primary aim of a feminist approach is to challenge and transform patriarchal ideologies embedded within society. According to Hassim (2006:6), feminism can also be understood as facilitating women's entry into the political arena, enabling them to contest marginalization and exclusion, whether within the formal structures of the state or within cultural and traditional spheres. Hassim further argues that in the pursuit of inclusion and systemic transformation, women's

movements frequently form strategic alliances with other social and political movements, as has been the case in South Africa. For example, many women involved in these movements aligned themselves with the ANC Women's League, her women's branch of the African National Congress while others in KwaZulu-Natal affiliated with the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), illustrating the intersection of gender activism with broader political struggles, as noted earlier in this study.

The alliance between women's movements and male-dominated political parties with entrenched hegemonic principles presents inherent challenges. Such partnerships can constrain women's autonomy and limit the transformative potential of feminist agendas. A historical parallel can be drawn to the period of the cattle-killing movement, during which Nongqawuse, a young female prophet was frequently disregarded by male elders, who preferred to seek validation from her uncle before acknowledging her pronouncements. This example underscores a recurring tension in which women's authority is mediated or undermined by patriarchal structures, even when their contributions are critical, and highlights the broader structural obstacles that women continue to navigate when engaging with political and social institutions dominated by male authority.

Hassim (2006:7) breaks down the two approaches that feminist movements usually utilize in their quest to fulfil their objectives. Namely, these are the inclusionary and transformatory feminist approaches. She explains the inclusionary approach as women's movements in dire need for political influence in order for their quest to succeed. Although women movements are able to mobilise, they have to have access to real political power that is possessed by the dominant powers in political parties.

According to Hassim (2006:7), women's movements engaged in the transformation of feminism often sought alliances with other social movements that operated independently of state influence. These alliances were grounded in a shared commitment to transforming broader social structures, a central objective also pursued by women's movements. However, this strategic orientation "may bring certain sections of the women's movement into contestation with the elite and party-oriented members, as it is a form of politics that is likely to take a more confrontational approach to party platforms and state policies" (Hassim, 2006:7).

The above observation is particularly relevant to this study, as it resonates with the experiences of many women's movements in South Africa in the post-1994 democratic era, as well as with the struggles of the female protagonists in the primary literary texts examined here. Much like women's

organizations that sought to challenge entrenched systems of inequality, the protagonists actively pursue the transformation of cultural and traditional gender ideologies that perpetuate patriarchal domination. Their efforts, however, are frequently met with resistance not only from men but also from other women who have forged alliances with patriarchal structures and those who uphold them. Such women often legitimize and defend these oppressive systems under the guise of preserving culture and tradition. This dynamic illustrates the complexity of feminist struggles in both social and literary contexts, where opposition to change may emerge from within the very communities that feminists aim to liberate, thereby revealing the deeply embedded and contested nature of patriarchy.

In *Nongxaki nezakhe* (Belebesi, 1979:6), *Nongxaki* confides in her aunt, *Hleliwe*, her concerns regarding the arranged marriage she is being coerced into. Rather than offering support, *Hleliwe* insists that marriage constitutes the only legitimate home for a young woman: *"Nongxaki, mntakabhuti, ikhaya lomntwana oyintombazana lisekwendeni"* (Belebesi, 1979:6). By aligning herself with her patriarchal brother, *Hleliwe* becomes complicit in sustaining the very structures that oppress women, thereby exemplifying what Hassim (2006:7) describes as women's alliances with patriarchal power. In this instance, the aunt not only denies *Nongxaki* solidarity but actively reinforces the patriarchal ideology that marriage is a woman's sole destiny.

Nongxaki's resistance is rendered futile as she attempts to articulate the dangers inherent in arranged marriages. Her aunt, however, remains unmoved and demonstrates a lack of empathy. Indeed, she emphasizes that informing *Nongxaki* of the arrangement is merely a courtesy, asserting that the young woman's consent is irrelevant: *"Ukhumbule Ntombi yam, ukuba nokuxelela oku ibe kuku 'pliza' wena kuba ndicinga ukuba unganezinto othanda ukuzithengela zona. Uhayi no ewe wakho abangeni ndawo. Qha ke"* (Belebesi, 1979:16). This exchange underscores the extent to which patriarchal authority is normalized and reproduced through women who, in aligning with male power, suppress alternative voices and foreclose the possibility of agency for younger women.

A parallel situation emerges in *UDike noCikizwa* (Mmango, 1988), where *Cikizwa* openly expresses to her paternal aunts her opposition to the arranged marriage being imposed upon her by her father. *Cikizwa* articulates the profoundly dehumanizing nature of such coercion, lamenting that it reduces her to the status of livestock, stripped of autonomy and treated as property: *"Ndiva intlungu yokuthobela umthetho katata, umthetho ondiphanga bonk'ubuntu bam, undenze ndibe yigusha efuyiweyo"* (Mmango, 1988:2). In framing her plight through the metaphor of her father's sheep,

Cikizwa underscores the erasure of her agency and the subjugation of her identity under patriarchal authority.

Her paternal aunt, *Nomazala*, however, aligns herself with her brother, thereby reinforcing his patriarchal decisions and legitimizing his authority. She dismisses *Cikizwa's* resistance as both disrespectful and foolish, asserting that arranged marriages are an accepted norm: *"yinto eqhelekileyo ukuba umntu amendisele apho athanda khona umntwana wakhe"* (Mmango, 1988:6). Further, she reframes the coercion as an act of care, claiming that her brother is neither enslaving *Cikizwa* nor depriving her of dignity, but rather preparing her future by "building her a home and family": *"Ubhuti akamenzi khoboka lo mntwana, kuphela uyamlunguselela, umakhela ikhaya lekamva"* (Mmango, 1988:6). This exchange illustrates how patriarchal ideologies are sustained not only by men but also by women who, through complicity and rationalization, reproduce oppressive structures under the guise of familial duty and cultural preservation.

In contrast, *Cikizwa's* progressive paternal aunt challenges her brother and sister by asserting that times have changed and that patriarchal principles, often disguised as cultural and traditional norms, require transformation. Her intervention highlights the presence of alternative voices within the family structure, voices that recognize the oppressive dimensions of practices such as arranged marriage and advocate for a reimagining of cultural traditions in ways that affirm women's agency. However, her critique is met with strong resistance from her siblings, who remain firmly entrenched in patriarchal ideology. *Cikizwa's* father, in particular, dismisses her concerns, insisting that she will not obstruct his efforts to secure what he perceives as a stable future and family for his daughter through marriage. This moment of familial confrontation illustrates the generational and ideological tensions within patriarchal societies, where progressive calls for transformation are frequently silenced by appeals to cultural continuity and the prioritization of familial honour. Moreover, it underscores the broader feminist argument that culture, when mobilized to defend patriarchal practices, becomes a mechanism of control that resists adaptation to changing social realities.

In *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* (1994), *Nolasti*, the progressive third wife of a polygamous chief, is ostracized by society for her unconventional and reformist views. Following a long day of assisting with domestic responsibilities during a funeral, she proposes that she and her sister wives take time to rest before resuming their household duties. More significantly, *Nolasti* challenges the normalized reverence shown towards their husband, urging her co-wives to cease treating him as a divine figure.

She argues that such idolization grants him unchecked authority, enabling mistreatment, abuse, and the relegation of women to subordinate roles.

Her critique, however, is met with strong opposition. *Nofinishi*, one of her sister wives, defends their conduct by claiming that they do not worship their husband as a deity, but rather respect him as the legitimate head of the family. Reinforcing this defence, *Nokhaya* adds that *Nolasti*, despite being educated, fails to distinguish between fear and respect, thereby framing *Nolasti's* critique as ignorance rather than insight. This dialogue (*Iinkunzi Ezimbini*, 1994:7) illuminates the contestations between women positioned on opposite sides of the gendered power spectrum: on one side, those who align themselves with hegemonic patriarchal structures under the guise of respect and tradition; on the other, the progressive voice that questions and resists these norms. The exchange underscores the complexity of intra-gender dynamics, demonstrating how women themselves can become either agents of patriarchal reproduction or advocates of transformation, a tension that remains central to feminist discourse in both literary and socio-political contexts.

> *Nolasti: Nitheth'ukuba asinakukhe siphumle nje nakancinci na bethuna? Yhini zinkosi sidinwe sinje?*
>
> *Nokhaya: Hayi wethu akukho xesha lakuphumla ayeza la mancentsa, kuza kuba njani xa esifikela sithe dudlu apha sonke?*
>
> *Nolasti: Yekani oku kumphatha okwesithixo uSigqibo! Nini aba baziphathise kakubi ngoku kumoyika kangaka.*
>
> *Nofinishi: Uyaphazama ke kuloo ndawo sisi. Akaphethwanga okwesithixo uyise kaMandla kulo mtyanti, kwaye asisebenzi ngexhala. Andazi ukuba ufundile nje uthini ukungawazi umahluko phakathi kokoyika umntu nokumhlonlela. Simhlonele thina uJwarha kuba uyithontsi yeli khaya…Awukwazi nokuhlonipha kodwa uthi ungumfazi!*

The dialogue above further illustrates how patriarchy constructs and normalizes the notion that women's subjugation is synonymous with respect. Within this framework, women are expected to demonstrate obedience and submission to men as an unquestioned marker of reverence. Such expectations deny women the right to rest, to develop and pursue their own ideologies, to exercise independence, to participate in decision-making processes, and to act as autonomous agents within their households and communities. In response to these constraints, *Nolasti* seeks to mobilize women

within her church who share her critical stance on patriarchy. Together, they establish a women's social movement aimed at challenging entrenched gender inequalities in their village and at developing transformative solutions to the systemic subordination of women (Motlabane, 1994:26). Their efforts, however, encounter considerable opposition, particularly from women such as *Nolasti's* sister wives, who dismiss these initiatives as disrespectful and inconsistent with the ideals of a "real" traditional wife. This opposition highlights the internal fractures within women's communities, where some actively resist patriarchal domination while others, through complicity, safeguard its continuity under the guise of tradition and cultural authenticity.

Nofinishi experiences public humiliation at the hands of her husband, the chief, in the presence of their neighbour. When *Sibonda* instructs *Nofinishi* to bring their guest a beverage, she complies; however, upon delivering it, he reprimands her harshly, treating her as though she were a child, for failing to provide meat alongside the drink despite the fact that no such request had been made. His words, *"Mandla yiya phaya kunyoko uthi aphathele uRhadebe into eselwayo"* (Mothlabane, 1994:9), exemplify the authoritative and demeaning manner in which he addresses her. This dialogue illustrates how *Sibonda* not only asserts his patriarchal authority but also reinforces his dominance by publicly chastising his wife, thereby naturalizing women's subordination through everyday interactions (Mothlabane, 1994:9):

> *Sibonda: Beka'pha Mfazi. Kutheni kaloku eza ehamba ze la manzi, akukho nto yokuwandlalela? Banjani na abafazi aba ukuvumba?*
>
> *Nofinishi: Andazanga Bawo ukub…*
>
> *Sibonda: Wazile ke ngoku Nofinishi! Yiza nenyama.*

Despite being subjected to such overt disrespect, *Nofinishi* and *Nokhaya*; *Nolasti's* sister wives continue to admire and defend their husband. When *Nofinishi* recounts the incident of public humiliation to *Nokhaya*, the latter immediately shifts the blame away from their husband and onto *Nolasti*. *Nokhaya* argues that their husband's increasingly volatile behaviour is the result of *Nolasti's* defiance, claiming that his transformation into "a beast" is provoked by her lack of respect. According to *Nokhaya,* while *Nolasti* remains unaffected and seemingly indifferent, her defiance leaves the other wives to endure the consequences of his anger. She further asserts that *Nolasti* is the true source of conflict within the household, accusing her of creating tension by constantly disrespecting their husband and then absconding to visit her friends, thereby leaving behind "the

monster she has created" (Mothlabane, 1994:13). This response reveals how women, through mechanisms of internalized patriarchy, may redirect blame onto other women who resist subjugation, rather than holding patriarchal authority itself accountable. In this way, sister wives like *Nokhaya* and *Nofinishi* become active agents in the preservation of oppressive structures, framing resistance as disorder while validating their husband's abusive conduct.

> *Nokhaya: ...Sihlala nesilo ngoku, ishi esoloko igcade nengakanani impazamo! Isimanga ke kukuba oyena mju wenze wonke lo monakalo upholelwe ngamalanga. Siyatsha thina sigcadwa kwabomvu wona amalahle la.*
>
> *Nokhaya: ...Oyena mju osiphathise kakubi apha kulo mtyanti nguNolasti. Uthi akugqemfeza esenza olu gezo lwakhe acapuke uyise kaMandla awukhuphele kuthi wonke umsindo kaloku laa ntikazi isuka ihambe iye kubaNyepha bayo, sisale thina bangakwazi kukhumsha siqhuqhumba.*
>
> *Nofinishi: Watsho kwasa ke ngoku. Uyaz' ukuba bendingayiqondi tu le shi? Tyhini, tyhini baju bakwaSilwana! Nithi akathakathi lo Mfazi? Angageza kangaka egezela incentsa kanti amazinyo aza kuba Buthelezi ngawethu! Nditshutshiswa kangaka nje izolo kungenxa yesaa simo sokubuya kwaNqawana, okuya ebethe dudlu ngathi ngumzala?*

The women place the blame for household discord squarely on *Nolasti,* construing her transformative stance as an act of disobedience rather than as a legitimate challenge to oppression. In doing so, they dismiss and normalize their husband's abusive and patriarchal behaviour, refusing to interrogate the structures of power that sustain their subordination. The resistance *Nolasti* encounters from both her husband and her sister wives compels her to move beyond a narrow feminist critique towards a broader struggle for women's emancipation and the dismantling of patriarchal ideologies that are strategically masked as cultural and traditional customs. Nevertheless, her efforts remain fraught with difficulty. Even the social movement she initiates with women from her church ultimately collapses due to the fragmentation between progressive voices and the wider community of women in the village. The majority of these women continue to align themselves with hegemonic powers, thereby reinforcing the very patriarchal systems that regulate their lives. This dynamic underscores the profound challenges faced by transformative feminist projects in contexts where patriarchal authority is deeply entrenched and legitimized through culture, tradition, and women's complicity.

In *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda* (1997), the female protagonist, *Nozinto*, experiences profound social isolation when her friends' distance themselves after she orchestrates an attempt on her husband's life in response to sustained physical and emotional abuse. Despite her urgent need for guidance and emotional support, *Nozinto* is instead met with judgment and rejection from the women in her social circle. One of her friends, *Zodidi,* reinforces this ostracism by aligning herself with patriarchal authority, remarking to her husband that he had been correct in warning her to avoid *Nozinto*: *"kudala ke phofu wathi mandohlukane nesisimanga singuNozinto"* (Ngewu, 1997:2). This episode illustrates how patriarchal norms are enforced not only by men but also by women, who, through complicity and moral policing, uphold social codes that sanction male authority while delegitimizing acts of resistance against oppression. The judgment *Nozinto* faces from her peers highlights the ways in which women's solidarity can be undermined by internalized patriarchal values, further isolating those who challenge abusive power structures.

It is evident that *Zodidi's* husband harbours a deep-seated antagonism toward *Nozinto*, who is characterized as a courageous and assertive woman yet profoundly affected by her husband's abusive behaviour. The persistent torment inflicted by her husband upon both *Nozinto* and their children drives her to react in ways that may be deemed irrational, yet these responses are judged harshly by her social circle. In contrast, her husband is exonerated from scrutiny and is often portrayed as a virtuous figure, highlighting a striking asymmetry in the moral evaluation of male and female behaviour within patriarchal frameworks. This disparity underscores how societal norms tend to valorise male authority while pathologizing women's resistance, thereby reinforcing the structural inequalities and silencing mechanisms that sustain domestic and social oppression.

Phalisa, also a friend of *Nozinto*, acknowledges that the other women in their social circle do not truly understand her, noting that Nozinto is a remarkably audacious woman: *"Mhlawumbi nimva nje ngokubaliselwa uNozinto asingowangoku. Unesibindi umfazi ophaya!"* (Ngewu, 1997:3). Despite awareness of her suffering, these women engage in gossip rather than offering comfort or support, thereby perpetuating her social isolation. *Phalisa* emphasizes the severity of *Nozinto's* circumstances, describing how she is treated like household property by her husband, who spends extended periods traveling while she remains responsible for managing the home and caring for their children. The cumulative effects of such neglect and abuse, *Phalisa* notes, have been so damaging that Nozinto has resorted to alcohol as a coping mechanism. This depiction highlights how

patriarchal structures not only oppress women through direct acts of control but also exacerbate their marginalization by eroding social support networks, illustrating the intersection of domestic abuse, social judgment, and communal complicity in sustaining systemic gender inequality. This is found in Ngewu (1997:4):

> *Ubuhlungu bemeko kaNozinto abunakuqondakala umele kude kuba uNozinto ufana nje nefenishala yokuhombisa umzi kaZamile! UZamile akanalo ixesha likaNozinto. Into yokusela kukaNozinto intsha kakhulu yaye inesizathu sayo. Eyona nto emenze wasela laa mfazi ziingxaki zomtshato ongekhoyo.*

Despite being fully aware of the abuses and neglect occurring within *Nozinto's* marriage, her friends continue to undermine her responses and hold her accountable for actions that are primarily reactive. They ignore the moral implications of *Zamile's* transgressions, including his infidelity, and instead place the entirety of the blame on Nozinto. Their judgment is further evident in their inquiries to *Phalisa* regarding the man with whom *Nozinto* seeks solace. *Phalisa* clarifies that *Nozinto's* relationship is not motivated by pleasure or desire, but rather represents a search for refuge from a marriage that has effectively ceased to exist, as her husband no longer fulfils his marital obligations. She confronts her friends with a critical question, challenging them to consider what alternatives *Nozinto* has when abandoned by the very spouse who is expected to provide her with emotional and material support (Ngewu, 1997:5). This scenario underscores how women's solidarity can be compromised by internalized patriarchal norms, whereby reactive strategies of self-preservation are pathologized, and the accountability of male partners is systematically overlooked. The conversation is as follows from Ngewu (1997:5):

> *UNozinto unalo ipolisa ancuma nalo. Akayenzanga loo nto kuba engakwazi kuziphatha koko ubethwe kukuphela komtshato. UNozinto masimcingele ngumntu naye, yaye uyafana nabanye abantu. Ngubani umfazi ekufuneka efukame inlungu yakhe yokungawafumani amalungelo omtshato wakhe endodeni yakhe? Xa uZamile emfulathele umfazi wakhe, mvumeleni uNozinto aye apho anokufumana khona uhoyo.*

As much as *Phalisa* indicates that she is on *Nozinto*'s side, she is still not fully supportive of *Nozinto*. The fact that she is sharing all these private details about *Nozinto*'s life means that she is not a true friend. She is not completely in solidarity with *Nozinto*. However, her loyalty to *Nozinto* is better

than that of her other friends. *Nconyiwe,* another friend of theirs responds like an agent of patriarchy when she disagrees by averring that women cannot compare themselves to men. "*Andiyazi mna into yokuba ithi indoda xa ikhethe ukuqubha emgxobhozweni, nomfazi asukele phezulu ukuya kuzifaka emgxobhozweni*" (Ngewu, 1997:5).

Nozinto finds herself alone even when she has four female friends, whom she regards as close to her. When she is in disbelief of what has happened to her husband, the first people she calls are her friends. One can tell from her behaviour that *Nozinto* is hurt and because of the emotional agony that has been weighing her down for years, she results to acting impulsively. Calling her friends to be with her just after her husband was shot is her cry for help, to be surrounded by those she loves dearly. To be around people. However, her friends use the opportunity to ridicule. They gossip about her. They do not realize that her out of character behaviour is a cry for assistance.

Nconyiwe and the other women choose to align themselves with their husbands and the broader network of male protagonists who embody and enforce patriarchal authority. Rather than offering support to a woman in distress, they actively participate in her further subjugation, functioning as gatekeepers of patriarchal norms and ensuring the continuation of systemic oppression. In stark contrast, *Nozinto* exhibits remarkable courage, maintaining her resilience despite being emotionally fractured both by her husband's abuse and by the judgment and ostracism of her social circle. This juxtaposition highlights the complex dynamics of women's complicity within patriarchal systems, illustrating how solidarity among women is frequently undermined by the internalization of hegemonic cultural and social expectations, while those who resist patriarchal control must navigate both domestic and societal hostility.

In *UDike noCikizwa*, the female protagonist, *Cikizwa*, along with one of her paternal aunts, *Nomatiletile*, actively oppose the arranged marriage into which she is being coerced. Both women express clear apprehension and disapproval, recognizing the coercive and oppressive nature of the practice. Their resistance highlights an emergent critique of patriarchal authority and the culturally sanctioned subjugation of women. In contrast, *Cikizwa's* other aunt, *Nomazala*, supports the arrangement and appears unable to comprehend the objections raised by her sister and niece. Her stance reflects the internalization of patriarchal norms, whereby compliance with established cultural and familial expectations is valorised, and dissent is delegitimized. This divergence among the aunts underscores the generational and ideological tensions within families and communities, illustrating

how women themselves can serve either as agents of resistance or as enforcers of patriarchal structures, thereby complicating the pursuit of female autonomy and the transformation of oppressive cultural practices.

Nomatiletile and *Nomazala* find themselves in direct conflict over their brother's decision to marry Cikizwa to a man she neither knows nor likes. *Nojoyini* informs them that *Cikizwa* has been emotionally distressed ever since learning of the impending marriage. *Nomatiletile* expresses genuine concern about the prospects for the marriage, questioning how it could succeed given *Cikizwa's* evident lack of interest. In contrast, *Nomazala* dismisses these concerns, maintaining that it is entirely normal for a father to arrange a marriage for his daughter according to his own wishes. She reinforces this perspective by emphasizing that their brother is not the first to exercise such authority, thereby framing the practice as a culturally sanctioned and historically unproblematic aspect of familial duty. This clash between the aunts highlights the tension between progressive critiques of patriarchal practices and the traditionalist defence of male authority, revealing the intergenerational and ideological negotiations that shape women's agency within patriarchal structures.

Nomazala states that *Cikizwa* is disrespectful as she cannot refuse a man as he brings cows. Cows become a sign of wealth in African families for the father. *Nomatiletile* tries to explain to her sister that society has evolved and is more welcome to the idea of emancipation. However, *Nomazala* insists that her brother is not enslaving *Cikizwa* rather than building her a bright future. *Nomatiletile* argues that their brother is enslaving *Cikizwa* by not allowing her to make her own decisions. The following dialogue from Mmango (1988:5-6):

> *UNojoyini: Kunje ngokuba benditshilo ke Sisi, lo mntwana akazange onwabe ukususela mhla kwathiwa wendiselwa kwaNgqika.*
>
> *UNomatiletile: Isizathu yintoni?*
>
> *UNojoyini: Akafuni lowa mntwana endiselwa kuye.*
>
> *UNomatiletile: Iya kwakheka ke le ndlu xa angafuniyo lo mntwana?*
>
> *UNojoyini: Le nto ndayimangala kwamhlamnene kuyise kuba lo mntwana wavela wacacisa ukuba akafuni kwendela kwaNgqika kwamhla kweziwa kucelwa.*
>
> *UNomatiletile: Wathini ke uSando wakuyimangala le nto?*
>
> *UNomazala: Yhu tana! Yinto eqhelekileyo ukuba umntu amendisele apho athande*

khona umntwana wakhe. Ayiqali ngobhuti lo. Lo mntwana usile. Wala indoda xa esazi ntoni ke yena, ubuso bendoda buziinkomo nje?

UNomatiletile: Phulaphula apha "Yhu tana: Lo Cikizwa asinguye uCikizwa wamaxesha akudala, amaxesha obumnyama; nguCikizwa wala maxesha okhanyo.

UNomazala: Yhu tana! Mna andiboni nto intle kula maxesha sifundekelwa ngawo kuthiwa ngawokhanyo, into endiyibonayo kuphela ukuphambana kwelizwe. Ngaphezu koko ke ekwazini nasekuqondeni kwam izinto ezenziwa ngala maxesha kuthiwa ngawokukhanya zimnyama.

UNomatiletile: (ngomsindo): Qonda kakuhle Nomazala. Ekuhambeni kwamaxesha kukhula umnqweno wenkululeko.

UNomazala: Yhu tana! Ubhuti akamenzi khoboka lo mntwana. Kuphela uyamlungiselela, umakhela ikhaya lekamva.

UNomatiletile: Umenza ikhoboka xa angamvumeliyo ukuba 'acinge, azi, aqiqe, aqonde', njengokuba esitsho.

The dialogue above illustrates how women within families, communities, and other social spaces can be socialized to internalize patriarchal norms, perceiving them as synonymous with tradition and therefore inherently legitimate. Such conditioning leads them to uphold and enforce these norms, even when they perpetuate the subjugation of women. *Nomazala* exemplifies this phenomenon, serving as a clear representation of women who act as agents of patriarchy. By defending her brother's authority and dismissing the concerns of those resisting patriarchal practices, she demonstrates how internalized patriarchal ideology can function to sustain oppressive structures, often positioning women themselves as enforcers of social and gendered hierarchies.

Through the foregoing analysis, this chapter conceptualizes the notion of "beyond feminism" as encompassing women who transcend conventional expectations by actively defying cultural, traditional, political, and social norms in pursuit of the emancipation of all women and the broader society. Such women demonstrate agency, courage, and resilience in the face of systemic oppression. *Nolasti*, from Mothlabane's *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*, exemplifies this form of transformative feminism through her commitment to social change within both her household and community, advocating for the betterment of all women. Similarly, *Nozinto* embodies steadfast resistance, standing her ground

against overwhelming odds to protect the wellbeing of her children and challenge male domination. Despite enduring profound physical and emotional abuse, she demonstrates remarkable courage by confronting and resisting oppressive authority. Likewise, *Cikizwa* and *Nongxaki* confront the coercive imposition of arranged marriages, remaining undeterred by the threat of social ostracism. Through their unwavering commitment to personal autonomy and the rejection of patriarchal dictates, both women assert their agency and ultimately achieve a form of triumph, illustrating that the pursuit of women's emancipation often requires steadfast resistance and resilience in the face of deeply entrenched male-dominated structures. Collectively, these literary examples illuminate how "beyond feminism" is not merely a theoretical position but a lived praxis in which women challenge, negotiate, and ultimately reshape the social and cultural landscapes that seek to constrain them.

Nongqawuse embodies the archetype of a "beyond feminist" woman, representing a young woman whose boldness and courage enable her to deliver her message even in the face of criticism and oppression from those entrenched in narcissistic and patriarchal authority. Her activism extends beyond the pursuit of women's emancipation to encompass the welfare of the entire amaXhosa nation, highlighting a commitment to collective social transformation. Despite widespread misunderstanding and repeated attempts to silence her, Nongqawuse demonstrated remarkable resilience, standing resolute in the midst of adversity. Her example underscores the intersection of individual courage, social responsibility, and transformative agency, illustrating how "beyond feminist" action entails not only challenging gendered oppression but also confronting broader structures of power and societal inertia.

'Beyond feminism' is a concept that encompasses women who played pivotal yet often unrecognized roles during South Africa's post-colonial struggles. These are women who were banned, arrested, or even killed for their activism, and who endured sexual violation, harassment, and systemic suppression both in guerrilla camps and in exile. Beyond feminism also captures the women who continue to fight persistently both openly and quietly for gender equality, advocating not only for themselves but for the collective empowerment of all women. It recognizes those who provide support to other women without judgment and who engage collaboratively in efforts to confront and dismantle social injustices, extending their activism above and beyond conventional expectations. Importantly, this conceptualization also emphasizes the intersectional and inclusive nature of transformative struggle, acknowledging the roles of both women and men in working together to challenge gender-based oppression. By framing feminist praxis in terms of courage, solidarity, and

collective action, “beyond feminism” underscores a holistic vision of social transformation that addresses both gendered and broader societal inequities.

The women depicted in the literary texts examined in this study each confront entrenched patriarchal barriers, yet they encounter numerous obstacles that result in their being perceived as vulnerable, vindictive, disobedient, or even morally transgressive. While they endeavour to assert their agency and pursue transformative goals, their efforts are frequently undermined by the mobilization of other women who support and uphold patriarchal cultural systems. Despite these challenges, these protagonists remain resolute in their actions, demonstrating resilience and courage in the face of systemic opposition. The following chapter will further examine how tradition and culture are strategically employed by some women against others, serving as a means to reinforce and legitimize patriarchal ideology. In doing so, these women emerge as both conscious and subconscious agents of patriarchy, illustrating the complex interplay between resistance and complicity within gendered power structures.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter first delineates the concept of “beyond feminism” as employed in this study, framing it as an analytical lens for examining gender injustice and oppression rooted in patriarchal philosophies. These philosophies, historically propagated by hegemonic structures, utilize the manipulation of cultural and traditional customs to maintain domination over women. Importantly, the chapter underscores that patriarchal power is not exercised solely by men; women themselves may also function as agents of patriarchy, enforcing and perpetuating these oppressive norms. This dual dynamic highlights the necessity of critically interrogating the mechanisms through which patriarchy operates, including the ways in which cultural and social systems are leveraged to sustain gendered hierarchies.

Secondly, this chapter demonstrates that amaXhosa women have historically exhibited remarkable boldness and resilience. They actively resisted various oppressive regimes and strategically leveraged education as a tool to challenge and manoeuvre colonial authorities. In doing so, amaXhosa women exemplify key principles of African feminist thought, using knowledge and critical engagement to subvert systems of oppression. Their efforts were instrumental in contributing to the eventual dismantling of the apartheid regime, as they sought to secure a better future for themselves and their children. Moreover, these women recognized the importance of solidarity with men in

navigating and resisting the pressures imposed by segregationist and colonial structures, thereby highlighting the intersectional and collective dimensions of their struggle for social and political liberation.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter seeks to interrogate the ways in which patriarchy is often disguised as culture and tradition, as well as the role of women in protecting and perpetuating patriarchal cultural principles and practices. The analysis begins with a clear definition of the concept of culture, which is fundamental to the development of this study, as it frames the argument that male domination frequently conceals itself under the guise of cultural and traditional norms. Culture is a critical point of inquiry because it is often manipulated to serve the interests of specific groups, with patriarchs leveraging it to justify the oppression and abuse of women. By defining culture, the chapter aims to expose these manipulations and highlight the mechanisms through which patriarchal authority is naturalized.

The chapter then proceeds to offer a detailed analysis illustrating how patriarchal ideologies in many African societies particularly among the amaXhosa, who are the focus of the literary texts utilized in this study are legitimized as cultural practice. This examination is organized under four subheadings, each dedicated to one of the primary literary texts analysed, demonstrating how the theme of patriarchy cloaked as culture manifests within each narrative. In doing so, the chapter provides both a theoretical and textual account of how cultural frameworks are mobilized to sustain gendered hierarchies and the complicity of both men and women in reinforcing these structures.

These accounts will illustrate how patriarchy, often cloaked as culture, is represented in *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*, highlighting the ways in which some women actively or inadvertently perpetuate hegemonic ideals upon other women sometimes unconsciously, and in other instances deliberately, often deriving benefit from male authority. This chapter also examines the institution of marriage as a significant cultural practice within African traditions. Traditionally, marriage functioned as a mechanism of control over young women, denying them autonomy and placing decision-making power in the hands of their fathers and other elders within the family. The dynamics of such patriarchal control will be explored through textual analysis of *UDike noCikizwa* and *Nongxaki nezakhe*, demonstrating how cultural norms and familial authority are mobilized to restrict women's agency and maintain male dominance.

The chapter will then examine the experiences of women who are subjected to abuse and neglect within marriage yet remain constrained by its social and cultural expectations to the extent that they

are compelled to assume identities that are not their own. This analysis will also reveal how the failure of other women to offer solidarity and support in such repressive contexts can exacerbate these women's suffering, sometimes compelling them to take drastic measures that have profoundly negative consequences for their lives. These dynamics will be explored through a critical reading of *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda*. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a summary of the key discussions, emphasizing the principal arguments and insights developed throughout the analysis, while providing a foundation for the subsequent chapter. This summary will underscore the relevance of African feminist principles, situating the experiences of the female protagonists within their historical and socio-cultural contexts and highlighting the ways in which their actions and resistances reflect broader struggles against patriarchal oppression.

4.2. Defining Culture

In defining the concept of culture, Idang (2015:97) focuses specifically on African contexts, emphasizing that generalizations in discussions of culture should not be interpreted as implying that all African cultures are homogeneous or possess identical experiences, languages, dress codes, and other social practices. Instead, he argues that it is important to recognize that there are underlying similarities shared by many African societies which, when contrasted with other cultural frameworks, reveal significant differences: "there are underlying similarities shared by many African societies which, when constructed with other cultures, reveal a wide gap of difference" (Idang, 2015:97). This distinction is particularly critical when re-evaluating African culture and values, as it underscores the necessity of transforming certain traditional practices in ways that accommodate contemporary societal needs, ensuring that cultural norms do not infringe upon individuals' rights, wellbeing, or livelihoods.

"The culture of a people is what marks them out distinctively from other human societies in the family of humanity" (Idang, 2015:97). By this statement it is evident that culture is the doctrine that people of a specific group or society formulate for themselves to abide and live by. He defines culture as the "totality of traits and characters that are peculiar to a people to the extent that it marks them out from other peoples or society" (Idang, 2015). It is the shared commonality of people's language, dress code, food, dance, music, religion, beliefs, and many other aspects of their lives.

Tylor (1871), who coined the term culture concurs with the above definitions by stating that it is the entire complexity of an individual or society's beliefs, capabilities, habits, morals, customs and laws.

Culture is passed from generation to generation and Fufunwa (1974:48) below explains how it is passed on:

> The child grows into and within the cultural heritage of his people. He imbibes it. Culture, in traditional society, is not taught, it is caught. The child observes, imbibes and mimics the actions of his elders and siblings. He watches the naming ceremonies, religious services, marriage rituals, funeral obsequies. He witnesses the coronation of a king or chief, the annual yam festival, the annual dance and acrobatic displays of guilds and age groups or his relations in the activities. The child in a traditional society cannot escape his cultural and physical environments.

Building on the preceding discussion, culture is not inherently learned through formal instruction but is primarily observed and imitated. Consequently, individuals raised within a particular social context gradually internalize and adopt the cultural norms, practices, and values of that society. While African cultures differ from European cultures, there exists considerable similarity among African societies themselves. As Idang (2015:100) notes, "The cultures of traditional African societies, together with their value systems and beliefs are close, even though they vary slightly from one another." Within African societies, culture can be categorized as material or non-material. Material culture comprises the visible and tangible objects associated with a society that help define its cultural identity, whereas non-material culture encompasses norms, values, and beliefs (Idang, 2015:100). Importantly, culture is not static; it is dynamic, evolving over time and across generations. Etuk (2002:25) explains that cultural development occurs through the process of assimilation, whereby individuals grasp new ideologies, comprehend them thoroughly, and integrate them into existing cultural frameworks. This conceptualization underscores the adaptability of culture and its capacity to transform in response to changing social, political, and historical circumstances.

Based on the above observation of culture, it can be said that "cultural considerations, some forms of behaviour, actions and conduct are approved while others are widely disapproved of" (Idanga, 2015:100). Therefore, deviating from the cultural norm in a specific community is frowned upon. Idanga (2015:101) links culture with values as these go hand in hand. He further defines values as a view or conviction that a society lives with and upholds, a conviction that an individual would die for. These convictions on how to live life can at any point change, improve and or deteriorate. This point gives emphasis to the point that culture is not static, it should develop and change with each

generation. Therefore, exploiting a group of people and basing the abuse on past controlled cultural ideologies is erroneous.

The perception that acting out of the ordinary is incorrect is absurd. It places people in boxes. “The society we live in has ways of daily forcing its values on us about what is good, right and acceptable. We go on in our daily lives trying to conform to acceptable ways of behaviour and conduct” (Idanga, 2015:101). Individuals who deviate from established societal norms are often labelled as deviant and, as a result, may be subjected to punishment, ridicule, and various forms of social marginalization.

The collective treatment and enforcement of culture upon society is because as viewed by Louw (2000:210) African cultures are collectivist. Collectivism is defined as, “a tendency within a culture toward gregariousness and group orientation” (Louw, 2010:210). Meaning that African cultures focus on the values and belief systems of a society as a group. “Collectivist cultures are characterized by interdependent self-construal, whereas individualist cultures feature independent self-construal” (Louw, 2000:211).

Children are socialized into a specific culture. Boys are groomed differently from girls (Booi, 2021:14). “Children are taught to embrace certain identities and to exert particular behaviours that are aligned with those identities in order for them to ‘fit in’ in the society they are born into” (Booi, 2021:14). Gender is, therefore, constructed within societal cultures based on the physical appearance of individuals. Certain physical actions are assigned to an individual based on their gender. Booi (2021:14) concurs with this statement when she avers that gendered social and cultural identities are shaped by cultural meaning systems, like the family structure, that are embedded in social relations.

These social and cultural teachings upon children are both intentional and unintentional. They are influenced to act in gendered ways through observation, imitation and reinforcement. Children are taught the differences between the genders and act accordingly. “…As the children perform their gender, they subscribe and reinforce social expectations” (Booi, 2021:15). She continues to argue that families in Black South African communities are constructed in terms of masculinity and femininity. Women are viewed as caregivers and men as providers which exempts them from caregiver activities. Hence, it is important to analyse the gender inequalities within the family structure that is vital in African cultural societies. Therefore, Booi (2021: 15) argues that it is fundamental to analyse the gender inequalities within the family structure and also find ways to transform this structure accordingly.

With that said, it is essential to state that Louw (2000:210) asserts that African cultures are collectivists. Meaning that African cultures focus on the values and belief systems of a society as a group, thus the importance of a family structure. “Collectivism structures are characterised by interdependent self-construal, whereas individualist cultures feature independent self-construal” (Louw, 2000:210). Basically, the family coexists. However, because the father/man is given the duty to provide, the rest of the family depends on him. The notion of a woman begging for the approval of a man, remaining in an abusive relationship, stuck in a loveless marriage and so forth stems from the fact that some women from an early age are taught to be dependent upon men and grant men that authority over their lives.

Mbatyoti (2018:23) on the other hand argues that precolonial Africa was not like the above, where men had all the authority. “Age and seniority were as important as sex in allocating responsibility and sharing rewards” (Falola, 2003:262). Meaning that age and seniority also played a vital role in the importance and dominance of a people. Falola (2003:262) states that Africans were forced to convert to Western cultures and abandon theirs therefore, some African customs and practices were abandoned. “African culture and language were to be abandoned so that one becomes civilized” (Wadesango, Rembe and Chabaya, 2011:35). Through colonialism, African cultures adopted the view that men are above women and therefore, should dictate while women become their subordinates. Siziba (2009:135) notes that during the pre-colonial era, men and women were equals in African society, however with colonialism these roles changed.

Mbatyoti continues to state that marriage is the epitome of all African societies, “it is the African custom to view marriage as a centre of existence where certain traditions like the payment of lobola must be recognized” (Mbatyoti, 2018:24). The marriage creates a family structure which consists of a mother, a father, and children. The “function of the family is to control marriage so that illegitimate relationships do not occur” (Mbatyoti, 2018:28). However, this union of marriage in the cultural arena has been spoilt by being used for patriarchal gain. In the past, “it targeted girls and women of marriageable age and it never involved rape or having sex with the girl until marriage negotiations are concluded” (Koyana and Bekker, 2007:139). Women are illtreated as men are viewed as the dominating gender especially in marriage. According to Mbatyoti (2018:25) women amongst amaXhosa were made to walk a few steps behind their husbands or other men in general so that the man would lead as tradition declares. Thus, one cannot run away from the fact that “traditional marriage perpetuates the cycle of gender inequality and may be found in different forms” (Mbatyoti,

2018:27). She continues to state that not just traditional marriage but "cultural values, beliefs and practices contribute to persistent gender disparities in leadership" (Mbatyoti, 2018:27).

Through the manipulation of culture, women are made to believe that they are subordinates of men, therefore, men take advantage of them. "A married woman is dependent upon and defined within the domestic territory" (Hudson-Weems, 2001:3). Men are allowed in some African cultures to have multiple partners and wives while the woman is confined to one partner. If she deviates from this, she is given many derogatory labels and frowned upon. Mbatyoti (2018:29) avers that for Africans, life is defined by respect and cultural roles. The respect is characterized as ukuhlonipha as stated elsewhere in this study. She continues to state that hlonipha values are enforced harshly upon married women. Ukuhlonipha is instilled upon women for them to be submissive. "Hlonipha manifests itself in the form of language and dress in society" (Mbatyoti, 2018:47). Mandela (1993:vi) avers below that:

> These are powerful cultural constructions associated with different roles of men and women in the amaXhosa society. These roles have significant social consequences as they define parameters within which domination of women takes place.

According to Mbatyoti (2018:30) in the past, all these traditional marital practices in South Africa were exempted as legal cultural practices, therefore, were practiced openly and were passed from generation to generation. Old women as the main culprits of handing down these customs to younger women have been strict on ensuring that their daughters but more especially their daughters in law continue practicing these customs regardless of how oppressive some of these acts of ukuhlonipha are. However, in recent years women have proved that they are bold, and some are deviating from these oppressive laws. Women are empowering themselves and their girl children. Those who choose to get married are doing their best to change the status quo with some still reluctant to change. Although women must exist under this oppressive circumstance, they still maintain their inner power and potential moral strength, and that can be regarded as an original point of power and resilience.

The aforesaid is found in the amaXhosa female protagonists of the literary texts analysed in this study. Where they attempt by all means to fight the patriarchal status quo, fighting tooth and nail. They are faced with many obstacles, many being other women that perpetuate hegemonic ideologies, sustaining them. However, these female protagonists do not give up until the end, regardless that the

end becomes death for one, while it is imprisonment for the other, forgiving and going back to the man who caused her downfall for the other and going back to a loveless marriage for the other female protagonist.

Culture is noted by De le Ray (1992:78) as the occupation of an individual's life from the moment of their birth and that it is gendered from the onset. "From the moment of birth there are sets of expectations which are gender specific. Not only are they different expectations, but they are accompanied by an evaluative component that is biased against women" (De le Ray, 1992:81). Even mothers are eager to bear baby boys because of the joy that it would bring their husbands and in-laws. Bearing a boy child gains the woman a seat at the top of society's hierarchy. Her importance is highlighted by the number of sons she was able to bear. Girl children are not regarded essential to their family home as they are expected to marry therefore, leave the family home and build for her in laws instead. The only value they bring is that of lobola. This meant wealth to their fathers in the past as lobola was in the form of physical livestock. However, with the trickling down of numbers of women getting married in recent years and the change from cows as lobola to monetary lobola girl children are not valued at all. The increasing cases of girls and women being sexually and physically abused, bullied and killed proves this. Men are granted power by their understanding and interpretation of culture and tradition. Therefore, De le Ray (1992:85) argues that culture plays a huge role in who and what we become.

Traditional marriage is a very fundamental institution in ensuring that women remain submissive and oppressed. Even though many do not marry anymore, the institution is still practiced by others especially in the rural areas. Gqibitole (2020:269) below concurs that:

> Marriage is the full ultimate goal – an institution that strips women of any semblance of freedom. Even in instances where women are given lead roles…they still need to conform to dictates of the society which curbs their individuality. The main function of marriage is the maintenance of social order and procreation. Any deviation from what is expected of a married woman brings chaos, not only to the homestead but to the nation as a whole.

Thus, traditional marriage can be viewed as an instrument of control. Although portrayed as daring and stout, the lead protagonists in the literary texts analysed endings are not positive. That is how many women's lives end more especially in the present reality, where many fearless women are

tragically killed by their partners, fathers, brothers and men in the society at large. Gqibitole (2020:268) notes that the only way that things will change, where men will stop feeling entitled to women and that men will stop boosting their egos and healing their inferiority complexes by using women is to challenge all traditional patriarchal stereotypes and a better understanding of the plight of women.

Of course, it is not all tradition and culture that is patriarchal, and no-one is stating that society should do away with culture as it is important to human life. As stated by Ramphele (2002:48) it is fundamental for a baby amongst amaXhosa culture to follow certain traditional rituals which range from stage to stage. This is to ensure that the child grows up under the guidance and protection of their ancestors. "Respect for Xhosa tradition and custom is strong, and rituals remain an integral aspect of contemporary life in South Africa" (Allegritti and Gray, 2005:4). As much as culture and tradition are essential, they need to transform with the times just like the economy and way of life continues to change and develop with modernity since many factors continue to infiltrate the way of living.

An essential custom amongst amaXhosa is *imbeleko* it is supposed to be the first ritual that is performed for an infant. However, in the modern era *imbeleko* is performed for an individual at any given age. Ramphele (2002:47) explains how a typical *imbeleko* ritual is performed:

> An elder of the family on the paternal side formally summons the ancestors by pouring beer on the ground in the family courtyard and sprinkling snuff. He uses the family isiduko (clan name which is used to praise the members of the lineage) to implore them to shower their blessings on the child, and to ensure that her/his future is under their protection. Those assembled add their voices. The child is welcomed as a joint responsibility by the nuclear and extended family as well as the neighbours who join the celebrations.

The above is not to say that all amaXhosa perform the ritual in the exact same manner. Each family and clan have their own way of performing the ritual. The custom is basically the introduction of the infant or individual at any age to their ancestors. If the child is born out of wedlock, then they are introduced to their maternal ancestors and if the mother decides to marry another man besides the father of the child, the child is to remain in their maternal home (Ramphele, 2002:68). "The *imbeleko* ritual places limitations on the movement of children between families." (Ramphele, 2002:68). In

the present era, many women move with their previous relationships' children into their marriages, and many of those children are abused by their stepfathers. This is problematic because as Alligritti and Garry (2005:6) argue below:

> While cultural practices such as *imbeleko* were originally 'intended to create harmony within families', contemporary gender relationships are incompatible with this traditional practice. Today, 70% of all births in South Africa are 'out of marriage' and the separation of mother and child is a social concern.

This means that if the single mothers of the 70% in the above-mentioned births decide to marry different men from the fathers of their children, those children will be left behind (possibly neglected by the mothers) at their maternal family homes, abused by their stepfathers, abused by their half siblings or even abused by their maternal families. Thus, this breeds a different kind of oppression and abuse upon the child. Therefore, this tradition has to change, in order for the child to be protected. At times, imbeleko is not performed at an early age, however the principle remains the same, that a child of an unmarried woman remains with the maternal family if she decides to get married to a different man. Ramphele (2002:13) argues that the hegemonic powers that culture in South Africa grants men permeates patriarchal traditional and cultural practices that are the drive of gender inequality and women oppression and subjugation. She continues to aver that (2002:13):

> Traditional practices and customs that are dysfunctional to modernity and the democratic approaches embodies in our Constitution with its non-racial gender equity ideals need to be identified and challenged…African culture should not be seen as an exception in this instance as this can only impoverish it and lead to its eventual demise.

It is important as stated by Ramphele (2002:13) to embrace our cultures as Africans. However, our cultures need to be evaluated so that they do not compromise and infringe on any individual and group's human rights. As it stands Albertyn (2009:167) notes that South African views of culture and tradition remain to portray a chauvinist view. She continues to voice that this "has enabled the (re-) emergence of patriarchal views of women, defined in terms of their reproductive and sexual roles, and as objects to enhance the status of women, rather than human beings with equality and dignity" (Albertyn, 2009:167).

Thus, some women do not see themselves as equals to men. They depend on men to the point that

they tolerate all sorts of abuse from men. Others persevere in relationships that are oppressive. This is all because culturally a woman in the African culture is taught that a man is a provider, therefore, should be 'respected', meaning that their egos should always be boosted and treated well. According to Albertyn (2009:168) the Constitution of 1996 recognizes the clash between culture and equality and states the fundamentality of culture, identity and diversity but all in light of equality. Culture should always be practiced in line with human rights and not oppressive or discriminative to women or any other individuals. "Culture is important, it is an inescapable part of being human and helps us make sense of the world. It shapes our identity and is central to the way we experience ourselves, our collectivises, and the world" (Albertyn, 2009:171).

As mentioned elsewhere in this study, culture and gender are inseparable as gender is an essential aspect of culture because an individual's culture shapes their understanding and context of gender construction. People's thinking and understanding are influenced by their culture. However, through outside (from communities, kinships and demographics) interactions and understanding, people learn more, develop and change their way of thinking as they see fit. Therefore, their culture is transforming. However, as Albertyn (2009:174) states below, that:

> Culture is thus portrayed as a closed and separate space that should be free from external influence. The dominant call is for the preservation of tradition, including traditional gender roles, which are often portrayed as necessary for the preservation of the group. Within the group, only certain voices are permitted as authoritative, able to define and interpret its norms and rules. Voice tends to be defined in monolithic terms, internal contestation is muted or denied, while 'outsiders' have little or no authority to understand or criticize 'internal' practices. In reality, the portrayal of a cultural group as a closed and monolithic unity tends to mask inequalities within, and to reproduce sectional power and interests as the elite within the group controls its membership, resources and voice. It also entails deference to patriarchal cultural norms. Patriarchy remains intact.

Only a few can voice their opinions within a group or community. Those allowed to speak are the ones with authoritative power to influence and make rules. And these are men in a traditional society. They make the norms, state the punishment for deviations and ensure that older women continue passing these patriarchal norms from generation to generation. Even through orature, these

hegemonic laws existed and were passed. Albertyn (2009:1750) defines culture as:

> Fluid, diverse and subject to change. It incorporates opposing tendencies of 'stability and continuity' and of 'perpetual resistance and change'. Culture is contested and dynamic, as cultural values, norms and practices can be challenged, subverted and amended over time. It is also flexible and preamble.

The above definition illustrates strongly that culture is not static, it is adapted therefore, can be developed and changed accordingly. Therefore, all those who defend certain misogynist ideologies in the name of culture are selfishly doing so as culture should represent all people of a community and not a small portion nor should it infringe on others, otherwise that would mean that it is manipulated to suit the elite patriarchal in power. It is in the context of the above that it is fundamental to state that cultures play a significant role in not just the existence of patriarchy as stated before, but in sustaining its ideologies. Falola (2003:251) has this to say about this statement:

> Men are regarded as the heads of households while a woman has relevance as a mother and wife. She keeps traditions and kinship alive by bearing children and socializing them. As a bearer of children, she acquires respect within the household; as bearers of male children, she acquires prestige and ensures the stability of her marriage and the continuity of kinship and its traditions. Culture also affirms the power that is available to women.

The above affirms that women are only well-respected and viewed important for bearing children and they are afforded extra respect if they bear male children. Amongst amaXhosa, whether married or not, a woman is regarded important during the period of her son's rite of passage to manhood, songs are composed of how important a woman who has a son is, and so forth. Married women are also counted prestigious. Those women given power are monitored by men and their power must operate within the boundaries of patriarchy.

4.3. Conclusion

Thus, it is fundamental to conclude this subsection by stating that all the authors mentioned define culture as a group, society and people's shared way of living. This encompasses their beliefs, values, identities and all social constructions. Culture is not static; it is flexible and should change with time. It should incorporate all the recent developments in the modern era. People should be able to adapt

to modern era changes freely.

The various authors also state that culture and tradition go hand in hand with gender because social constructions are part of a people's identity, that is their culture. Thus, it became easy for those of authoritative power to manipulate culture and tradition to suit their patriarchal agenda. It is visible from this defining section that culture is not the enemy, the manipulation is. It is demonstrated in this subsection that it is fundamental for a people to have a culture, something that binds their similar interests, values and beliefs to live by.

The importance of customs and rituals as tradition has also been portrayed in this subsection. However, this also comes with a call for the transformation of these practices as they do not reflect the current societal situations, instead they are oppressive to women and children. Society has developed intensively, therefore, cultural practices should too. Customs that infringe on human rights should be discarded.

It is visible in this subsection that as much as majority of those with authority to dictate are men, there are women who subscribe to this privilege too. However, theirs is limited and monitored. These women impose cultural and traditional regulations upon others, that in turn oppresses other women and grants patriarchy more power. There are women of course that oppose and boldly attempt to mobilize others to fight these gender injustices. Nevertheless, they are met by immense resistance and at times punished or silenced as is visible in the literary texts examined in this study.

Men at times do not understand feminism as a concept and perhaps are intimidated by the word on its own. Especially the traditional conservative African men. There are men who interpret feminism and outspoken women as enemies of men and culture. They become hostile and retaliate in many dangerous ways. Thus, it is important to educate men that through Africana feminism, women are not against but rather regard men as their counter equals. Unity is an essential key for all African women so that their message about emancipation and gender equality is intensified.

4.4. Patriarchal Culture and its Women Perpetrators in *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*

The male characters in *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* (1994) embody the attitudes of men who perceive strong women; particularly those who advocate for the transformation of African culture towards a more equal and liberated society as disrespectful, uncultured, and even morally corrupt. This perspective is exemplified in the following passage from Motlabane (1994:1–2), which takes place at the funeral

of a local man in the village. During this scene, Sigqibo, the village chief and husband of the female protagonist under analysis in this study, together with Ntango, another local man, address the mourners. Their discourse illustrates the hegemonic structures of power and the gendered oppression that women endure:

> *Ntango: Abafazi bethu bathi baphucukile kule mihla, kodwa eyabo impucuko iswele ingqikelelo. Bephucuke benjalo, bebazi bonke ubugqi bale mihla bokolula imihla emhlabeni, amadoda abo abhubha mihla le ebulawa sisifo sentliziyo. Buphi ke ubulumko babo xa bengenakuwakhusela amadoda abo ekubeni besithi bazi yonke into, kwankqu nokulawula amadoda lawo? Okanye ke ulawulo lwabo kukuwabulala?*
>
> *Sibonda: Liyinyaniso lona eli libhekiswa ngulo kaNtungo lokuba siyawoyika amakhosikazi ethu kule mihla kuba afunde iincwadi ezinkulu. Ezo ncwadi ke bezingafundwa ngoonina, kodwa imizi le ibiluqilima…Namhla ke izinto ziguqukile, ooNokhaya bafuna amagunya angentla kwawooSokhaya. Mhlawumbi ngaloo magunya ke la acinezela amadoda abe efudula eziintloko emizini yawo.*

In the above passage, *Ntungo* who is one of the village men is heavy hearted by the death of the deceased. He blames the women of the village. He states that women claim that they are modernized, however their modernization lacks knowledge. Even though they are modern and claim to be knowledgeable about the advancement of the world, their husbands continue to die with heart disease. He questions women's wisdom for being unable to save their husbands from death. He asserts that women are only powerful in killing their husbands.

Strangely enough though, in his speech *Ntungo* indirectly confirms that women amongst amaXhosa societies are intelligent and adaptive of any situation and environment that they are placed in. He states this in the above insert but still remarks negatively about their intelligence and modernized ways. He says all this sarcastically. *Sigqibo* agrees with *Ntungo. Sigqibo* exclaims that their wives are educated, read books that their mothers never read yet were able to fulfil a whole lot more. He continues to state that wives want to be awarded rights in their households, rights to lead, while their husbands follow.

These comments insinuate that men feel threatened by women and their strength, intelligence and rapid ways of adaptation to a point whereby they would believe that women have the power to cause

natural deaths like a heart attack and the power to kill their husbands in general. They [men] do not want to acknowledge women as their equals in the household, arguing that women are only intelligent when they want to rule over men and kill them instead of protecting them when the situation in most instances is the other way around.

Both statements by men demonstrate that men are not fully aware of the meaning of gender equality and are hostile towards African feminisms because they think it intends on stripping them of their power. They regard African feminisms as a movement against men, that it is an initiative of women fighting against men. This is untrue; thus, it is fundamental for women to unite and work together with men. Defined by Boyce Davies and Adam Graves (1986:8-10) African feminisms is the opposite, in fact it caters for the inclusion and working together with African men to eradicate all gender inequalities as that was the status quo in precolonial Africa. Boyce Davies and Adam Graves (1986:8-10) define African feminism in the following manner:

> African feminism…recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of the yokes of foreign domination and European/American exploitation. It is not antagonistic to African men but challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspects of women's subjugation which differ from the generalized oppression of all African peoples… It recognizes that certain inequalities and limitations existed/exist in traditional societies and that colonialism reinforced them and introduced others…

Thus, it is important for unity between the sexes and most essentially harmony amongst women in order to bring forth a stronger voice in fighting the hegemonic injustices. Women that attempt to fight these injustices are met with hostility from other women especially in the conservative cultural societies. The female protagonist in *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* is one of those women. *Nolasti*, *Sigqibo's* third wife and her neighbour friend, *Nolimithi* try to educate other women in the village about the importance of independency and empowerment. In fact, *Nolasti* is an epitome of an independent, intelligent and empowered African woman. She and her friend, *Nolimithi* think of ideas as to gather women and hold an empowerment session with them. Mothlabane (1994:4-5) gives an account of their conversation:

> *Nolasti: …Uyandibona mna tshomi, andicengi mendo undibonanje, kwaye andinaxesha lakuthantamisa ndoda inomphefumlo owozelayo apho.*

Nolimithi: Iyakhubekisa okwenene into yokuba abafazi benziwe amakhoboka amadoda olu hlobo, ukuze kube kukho izinto ezifana nooNofinishi aba, kuba enjenje umyeni wakho woniwa ngabo. Ukuba bebengengabo aba thoba sikutyele bangabo ngengenje uSibonda.

Nolasti: ...Mna ndicinga ukuba xa sinokubashumayeza abanye abafazi aba, sibabonise ingxaki esikuyo thina bafazi, bangasebenzisana nathi ekothuleni le dyokhwe siyithwaliswe ngumendo.

Nolasti makes it known above in her opening insert that she does not depend upon marriage. She also bravely asserts that she has no time to boost male egos. Her friend, *Nolimithi* agrees with her and shares how painful it is for women to be enslaved by men, and to top it off there are women who endorse patriarchy. Women who allow to be oppressed and subjugated by men, women like *Nolasti*'s two sister wives. *Nolimithi* affirms that *Nolasti*'s sister wives play a huge role in their husband's dominating behaviour. She continues to aver that if the sister wives did not adhere to his hegemonic behaviour, things would be a little different.

Nolasti is hopeful that matters can still change. She avers that they [she and *Nolimithi*] should mobilize and share their plight with other women. *Nolasti* is positive that the other women of the village will also join them in their course for emancipation from all cultural gender injustices. This portrays *Nolasti*'s boldness and determination to emancipate herself and other women from the shackles of patriarchy. *Nolasti*'s fight is still present today, where women are doing their best to fight for inclusion and equality. However, there are still women that are gatekeepers of patriarchy.

"Patriarchy finds its strength in that it manages to adapt and find expression even in the changing of social and political spaces, and fundamentally, the by-in from women to maintaining this phenomenon" (Tau, 2017:17). Made (2019:149) concurs with the previous statement as she argues that abuse does not only come from men to women but in fact, some women are also perpetrators of inflicting abuse upon other women. These are women such as *Nolasti*'s sister wives.

The sister wives view their husband, Sigqibo as a supernatural being, granting him the power and authority to oppress them. They are afraid of *Sigqibo* and this is portrayed in a scene where all the wives are coming from the funeral where their husband spoke at. They are extremely exhausted as they were part of the catering women at the funeral and subsequently during the entire period before the funeral. However, upon their arrival at home, they do not rest but ensure that their husband has

everything prepared for before he gets home. *Nolasti* attempts to encourage them to take a break and show them that their behaviour is part of the reason their husband illtreats them. However, they blame her for their husband's oppressive and disrespectful nature, stating that *Nolasti* does not know how to treat and respect a man.

The sister wives rush to the river to get fresh water for their husband and leave *Nolasti* resting. Just as she relaxes, Sigqibo walks in and requests *Nolasti* to make him a cup of coffee. She is furious about his request and tells him that she is tired from all the chores at the funeral and from days prior to that, having to prepare for the funeral and serve guests at the bereaved home. Sigqibo is angered by *Nolasti*'s reaction. Angered by the fact that she is tired. Angered by not wanting to utilize his hands to make himself a cup of coffee. Made (2019:151) argues that the treatment of women in the amaXhosa society is greatly influenced by culture and tradition where men are known to just look after the livestock and sit in the kraal while women do all the domestic chores. Thus, the domination that men have in the household grants them power to enslave women and they do not want to validate patriarchal ideologies because they benefit from them tremendously.

The above-mentioned statement is supported by the upcoming narratives from *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* whereby Sigqibo is visited by his neighbour and friend, *Nolimithi's* husband. Sigqibo sends his son to his mother, Nofinishi to ask her to bring them sorghum. Upon her return with the sorghum, Nofinishi is reprimanded by her husband as if she is a child for not offering them any meat, yet he only requested for sorghum. This is demonstrated in the insert below by Mothlabane (1994:10):

> *Sigqibo: Bek'apha Mfazi. Kutheni kaloku eza ehamba ze la manzi, akukho nto yokuwandlalela? Banjani na abafazi aba ukuvimba?*
>
> *Nofinishi: Andazanga Bawo ukuba…*
>
> *Sigqibo: Wazile ke ngoku Nofinishi! Yiza nenyama. (Aphoseleke phandle uNofinishi, ngephanyazo abuye nesithebe sinecala leembambo zegusha etyetyisiweyo).*

Again, Nofinishi grants her husband too much power by allowing him to disrespect her in front of the neighbor. Instead of asking her nicely to bring them meat, he scolds her as though she knew that they would want that too. Sigqibo has called his neighbour, Gcisa to discuss the issues he has with *Nolasti*. In the conversation below extracted from Mothlabane (1994:11) Sigqibo and Gcisa illustrate

that men, especially in the conservative traditional setting are threatened by modernisation and transformation thus, do not want to address the patriarchal ideologies embedded in culture as they have manipulated culture and therefore, benefit from the patriarchy.

> *Sigqibo: ...Kaloku imfundiso encancwe nguNolasti lo kwezi zizwe zasemzini kukumelana axhomane nendoda akuva ethanda. Akukho nto unokuyigqiba ngosapho lwakho angaceli mngeni. Yinto leyo eyenza ukuba sisoloko sijamelene okwemiqhagi kulo mzi kuba intokazi le ithetha isondele kanye ebusweni bendoda.*
>
> *Gcisa: Hayi Jwarha ndiyakuva, kunjalonje uthetha into eyenzekayo nakweminye imizi. Abafazi baphume iphulo kule mihla bathi balwela amalungelo abo. Andazi ke ukuba ilungelo lomfazi liyeke nini na ukuba kukwamkela ukukhuselwa, ukondliwa nokonwatyiswa yindoda emzekileyo. Aba Nokhontoni bale mihla bathi ilungelo lomfazi kukulawula indoda. Bendingazi ukuba uNolasti ukuloo nto naye.*
>
> *Sigqibo: Zakhe zakhonya na iinkunzi ezimbini ebuhlanti obunye Gcisa? Yinto esiza kuyithini le ivelele usapho lukaPhalo? Uthi uyindoda njani xa uphendulana nabafazi emzini wakho? Uyazi ukuba kubakho iimini ezifana nale yanamhlanje apho andicaphukisa ngokokude ndizibhaqe ndicinga amasikizi lo mfazi?*

Sigqibo is basically angry and tells his friend that *Nolasti* has been influenced by western teachings that make it acceptable for her to stand up to him every time she feels like it. He states that there is no decision that he can make about his family without her interference. He asserts that *Nolasti*'s behaviour is causing tension in their household as she speaks back to him. *Gcisa* tells him that this is a serious issue as many other men are also in this dilemma in their households. He avers that women state that they are fighting for their rights. *Gcisa* states that he does not understand when women's rights stopped being that of allowing their husbands to protect and feed them and being made happy through sexual intercourse by a man that has married her. He continues to aver that women these days claim that a woman's right is to rule over a man. He says he did not know that *Nolasti* is that type of woman.

Sigqibo asserts that two bulls have never been able to rule in the same kraal. He defeatedly asks his friend how they are going to handle this situation. He rhetorically questions his manhood if he is to be ruled by a woman and confesses that there are days where he wants to physically assault *Nolasti*. Throughout their conversation, it is evident that these men feel threatened by strong, vocal and

independent women. They do not want to be challenged, and they want to make all the decisions without consulting their wives. They want to be feared by women, even threatening physical abuse. They are afraid of transformation as it does not grant them the upper hand.

Sigqibo's two other wives continuously boost his patriarchal male ego by constantly taking his side out of fear and their so-called respect for him. They blame *Nolasti* for his abusive and oppressive behaviour. They pin everything upon *Nolasti*, arguing that she provokes their husband and as a result has turned him into a monster. However, she is simply standing up for herself and them. They state that *Nolasti* disobeys their husband. The following statement by *Nofinishi*, one of the wives backs this up in Mothlabane (1994:14):

> *Nofinishi: Usimele ngempucuko yokuba yena akanakuphathwa yincentsa. Ndixakwa kukuba wayeze kuthini apha kanti ufuna ukuziphatha. Inzima le mfundo yabo, ibaphambanisa ingqondo. Bayafuna ukuba ngabafazi kodwa abakwazi tu ukwenda!... Ndibona ngathi le tyhefu seyingene nalapha kwabanye abafazi abafana noNolimithi. Naye ngoku sendimana ukumva ethetha ngamalungelo esingawanikwayo ngabayeni.*

Nofinishi basically states that *Nolasti* preaches to them about enlightenment this encapsulates that she will not be ruled by a man. Yet, she is married to a man. *Nofinishi* argues that she does not understand why *Nolasti* agreed to marriage if she does not want to be ruled by a man, she continues to exclaim that education is turning women into lunatics. She is baffled at the fact that these enlightened and educated women want to become wives, yet they cannot perform their wifely duties. *Nolasti* says that she has noticed that *Nolimithi* has also been influenced by her sister wife's views. *Nolimithi* is also suddenly talking about rights that they are not given by their husbands.

Nofinishi is part of the women that Mutanda (2007:90) speaks of as the direct and indirect players in the sustenance of perpetuated patriarchal oppression. She evaluates and reduces *Nolasti*'s wifehood because of her insecurities and lack of enlightenment. She downplays *Nolasti*'s role in their family, yet *Nolasti* is their principal breadwinner. Both *Nofinishi* and *Nokhaya* are uneducated and as a result unemployed, therefore are dependent on their husband as the provider of the household. Thus, they could treat him with great esteem.

However, *Nolasti* is the principal breadwinner in their household as she is employed and earns a regular monthly income. Whereas their husband depends upon what is sold from harvesting and that

is not a guaranteed income as there are harvesting seasons that are not great. Due to her status as the breadwinner, *Nolasti* would like to be included when decisions are taken about her salary. Sigqibo feels belittled by this because as Akanle (2020:398) states, the breadwinner role in many African families was previously dominated by men. This challenges the cultural and traditional patriarchal ideologies.

Nolasti is a domestic worker, and her employer asks her to babysit for them one evening for an extra fee. She agrees and excitedly tells her husband, thinking of the extra income she will be making as they need it as a family. However, Sigqibo is furious that *Nolasti* agreed to do the job without his permission. *Sigqibo* says, "*Uvume njani Nolasti*? *Uyivuma njani into elolo hlobo ungakhange ugqithe kum? Uthetha ukuba uza kusuka uzigqibele ukuba unokubuya nanini na xa uthanda apha emzini wam*" [How do you agree, *Nolasti*? Are you telling me that you will decide when to come and go as you please in my house?] (Mothlabane, 1994:18). *Nolasti* responds by saying that she was not thinking of that, all that came first to mind was the huge amount that she would receive especially since they need it as a family, "*Andikhange ndicinge njalo, eyona nto isuke yaphambili kum leli thuba lale mali ingaka ndiza kuyifumana ekubeni ndisazi ukuba sixakeke sinje kweli khaya"* (Mothlabane, 1994:18).

The above altercation between Sigqibo and *Nolasti* indicates that Sigqibo is power hungry and insecure as he constantly wants to lead and take control in their marriage, yet *Nolasti* is the only one employed. It also illustrates that Sigqibo feels weakened by the fact that *Nolasti* is the breadwinner in their household. His defense mechanism is to be harsh on *Nolasti* as he knows that he has failed to comply with one of his patriarchal doctrine principles which is to provide for his family. His retaliation when speaking to *Nolasti* in Mothlabane (1994:18) proves this:

> *Sigqibo: Ngubani obethe andikwazi kuzenza ezo zinto ngokwam? Sekutheni sendicingelwa nguwe nje ngoku indlela yokwenza izinto emzini wam?*
>
> *Nolasti: ...Yintoni le nto uthi uzazi ukuba utsala nzima ube uzenza ngathi unekratshi? Uyazi ukuba kule mbalela asisavuni nto iyiyo, siyalamba. Ukuba ibingeyiyo le mali ndiza nayo kwaba beLungu ngesekudala abantwana bethu bengasahlawuli esikolweni. Ngesingakwazi nokumondla uMama wakho, andisathethi ke ngemali yoogqirha bakhe. Kutheni le nto usuka undenze umoni ngokuza nemali yokuncedisa ekwenzeni ukuba intlalo yekhaya ibe lula?*

Sigqibo rhetorically questions *Nolasti*'s implication that he is unable to provide for his family financially. In response, *Nolasti* asserts that he is well aware of their financial difficulties and reminds him that a recent drought has severely limited their harvest. She emphasizes that, without her income, they would not have been able to pay their children's school fees, support *Sigqibo's* mother, or cover her medical expenses. *Nolasti* expresses her bewilderment at *Sigqibo's* tendency to portray her as a transgressive figure merely because she contributes to the family's financial stability.

According to Akanle (2020:401), female breadwinning in many African societies is perceived as a deviation from cultural norms, often associated with diminished male self-esteem, a loss of integrity, and a decline in men's respect within the household. The study further reveals that many women within these societies contend that female breadwinners are frequently regarded as arrogant and inclined to usurp the traditionally male role of family decision-making, a perspective that aligns with patriarchal ideologies.

Nolasti encounters a challenge reflective of the broader struggles faced by many women in contemporary society, wherein men assume entitlement to decision-making authority, even over aspects of women's own lives. Troubled by this infringement on her autonomy and human rights, she seeks counsel from her church pastor. However, instead of addressing her concerns, the pastor dismisses them, asserting that both cultural traditions and biblical teachings prescribe male authority. This response is paradoxical, given that the same pastor publicly advocates for equality, non-discrimination, and the active participation of women in leadership roles within the church. Consequently, *Nolasti* had expected pastoral guidance that would support her position rather than reinforce patriarchal norms.

However, the church has also been manipulated in a manner to suit patriarchal needs. This is confirmed by Maseno (2021:2), she argues that African theology attempts to mimic and accommodate African culture and in doing so did not pay attention to its oppressive and abusive nature. Mbiti (1972:50) states that the church in Africa should reflect what community is in African culture. He further states that marriage is an important part of African culture, therefore, plays a huge role in African theology as well. "For continuity in community, the supreme purpose of marriage according to African people is to bear children, to build a family, to extend life and to hand down the living torch of human existence" (Mbiti, 1972:105). And the church holds the same principle, granting marriage esteem respect as its main obligation is to ensure the continuity and multiplication

of human life through women bearing children.

The foregoing illustrates the repressive stance toward women within a church that, despite preaching equality and non-judgmental values, often contradicts these principles in practice. Consequently, *Nolasti* is unable to find solace or impartial counsel from her priest. Instead, she discovers a space of refuge and support in the women's gatherings held at her church every Thursday. During the Thursday Women's Gathering, organized by *Nolasti* and *Nolimithi*, the issue of patriarchy is brought to the fore. *Nolasti* initiates a discussion with the other women of the congregation, which elicits collective anger and frustration regarding the treatment they endure from their husbands. The women resolve to unite and begin educating their spouses on more respectful and equitable ways of relating to them. They further agree to reconvene for strategic planning sessions, recognizing that the dismantling of patriarchy necessitates collective solidarity among all women.

Ngcobozi (2017:2) notes that the Manyano was originally a missionary project to force black women to gather in prayer, enforcing Western Christianity values with the missionaries hope that this would make the women abandon their cultural and traditional spirituality and way of life that dates back to precolonial African society. Preston (2007:23) puts it nicely when he says:

> Manyano was to assume the somewhat modified characteristics of being a contextualized channel of mutual support, both for women who had moved to urban areas and rural whose husbands had moved to the cities for work, in the face of social, economic, political and emotional disruptions.

According to Haddad (2004:4) the term Manyano is an isiXhosa term that means join/gather. It was used to describe the weekly black church women's prayer gatherings, originally in the Methodist church. "Within the black church, the Manyano is the longest standing and most prolific women's organization, which is a union of mothers who are mostly recognized by their distinct uniform" (Ngcobozi, 2017:2). She avers that the black church in South Africa is a powerful place for black South Africans as it is the space where they go to for strength and solace with the belief that God is ultimately the most Supreme and powerful. Therefore, it can relieve their sufferings. Thus, *Nolasti* and *Nolimithi* decided to take their plight to church at their Women's Manyano.

Essentially, black women used the Manyano for a place of hope for women, where they would be able to uplift each other, pray for their families, husbands and each other. They can assist and give each other hope in these gatherings. Therefore, *Nolasti* and *Nolimithi* chose this platform to give

those in need support, receive support, draw strength and to share and receive ideas on ways to change the plight of women.

Sigqibo explains the importance of the hierarchy amongst amaXhosa. He states that children ought to respect their mothers, their mothers are to respect their men, who in turn show respect to the kings, the kings respect the ancestors, "*abantwana bahloniphe oonina, bona bahloniphe amadoda abo, wona ahloniphe iinkosi, zona zihloniphe izinyanya*" (Mothlabane, 1994:31). It is ironic how women are place just above children in this hierarchy as they are treated by all those that follow next, as though they are on the same level as children. They are only to be respected by children. Yet, women like *Nokhaya* and *Nofinishi* still endorse patriarchy and regard it as respect for their culture and traditional ideologies. This is visible in the following dialogue from Mothlabane (1994:33) where *Nokhaya* and *Nofinishi* attempt to advise *Nolasti* on how to ensure that she receives respect as well as calmness from their husband:

> *Nokhaya: Zininzi iindlela zokuyenza ive ngawe incentsa ubonanje, ungakhange ulwe nayo. Wena njengokuba ndikulozele nje ucinga ukuba umfazi ongalwiyo sisidenge. Thina ke siyathula sibe ngathi sivumelana naye nokuba akunjalo. Kwakuba njalo ke uyekelela umxakatho, wena ke uza kuthi selelibele uthi gqi kancinci ngobuchule, unge uyayibuza ishi eli xa usazi ukuba uyayalela.*
>
> *Nofinishi: Ibe ke Sisi! Ndiyamazi mna uJwarha ukuthanda gqitha ukuxatyiswa. Ukuba ukhe wathi uyayibona ishi ngolu hlobo akukhombisa lona, ubonakalise ukumthemba, umgqibile. Emva koko uza kwenza njengoko ufuna engaqondi tu ukuba wenza le ifunwa nguwe. Ndiyamyeka mna andidlavule xa ethanda ndingaphenduli tu, ndisazi nje ukuba andizusuka shi. Uza kuthi xa elele kamnandi ndibe nemibuzwana eza kwenza ukuba kuphume impendulo apha kuye, ibe loo mpendulo iyilaa shi ndiyifunayo. Uthi kutheni wena engasiqumbeli nje thina, kodwa esingxolisa kwanjengawe?*

In the passage above, *Nokhaya, Sigqibo's* first wife, advises *Nolasti* that there are multiple ways of influencing a man without engaging in direct conflict. She explains that she and *Nofinishi*, the second wife, adopt a strategy of silence and outward compliance, feigning agreement with their husband even when they internally dissent. This performance of submission, *Nokhaya* asserts, causes their husband to lower his guard, thereby enabling them to pose ostensibly sincere questions which, in

effect, function as tactful directives.

Nofinishi concurs, stating that she knows *Jwarha* [their husband's clan name] She advices *Nolasti* that if she changes her ways and does things in this manner, this will show their husband that *Nolasti* trusts him. She says afterwards, their husband will follow *Nolasti*'s instructions without knowing that he is doing so. She gives testimony and states that she allows him to verbally abuse her, then when they are in bed, she will question him strategically and his responses will be her desires and in that manner their husband is never angry with her and *Nokhaya*. However, this is untrue. Sigqibo treats them like children, scolds them and does not involve them in any of the household decision-makings. He continuously disrespects and abuses them. Throughout, the other two wives remain silent and portray fear for their husband. Things do not go their way, instead they are constantly living in fear and manipulated by their husband to think that culturally as women they should suffer in silence.

Peculiar, the two wives' advice solely relies on ensuring that *Sigqibo's* ego is boosted. They must remain silent and agree with him to ensure that he feels superior, meanwhile they remain hurt and inferior. As a result, they utilize a way into tricking him. That is the painful part, where they must work extra hard to nurse his feelings while they are damaged. Basically, they act dumb just to boost his ego. This is the reason men remain patriarchal and illtreat women.

The men of the village are gathered at *Sigqibo's* house. They are discussing what they see as a pandemic, where all their wives are becoming independent due to employment. The men state that women making their own money has become a nightmare in their households, because they now suddenly want to be part of the decision-making in the household. After the feast with the men of the village, *Sigqibo* visits *Nolasti* in her room. He demands that she prepare him leftover meat. *Nolasti* is about to sleep. She tells him that she is tired, however he becomes livid and beats her with a stick until she manages to run away and *Gcisa* comes in to stop *Sigqibo*.

Nolasti is assisted by her employer, who takes her to the doctor and the doctor lays charges against *Sigqibo*. *Nolasti* is infuriated by this, even though she was physically abused by her husband, *Nolasti* still does not want to lay charges against him. She is afraid of how society will view her for imprisoning her husband. Indeed, *Nolasti* rushes home after finding out from her boss that the doctor laid charges on her behalf on *Sigqibo*. Upon arrival at home, *Nolasti* is met with anger from the other wives. They swear at her. Even her son is angry with her because of his father's arrest.

The above is an issue that many women are facing, where it becomes hard to speak or report Gender Based Violence because of the way families will react. Society ridicules and labels women who take a stand against their abusive partners. Family members turn on their own as they believe wives and women in partnerships should persevere and speak to their husbands. Everyone has turned upon *Nolasti* yet she was physically abused, she is in pain physically and emotionally.

Nolasti is pressured by her family to drop the charges against Sigqibo. She asks the priest to accompany her to the police station. However, the priest's wife is against this. The priest silences his wife, just as he had taken Sigqibo's side when *Nolasti* went to complain and get advice from him previously. After her attempt to drop the charges against her husband fails, she returns to her mother's home. Her mother and brother have also turned against *Nolasti*, viewing her as an embarrassment to the family. Her mother continuously scolds her for being vocal and standing up to her husband, stating that *Nolasti* did not conduct herself like a good wife. She continues to say that *Nolasti* is rebellious and wants to be the one wearing the pants in her marriage, and that has led her to this demise. The following interaction between *Nolasti* and her mother indicates the rejection she receives from her family in Mothlabane (1994:46):

> *Magaba: Ndidane ndisisonka ndilapha nje. Andiyazi nokuba mandiqale ngaphi ukuthetha nawe Nocawe (ligama likaNolasti lakokwabo). Kukangaphi ndikuxelela mntwan'am ukuba ayidalwanga into yokuba kukhonye iinkunzi ezimbini ebuhlanti obunye?*
>
> *Nolasti: Bhuti khawucacisele uMama wethu…*
>
> *Magaba: Eyona nto ubaluleke ngayo ziinkani!!Wenza zona nangoku. Uthi makandicacisele ntoni uMadoda? Andicacisele le mbudede yokuba ibe yimpazamo ukuba sibe siya enkundleni yamatyala ngomso? Andicacisele ukuba siza kuba ziindaba eziphambili ezifundwa lilo lonke eli loMdibaniso kwiMvo? Uthi makandixelele loo mahlazo? Inene akwaba ebesaphila uyihlo, ubuza kuyazi into etyiwa ligqirha.*

Nolasti's mother, *Magaba* expresses her disappointment at *Nolasti*. She states that she is dumbfounded. She expresses that she continuously kept telling *Nolasti* before that two bulls are unable to be in the same kraal. *Nolasti* urges her brother, *Madoda* to explain to their mother that this was a mistake. However, her mother is furious and tells her that she [*Nolasti*] is very stubborn. She

blames *Nolasti*'s stubbornness as the cause of the situation where they find themselves going to court the next day for *Sigqibo's* case. She further states that their family is going to be the laughing stalk of the entire village because of *Nolasti*.

The interaction between *Magaba* and *Nolasti* highlights a critical issue: older women, and women more broadly, can at times be unsupportive of the struggles faced by abused women. This lack of support often silences victims, fostering feelings of shame that deter them from reporting abuse and, in some cases, results in continued victimization or even femicide. Young wives, in particular, are frequently hesitant to disclose experiences of abuse to their parents due to fear of bringing shame upon their families by returning home, seeking divorce, or reporting the matter to the authorities. Such fears are compounded by the harsh treatment and disparaging remarks they anticipate from their families, as exemplified in *Nolasti*'s experience with her mother.

Women like *Nolasti* are thus left in a state of social isolation, perceived by society as rebellious and by their families as sources of embarrassment. With no supportive networks to rely on, many survivors eventually return to their abusive partners, a decision that tragically exposes them to further harm and, in some cases, death. The cultural prescriptions of silence and submissiveness that women are expected to embody in marriage as exemplified by the strategies of *Nokhaya* and *Nofinishi* serve to reinforce patriarchal control and perpetuate cycles of abuse.

4.4.1. Conclusion

The foregoing section illustrates that the men of the village perceive women's intelligence and wisdom as a threat to their authority. In response, they seek to undermine women by resorting to accusations of witchcraft and the alleged murder of their husbands and partners. This dynamic is particularly evident in the funeral scene in *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*, where the male villagers collectively accuse women of being responsible for the deaths of men.

Patriarchy functions in this manner, wherein men perceive women's advancements as a direct threat to their dominance. Acknowledging the fragility of their power, patriarchal agents seek to preserve it by imposing restrictions on those they subordinate and by attributing various social ills to them as a mechanism of control. Such practices not only reinforce systemic inequality but also overlook and at times deliberately ignore the possibility that collaboration with those deemed as subordinates could foster meaningful and positive social transformation.

This further illustrates that individuals who adhere to patriarchal principles often exhibit hostility towards the advancement of cultural norms and practices. Such resistance can be attributed in part to limited awareness, but more significantly to an unwillingness to embrace transformation, as existing social arrangements privilege them. Within this framework, culture is redefined and sustained through patriarchal dominance, and it operates to their advantage. Consequently, patriarchal actors perceive little incentive to reevaluate cultural principles, as doing so would threaten their authority and diminish their power over society.

Another significant factor evident in this section is the role of women acting as patriarchal gatekeepers; women who actively contribute to the perpetuation of oppression, abuse, and prejudice against other women. Such women enforce and reproduce patriarchal cultural ideologies by mistreating their peers within the framework of male-dominated traditions. As Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) observes, these gatekeepers are often unemployed, economically dependent on men, and situated within conservative, traditional marital arrangements, which reinforces their complicity in sustaining patriarchal structures.

This dynamic is also evident in *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*, where Sigqibo's other two wives reinforce patriarchal ideology by imposing it upon *Nolasti*, insisting that cultural norms dictate how a 'proper' wife should conduct herself. They not only embrace submissiveness but also encourage their sister-wife to conform to the same expectations. Their obedience towards their husband is rooted in their perception of him as both provider and protector, a dependence reinforced by their lack of formal education and employment.

The women whom *Nolasti* and *Nolimithi* mobilize within the church gatherings are largely employed and economically independent, which affords them greater awareness of patriarchal dynamics and a stronger commitment to social transformation. In contrast, unemployed and financially dependent women often resist change, fearing the loss of their male providers. Furthermore, many wives have been socialized by older generations of women to believe that submission, endurance during marital hardships, and silence are the only means of sustaining a marriage. As a result, they uphold and reproduce these teachings, often disparaging women who deviate from them. In some instances, married women also marginalize unmarried women, framing marriage as the ultimate aspiration for all women.

All in all, the struggle to dismantle patriarchy is compounded by the presence of women who act as

willing participants and agents of patriarchal culture. Such women reinforce oppressive structures by upholding and reproducing norms that limit the autonomy of others, thereby undermining collective solidarity among women. Those who advocate for change, though often in the minority, are subjected to ridicule, stigmatization, and derogatory labelling by both family and society. This is exemplified in the case of *Nolasti*, who is branded an embarrassment by her mother and brother, and further ostracized by her community for having her abusive husband arrested. These responses illustrate how resistance to gendered oppression is constructed as a transgression against cultural expectations, effectively criminalizing women's voices. As a result, many women continue to endure abuse in silence, recognizing that speaking out not only isolates them socially but also exposes them to further victimization. Ultimately, this dynamic highlights the dual struggle women face: confronting patriarchal violence while also resisting the internalized and socially sanctioned policing of other women.

Many young women are compelled to adhere to patriarchal cultural and traditional ideologies, as these are upheld as the proper and respectable way of existing within society. Conformity is demanded regardless of the consequences such practices may have on their autonomy, wellbeing, and future opportunities. This pressure to conform underscores how cultural expectations function as mechanisms of control, shaping women's identities and life choices in ways that prioritize societal approval over individual agency. The case that follows in the analysis of *UDike noCikizwa* illustrates this dynamic, revealing how patriarchal norms are transmitted across generations and normalized to the extent that young women often internalize them as natural and unquestionable.

4.5. The oppression of women in marriage as a traditional institution: as portrayed in *UDike noCikizwa*

Mbatyoti (2018: iv) argues that many of the discriminatory and repressive cultural practices that existed in the past continue to be in place in the present era. These include customary marital practices among amaXhosa. She further asserts that arranged marriage is used as one of the social aspects that portrays the status of women in literature written by male authors. Mbatyoti (2018:154) further notes that this demonstrates certain male authors prejudice towards female protagonists.

In an arranged marriage, the partner is selected by the elders on behalf of the young woman, rendering

the union an agreement between families rather than a mutual decision between the prospective spouses. In many cases, the young man is either willing to proceed with the arrangement or may even have been the initiator through his family, yet the young woman is almost never the one to initiate such a process. This highlights the systemic disregard for women's voices and autonomy, as their consent is treated as secondary or altogether unnecessary. The practice underscores the broader patriarchal structure in which women's identities and futures are negotiated and decided by others, thereby reducing them to passive participants in matters that profoundly shape their lives. Importantly, this issue extends beyond the amaXhosa context, cutting across numerous African societies where cultural traditions continue to privilege collective familial interests and male authority over women's individual rights. Such practices perpetuate gender inequality and silence women's agency under the guise of cultural preservation.

In *UDike noCikizwa*, the female protagonist feelings and opinions are not taken into consideration. *Cikizwa*'s father chooses a spouse for her despite her thought on the matter. *Cikizwa*'s romantic interests are ignored. Her mother is also not allowed to have an opinion on the matter. *Cikizwa* writes to *Dike*, her romantic partner, whom she wishes to spend rest of her life with, a letter. Her opening lines are negative towards culture and tradition. She portrays her sadness due to the repressive nature of culture. She avers that the world is a cruel place, where tradition and culture hold authoritative power over human life. *Cikizwa* cries that a person might be alive, and their brain might be working but they are treated as imbeciles. "*Kubi ukuphila kweli lizwe – ilizwe lamasiko, lezithethe nemithetho, izinto ezithi unenyama negazi nengqondo nje zikwenze ufane nesigodo somthi olinde ukubaswa"* (Mmango, 1988:2).

In this context, arranged marriage can be reasonably characterized as a form of forced marriage, as it compels the young woman to enter into a union, she does not desire. Machaka (2019: iii) notes that such practices have detrimental effects on the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of young women. This is vividly illustrated in the case of *Cikizwa*, whose body remains alive, yet whose spirit and agency are effectively suppressed; she is treated as though incapable of independent thought or decision-making. Such treatment not only undermines her personhood but also reflects the broader patriarchal mechanisms that systematically deprive women of autonomy, reducing them to passive subjects within familial and societal structures. The consequences of this coercion are profound, often resulting in long-term trauma, diminished self-worth, and the internalization of subordination.

Cikizwa further expresses her profound sorrow at being compelled to adhere to her father's authority, as cultural norms dictate that she must remain obedient to him. She describes feeling bound by a law that strips her of autonomy and reduces her to a passive, almost animalized position, likening herself to one of her father's sheep. This law, while presented as culturally normative and humane, effectively denies her full personhood and self-determination. She reveals to *Dike* that her father has arranged a marriage for her with a man named Mjongwa, stating: "*Ndisitsho nje ndiva intlungu yokuthobela umthetho katata – umthetho ondiphanga bonk'ubuntu bam, undenza ndibe yigusha efuyiweyo. Umthetho ongqongqo katata undinyanzela ukuba manditshate noMjongwa Ngqike, umfana waseMhlungulu*" (Mmango, 1988:2). This passage highlights how the intersection of patriarchal authority and cultural prescriptions can objectify young women, constraining their agency and imposing marital unions that disregard their desires and well-being. Such practices underscore the tension between cultural conformity and individual rights, revealing the deeply entrenched mechanisms through which patriarchy perpetuates control over women.

This depicts how the female protagonist feels dehumanized like one of her father's sheep. She has no say in the matter, like livestock, she is sold off. According to Machaka (2019:2) this is a form of gross violation of human rights. African culture denotes that the male and especially the father is the head of the household therefore, he is given the right to make decisions on behalf of everyone else below him, especially in relation to who his daughter is to marry. Thus, *Cikizwa* must obey her father's decision. And that is how patriarchal ideologies are imposed upon women, disguised as culture and tradition.

Peter (2002:81) observes that in arranged marriages, the consent for marriage is granted primarily by the father of the prospective bride or another male figure who serves as the head of her family. Mothers of both the bride and groom are typically excluded from the decision-making process and do not participate in the negotiations between the two families. Consequently, they are unable to interject or advocate on behalf of the young woman, reinforcing a gendered hierarchy in which male authority predominates and female voices are marginalized. This practice illustrates how patriarchal structures are embedded within cultural traditions, systematically limiting women's autonomy and perpetuating the subordination of daughters within familial and societal frameworks. Moreover, it highlights the broader sociocultural mechanisms that sustain male dominance by framing women's agency as secondary or inconsequential in matters that directly affect their lives.

Thus, *Cikizwa*'s mother's concerns regarding the arranged marriage are disregarded by her husband. She perceives that her daughter's well-being has been negatively affected ever since being informed of the impending marriage to *Mjongwa*, noting a decline in her physical and emotional health. In an attempt to address the matter, she confides in *Cikizwa*'s paternal aunts, reporting that there are significant problems within their household and that *Cikizwa*'s unhappiness has even led to weight loss. She states: *"Kukho into eyingxaki ekhay' apha. UCikizwa akonwabanga, kunjalonje yile nto, usuke waphela isiqu ngoku*!" (Mmango, 1988:5). This episode underscores the marginalization of women's voices within patriarchal family structures, where even maternal concern is rendered subordinate to the authority of the male head of the household. It also reflects the broader societal dynamics in which young women's agency and emotional well-being are frequently overlooked in the enforcement of culturally sanctioned practices such as arranged marriages, highlighting the tension between familial authority and individual autonomy.

However, one of the paternal aunts, *Nomazala* finds the above trivial as Peter (2002:78) states that arranged marriage is a norm amongst amaXhosa. In fact, many marriages in the past among amaXhosa were arranged. "Those marriages were not of the heart and were not traditionally culminated by courtship. Romance came into the picture only in exceptional cases and love was not a prerequisite to a marriage" (Peter, 2002:78). Hence, *Nomazala's* reaction when her sister, *Nomatiletile* is concerned as to how unstable the marriage will be if *Cikizwa* does not want to be involved in it. The conversation below from Mmango (1988:5-6) between the old women demonstrates that there are conflicting philosophies about the arranged marriage even though there are still women like *Nomazal*a, who do not want to evolve with the times, there are those that are aware of the suppression within the practice and advocate for change.

> *Nomatiletile: Iya kwakheka ke le ndlu xa engafuniyo lo mntwana?*
>
> *Nojoyini: Le nto ndayimangala kwamhlamnene kuyise kuba lo mntwana wavela wacacisa ukuba akafuni kwendela kwaNgqika kwamhla kweziwa kucelwa.*
>
> *Namatiletile: Wathini ke uSando wakuyimangala le nto?*
>
> *Nojoyini: Wasuka waligwele ngumsindo, wathi yena akanakuva ngomntwana apha emzini wakhe.*
>
> *Nomatiletile: Uyayiqonda nje le nto ayenzayo uSando? Akayiqondi?*

Nomazala: Yhu tana! Yinto eqhelekileyo ukuba umntu amendisele apho athande khona umntwana wakhe. Ayiqali ngobhuti lo. Lo mntwana usile. Wala indoda xa esazi ntoni ke yena, ubuso bendoda buziinkomo nje?

Nomatiletile: Phulaphula apha, "Yhu tana". Lo Cikizwa asinguye uCikizwa wamaxesha akudala, amaxesha obumnyama, nguCikizwa wala amaxesha okhanyo.

Nomazala: Yhu tana! Mna andiboni nto intle kula maxesha sifundekelwa ngawo kuthiwa ngawokhanyo, into endiyibonayo kuphela kukuphambana kwelizwe. Ngaphezu koko ke ekwazini nasekuqondeni kwam izinto ezazisenziwa ngalaa maxesha akudala kuthiwa ngawo bumnyana zazikhanya, kanti izinto ezenziwa ngala maxesha kuthiwa ngawokukhanya zimnyama.

Nomatiletile: Qonda kakuhle Nomazala. Ekuhambeni kwexesha kukhula umnqweno wenkululeko.

Nomazala: Yhu tana! Ubhuti akamenzi khoboka lo mntwana. Kuphela umlungiselela, emakhela ikhaya lekamva.

Nomazala: Umenza ikhoboka xa angamvumeliyo ukuba 'acinge, azi, aqiqe, aqonde', njengookuba esitsho.

In the above dialogue between *Cikizwa*'s aunts and her mother, *Nomatiletile* expresses concern regarding the viability of the arranged marriage, given that *Cikizwa* is being coerced into it without personal interest or consent. *Cikizwa*'s mother, *Nojoyini*, recounts that she had previously voiced these concerns to her husband, Sando, who responded with anger and asserted that he would not be dictated to by a child. *Nomatiletile* questions whether her brother is aware of the implications of his actions. However, *Nomazala* intervenes, arguing that arranged marriages are culturally normative, where a parent has the authority to marry off a child at their discretion, and that her brother did not invent this practice. She further questions *Cikizwa*'s understanding of such matters and remarks that a man's worth is traditionally symbolized by his livestock. *Nomatiletile* counters, emphasizing that *Cikizwa* belongs to a more enlightened generation. Nevertheless, *Nomazala* dismisses this perspective, claiming that she perceives nothing enlightened about the current generation, viewing the past as superior. In response, *Nomatiletile* asserts that societal advancement necessitates

increased emancipation for young women. *Nomazala* maintains that their brother is not enslaving *Cikizwa* but rather securing a proper future for her. *Nomatiletile,* however, argues that by denying *Cikizwa* the ability to make her own choices, her father is, in effect, subjecting her to a form of enslavement. This exchange highlights the generational and ideological tensions surrounding patriarchal authority, cultural tradition, and the evolving discourse on women's autonomy, revealing how deeply ingrained cultural norms can conflict with emerging notions of female self-determination.

These women represent distinct generational and ideological perspectives that this study seeks to examine: the present-era women, and the older rural and urban women whose worldviews often conflict. *Nojoyini*, *Cikizwa*'s mother, is fully aware of her husband's patriarchal and traditionalist perspectives, yet she remains largely silent in the face of his authoritarian control. She refrains from actively advocating for her daughter, reflecting the entrenched cultural expectation that a 'proper' woman should conform to her husband's authority. Within patriarchal ideology, women are socialized to remain silent and obedient even during times of emotional or physical hardship, persevering through adversity without challenging male dominance. This silence is not merely a personal choice but a reflection of deeply embedded cultural norms that enforce female subordination and limit agency, illustrating how patriarchal values are reproduced across generations.

Nomatiletile, bold and vocal even when dismissed by her sister she fiercely attempts to fight for *Cikizwa* but is met with hostility by the other women, because even though *Nojoyini* acknowledges the wrong in the matter at hand, her silence means consent. Therefore, *Nomatiletile* finds herself fighting against the system alone. *Nomatiletile* embodies the strength that African feminism views in African women and that is needed for the emancipation of women and gender equality. More women like *Nomatiletile* are needed in society. Women who stand up for the betterment of women life especially through the advancement of culture and tradition. It is a difficult cause as there are still women like *Nomazala* who obliviously view patriarchal beliefs as culture. This act fights against all the positive efforts women are making in emancipating themselves from the shackles of hegemony.

According to amaXhosa custom, "marriage is a process whereby two-family groups are drawn closer together" (Peter, 2002:81). Therefore, it is not only about the couple but about the entire families as well. In fact, the two parties may not agree but if the families form an alliance, the couple will be

outnumbered. *Nomazala* attempts to explain this ontology to *Cikizwa* in the following conversation between the aunt and niece in Mmango (1988:9):

> *Nomazala: Yhu tana! Ngokwenene usisibhanxa Cikizwa.*
>
> *Cikizwa Ngokuba ndenzeni?*
>
> *Nomazala: Walela xa ubhuti ekwakhela ikhaya. Awukwazi ukuba ukwenda likhaya lekamva lentombazana? Ungagugela ekhaya ngokuba kutheni kakade?*
>
> *Cikizwa: Dadobawo andonwabanga.*
>
> *Nomazala: Yintoni unexhala lokwenda? Musa ukuvumela ixhala lelize likulawule. Cinga ngexesha elimnandi oya kulo, uvuye wonwabe.*
>
> *Cikzwa: Ulonwabo alunakubakho kum.*
>
> *Nomazala: Ngokuba kutheni?*
>
> *Cikizwa: Njengokuba umlilo ufudumalisa owothileyo lunjalo ke novuyo ukuchulumanchisa umntu.*
>
> *Nomazala: Utheth' ukuthini?*
>
> *Cikizwa: Uvuyo yintlantsi esentliziyweni, eyakheleka yenze umlilo omkhulu – ulonwabo.*
>
> *Nomazala: Lilonke ke utheth' ukuthi uzimisele ukuyilahla le nyhweba uyenzelwa ngubhuti, ekwendisela emzini obhadlileyo kwaNgqika? Yeyiphi intombi engenakuzigobh' amacala xa isendela konje umzi ukuba mhle nokufudumala? Yeyiphi intombi engenakutsho ukuba ithe gcobho xa isendela konjena ukuphila nokomelela umfana? Kunjalonje lo mntwana uwukhuthalele umsebenzi awawufundelayo, ungumlimi wenene.*

Nomazala mocks *Cikizwa* by calling her an imbecile for not allowing her father to create a home for her. She further states that a young woman's future is in marriage. *Nomazala* avers that it is a disgrace for a woman to age in her parent's home and unmarried. *Cikizwa* tells her aunt that she is unhappy and her aunt states that it is just pre-wedding jitters, that *Cikizwa* has nothing to worry about and that she should not allow her jitters to control her. She should focus on the amazing time ahead that she is walking into. *Cikizwa* tells her aunt that she will never be happy. *Nomazala* is confused as to how

Cikizwa would want to throw away the biggest favour her father has done for her by arranging her to marry into the wealthy *Ngqike f*amily. She continues to state that no young woman would let such an opportunity to marry a well-educated and wealthy woman pass her by.

The above exchange between *Nomazala* and *Cikizwa* demonstrates that the aunt exhibits little regard for her niece's personal feelings or agency regarding the arranged marriage to the *Ngqike* family. For *Nomazala,* the institution of marriage is not centred on love, affection, or the well-being of the woman, but rather on wealth, social standing, and the strategic enhancement of familial status. She expresses concern that *Cikizwa* may remain unmarried if she refuses the union with *Mjongwa,* which, in her view, could tarnish her father's and the family's reputation within the village. This perspective reflects the broader African cultural conceptualization of marriage as a union between families rather than a mutually consensual partnership between individuals. The emphasis is placed on the social, economic, and symbolic significance of the marriage for the families involved, particularly the bride's father. Within this framework, a young woman is accorded respect and social recognition primarily through her marital status, entering a new social hierarchy as a wife. *Nomazala's* insistence that marriage constitutes a woman's destiny underscores the internalization and perpetuation of patriarchal norms, revealing how cultural ideologies can subordinate individual desires to collective familial interests.

According to Sigaba (2000:47) a young woman is expected to marry and procreate which is an essential part of amaXhosa and many other African cultural tribes' life. "Getting married changes, the status of the young woman. She is now respected and has greater authority and say among other women in the affairs of the family" (Sigaba, 2000:47). However, until she gets married, the young woman is under the guardian of her father. Soga (1937:5) asserts that the parents of the child are to secure their daughter a better and brighter future by marrying her off, for a girl should aspire for marriage and her mother is to train her for it. Thus, Nomzala shares the above sentiments of her brother building a positive future for his daughter, *Cikizwa*.

Young people especially young women were regarded as inexperienced about life therefore, the father would make decisions about their livelihoods. Sotewu (2016:22) concurs to this when she states that there were also certain behaviours that were regarded and still are viewed as unacceptable and taboo for young people, therefore those who deviate are regarded as disobedient and disrespectful. Thus, arranging a marriage for children is viewed as building a future for them or

setting them on a great path. “Traditional African religion does not focus on the individual but rather on the community to which the individual belongs” (Mhlauli, 2019:38).

The above scenario reveals an inherent injustice within the societal and cultural framework, whereby individuals coexist yet their personal aspirations and agency are often subordinated to collective expectations. African cultural norms and religious prescriptions, when interpreted in the manner described, leave little to no room for individual interests or self-determination. In this instance, *Cikizwa*’s perspectives and preferences regarding her marriage are disregarded, reflecting a systemic marginalization of women’s voices. Nonetheless, *Cikizwa* demonstrates notable courage by articulating her dissent and asserting her viewpoint, in contrast to others who remain silent, acquiescing to societal and familial pressures without questioning or expressing their own positions. Her vocal resistance highlights the tension between individual agency and culturally sanctioned conformity.

The pressure of getting married for other young women becomes too much to the point that they become depressed and feel worthless and desperate as time passes and they become older single. Desperate not to reach the spinster age, young women will do anything for men to marry them. In *UDike noCikizwa*, Nonjoli is one of these desperate young women. Nonjoli, who is *Cikizwa*’s neighbor allows the pressure of marriage to turn her into a jealous woman. She is jealous of the fact that *Cikizwa* is younger than her yet is getting married, while she remains single. Nonjoli vouches to herself to do everything to stop Mjongwa from marrying *Cikizwa* and instead marry her.

According to Ademiluka (2021:1) African women at the age of 30 and above become desperate for marriage due to a number of reasons, however, the major one is that they view themselves as failures as African tradition views marriage as an obligation for all Africans. Marriage is viewed as an important practice for procreation and building the family unit in African societies. Mbiti (1969:104) concurs when he says that:

> [Marriage is considered]as a sacred duty to which every normal person must perform, and…anybody who, under normal conditions, refuses to get married, is committing a major offence in the eyes of the society… Without marriage a person is not considered to be complex, ‘perfect’, and truly a man or a woman.

Thus, in many African societies unmarried men and women are viewed as ruining the socio- cultural system. Molubo (2020:68) notes that in many African societies unmarried women are regarded

unworthy. Using a poem analyzed by Hoza (2010), she argues that women fear growing old without being married as this reflects negatively on them as though they were unable to be wooed and that they were not brought up well. The woman's family also becomes an embarrassment as this reflects on them too. "Thus, many women would rather remain in loveless, abusive and oppressive marriages than get divorced" (Molubo, 2020:68). This is because the unmarried life is against cultural and traditional principles and divorce is even worse.

Therefore, women like Nonjoli would do anything to ensure that they are wooed by men and married. To avoid the embarrassment and pain of being given many derogatory labels by society. Nonjoli questions *Cikizwa* about the wedding, trying to find out where her heart is at. *Cikizwa* makes it clear to Nonjoli that she is only marrying Mjongwa as a way of pleasing, respecting and adhering to her parents' wishes. She further points out the importance of respecting elders' wishes. *"…sukuba esenza imfanelo, ethobela umthetho wabazali bakhe…thina bantwana sikhulela phantsi kwemithetho yabazali, kuyimfanelo ke ngoko ukuba siyithobele khon' ukuze sifumane amathamsanqa neentsikelelo*" (Mmango, 1988:14).

Nonjoli does not believe that *Cikizwa* is unhappy about marrying Mjongwa, and indirectly empowers *Cikizwa* by telling her that traditionally it would be impossible for *Cikizwa* to find a way out of the wedding. However, because *Cikizwa* and *Mjongwa's* wedding will take place in the church, *Cikizwa* has the right to disagree when the priest asks if she agrees to marry *Mjongwa*. *Nonjoli's* maliciousness indirectly assists *Cikizwa* with her dilemma of marrying a man she is not attracted to.

Nonjoli is constrained by the societal expectation that marriage constitutes the ultimate destiny of a woman, a notion identified by Hoza (2012:145) as the most significant rite of passage for young women. In this context, Nonjoli is determined to prevent the union between *Cikizwa* and Mjongwa, employing scheming strategies that cast *Cikizwa* as the antagonist, without regard for her feelings or autonomy. Despite *Cikizwa*'s explicit expression of her unwillingness to marry *Mjongwa, Nonjoli*, operating within hegemonic frameworks, dismisses her dissent. This reflects a broader pattern whereby women are often perceived as deceitful, manipulative, and morally suspect, a characterization reinforced by societal and patriarchal discourses. Consequently, *Nonjoli* adopts a similar stance towards *Cikizwa*, manipulating *Mjongwa's* cousin into believing that *Cikizwa* intends to harm *Mjongwa*, thereby further entrenching the oppressive dynamics of patriarchal control.

Interestingly, when *Mjongwa's* cousin relays the message that *Cikizwa* does not want to marry

Mjongwa and that she will kill him after the wedding, *Mjongwa's* mother says that *Mjongwa* was never interested in *Cikizwa* and that they as the parents decided on *Cikizwa* and *Mjongwa's* union (Mmango 1982:34) "*Ngaphezu koko ke uMjongwa akazange abe nanjongo kuCikizwa, kuphela sithi thina bazali aba baneenjongo zokuba abantwana bethu sibatshatise*".

Even when *Nonjoli* attempts to influence *Mjongwa* regarding the matter and even tries to seduce him, he demonstrates first, a self-centred disposition, prioritizing his own interests over those of others, and second, a commitment to proceed with the wedding solely because it has been arranged by his parents. This indicates that *Mjongwa* neither loves *Cikizwa* nor has any genuine interest in a romantic relationship with her or any other woman. His conversation with *Nonjoli*, as recorded in Mmango (1988:39), exemplifies this lack of personal agency and emotional engagement, reflecting the broader implications of arranged marriages within the patriarchal framework.

> Nonjoli: Umntu angafane anikwe bonke ubutyebi basemhlabeni kodwa ukuba ukuphela komphefumlo ongumntu emhlabeni akangeke onwabe kobo butyebi.
>
> Mjongwa: Mna ndingonwba xa ndilima, ndifuyile kungekho nto ndiyiswelayo.
>
> Nonjoli: Umntu angafane abe sisityebi kodwa ukuba ungumntu yedwa angalihlwempu phakathi kobo butyebi. Mjongwa: Angalihlwempu xa aswele ntoni?
>
> Nonjoli: Angaswela umncedisi, umthuthuzeli nomonwabisi. Ezi zinto ke yimisebenzi eyadalelwa ukuba yenziwe ngumntu komnye umntu lo gama badla ubomi. Le nyaniso yangqinwa ngumntu wakudala owathi: "Umntu ngumntu ngomny' umntu."
>
> Mjongwa: Umntu ongelonqenarha legwala akafuni mncedisi, namthuthuzeli, namonwabisi, wonwaba kanye ngoku ayedwa.

In the conversation above*, Nonjoli* attempts to persuade *Mjongwa* of the necessity of companionship by arguing that one may possess all the material wealth in the world, yet without a romantic partner, true happiness remains unattainable. *Mjongwa*, however, expresses a contrasting perspective, asserting that he would be content with a simple life devoted to farming and livestock. *Nonjoli* counters that wealth alone cannot bring fulfilment, emphasizing that human life is designed to be

shared with others who aid, comfort, and joy. She invokes the adage, 'A person is someone through the help of another person,' to support her argument. *Mjongwa* rejects this notion, maintaining that an industrious individual who is unafraid to take risks does not require a companion to find contentment and can achieve satisfaction independently. This exchange illustrates *Mjongwa's* self-centred and egotistical disposition, which is incongruous with the qualities expected of someone entering into a marital union founded on companionship. The continuation of *Nonjoli* and *Mjongwa's* dialogue is recorded in Mmango (1988:40):

> *Mjongwa: Andisayi kuze ndifune mncedisi, namthuthuzeli, namonwabisi ebomini bam.*
>
> *Nonjoli: O! Mus' ukundenzakalisa. Kudala ndakuthanda.*
>
> *Mjongwa: Mna andizange ndimthande omny' umntu ndaye ndingasayi kuze ndithande mntu.*

Mjongwa tells *Nonjoli* that he will never need an assistant, comforter and a person to make him happy in life. *Nonjoli* is shattered by *Mjongwa's* words and declares her love for him. However, *Mjongwa* is not moved by this, in fact he responds by saying that he has never loved a human being in his life, and he will never love anyone. This illustrates that *Mjongwa* is not in love with *Cikizwa* and is marrying her to please his parents, and that probably does not care about her but honours his parents out of respect. *Cikizwa* will never be happy with *Mjongwa* for, to him, the marriage is only an obligation dictated to by tradition.

Through *Nonjoli's* influence, *Mjongwa's* cousin also attempts to push *Mjongwa* into *Nonjoli's* arms, but he tells her the same words he said to Nonjoli that he has never loved anyone before and will never love anyone, "*mna andizange ndimthande omnye umntu, ndaye ndingasayi kuze ndithande mntu*" (Mmango, 1988:24). He continues to assert that he will never love anyone who has blood flowing in their veins and a brain like him. He says he would rather love chicken, or pigs or cows than love a human being. *"...Ndithande umntu onenyama negazi nengqondo njengam? Isidalwa esifana nam? Andisokuze! Kungcono ndithande inkukhu, okanye ihagu, okanye inkomo, kunokuba ndithande umntu*" (Mmango, 1988:24). *Cikizwa*'s family is forcing their daughter to marry into a loveless relationship. Where the man would rather admire and adore his livestock than a human. This demonstrates that *Cikizwa*'s father values patriarchy does not care about the young woman's happiness.

Throughout, *Nonjoli* portrays boldness even though she is being malicious. She bravely does the unheard of, by firstly advising *Cikizwa* to reject the wedding in church in front of a crowd and her parents and future in-laws. Secondly, she approaches *Mjongwa*, which is frowned upon amongst amaXhosa. The man is viewed as the hunter, therefore should approach women and not the other way around. However, *Nonjoli* is not afraid of going after what she wants. She declares her love for *Mjongwa* and boldly tries to persuade him to choose her. Something that Saule (2006:100) notes is rear amongst amaXhosa.

Cikizwa is somehow also inspired ever since she spoke to *Nonjoli.* She reclaims her strength and freedom by rejecting *Mjongwa* at the church in front of the priest and their families and friends (Mmango, 1988:71). She stands by her truth and tells her father that she would rather live a life of agony by being disowned by him than continue marrying a man whom her heart does not belong to, "*kungcono ukukhokhoba phantsi kwedyokwe yembandezelo kunokuphumla emthunzini wesono*" (Mmango, 1988:72).

And through her honesty and courageousness *Cikizwa* saves herself from a loveless union. To illustrate that the older women are the ones that encourage patriarchy to succeed, especially on young women, a group of old women from the village that attended *Cikizwa*'s almost wedding while walking home are shocked by the proceedings at the church. Instead of discussing the shooting incident that happened at the church and Sando, *Cikizwa*'s father's shenanigans, the women are gossiping about *Cikizwa*'s behavior. They proclaim that educating children is a waste of time if they are being educated to burn with the world as *Cikizwa* has chosen to burn with the world when she decided to reject Mjongwa. "Hi bafazi, nithi masibafundise aba bantwana xa kanti sibafundisa nje sibafundisela ukuba batshe nelizwe kuba lowo mntwana esala ukwenda nje akukho nto yimbi ufuna ukutsha nelizwe?" (Mmango, 1988:74).

Ultimately, *Cikizwa* resorts to suicide, a tragic consequence of her father's actions in arranging her marriage, effectively extinguishing the possibility of her union with the man she loved. This act is driven by greed, as her father consented to the marriage in exchange for material gain, receiving livestock, including cows, a horse, and sheep from the *Ngqika* family. *Cikizwa*'s death underscores the devastating impact of patriarchal control and the commodification of women in arranged marriages, where familial and economic interests are prioritized over the agency, well-being, and emotional life of the young woman.

To illustrate that *Cikizwa*'s father arranges the marriage with the Ngqika's purely for wealthy, he states that he cannot lose out on fifteen cows, twenty sheep and a horse due to an imbecile, "*Ndiza kuphulukana neshumi elineshihlanu leenkomo, amashumi amabini eegusha, nehashe ngenxa yesi sidenge*" (Mmango, 1988:28). He also basis his decision of forcing her daughter into a loveless marriage on tradition when he asserts that Mjongwa and *Cikizwa*'s union is blessed and that the Bhele and Njiyela households must unite, "*Indlu yamaBhele namaNjiyela mayime! Le ndlu imisekile yaye isikelelekile*" (Mmango, 1988:28).

Cikizwa exhibits notable audacity and agency in her decision to resist her father's authority by rejecting the arranged marriage to *Mjongwa.* Her defiance represents a deliberate challenge to patriarchal norms that dictate women's obedience and submission, particularly in matters of marriage. By reminding herself to remain strong and to fight for a life of peace and happiness with *Dike*, she actively asserts her right to personal choice and emotional fulfilment: "*Mandikrote, ndomelele; ewe, mandizame ndilwele ubomi boxolo nolonwabo – ubomi bethu Dike wam*" (Mmango, 1988:65). This resolve not only reflects her inner fortitude but also illustrates the broader struggle of women in patriarchal societies to claim autonomy over their lives and relationships. *Cikizwa*'s stance underscores the tension between individual desires and societal expectations, emphasizing the courage required to confront entrenched cultural and familial pressures.

During the wedding ceremony the priest first asks *Mjongwa* to repeat after him and *Mjongwa*, adhering to his parents' agreement with *Cikizwa*'s parents, does as he is told by the priest. When

it is *Cikizwa*'s turn, she does the opposite. Her father is angered by her actions. *Cikizwa* firmly assures the priest that she is certain with her response. One of the church elders pulls *Cikizwa* aside and tells her that she must respect her parents' wishes and place them above all by liking all that they like and dislike the things they dislike. He affirms that by doing so, *Cikizwa*'s life will be filled with happiness, "…*Beka uyihlo nonyoko ngokuthanda ezo zinto bazithandayo nangokuthiya ezo zinto bazithiyileyo; ukuba wenjenjalo ulonwabo luya kuba lolwakho bonke ubomi bakho*" (Mmango, 1988:70).

Cikizwa demonstrates remarkable resilience and self-determination by firmly resisting the imposed marriage to Mjongwa, despite the intense pressure from her elders. Her refusal to comply reflects a conscious challenge to patriarchal authority and the expectation of female obedience. When her father threatens to disown her should she continue to defy his wishes, *Cikizwa* boldly accepts the

potential consequences, asserting her agency and moral conviction: "*Cikizwa, ukuba akuvumi ukwendela kulo mfana, ndiyakuhlamba phambi kwale ntlanganiso, ukususela namhlanje andisayi kuba nguyihlo okuzeleyo nawe akusayi kuba yintombi yam endiyizeleyo*" (Mmango, 1988:72). This act of defiance illustrates her prioritization of personal autonomy and emotional well-being over societal and familial approval. Furthermore, her stance exemplifies the broader struggle of women to claim individual rights and resist traditional structures that seek to subordinate their choices, positioning *Cikizwa* as a symbol of resistance against patriarchal oppression.

4.5.1. Conclusion

The above scenario illustrates the pervasive manipulation tactics employed to control women, compelling them to conform to the expectations and intentions of patriarchal authority. Women are systematically encouraged to suppress their personal desires and well-being under the guise of obedience to cultural and traditional norms. These norms dictate that a woman's strength lies in her capacity to endure suffering silently, to persevere through pain, and to relinquish agency to men, who are presumed to possess superior knowledge regarding her happiness. Such strategies not only reinforce gendered hierarchies but also perpetuate the subjugation of women by normalizing their exclusion from decision-making processes that directly affect their lives. This manipulation underscores the broader societal mechanisms through which patriarchy sustains itself, ensuring that women remain complicit in their own oppression.

The wedding is ultimately halted when *Cikizwa*'s father is arrested for the murder of *Dike*. During the arrest, he resists law enforcement, drawing a firearm and, in the ensuing physical altercation with a police officer, discharges the weapon and fatally wounding *Mjongwa*. Ironically, *Mjongwa,* who had consented to the marriage and justified it as appropriate according to tradition which dictates that marital arrangements should be a joint agreement between parents and that obedience to parental authority is paramount, dies at the very wedding he deemed legitimate. This tragic outcome underscores the destructive consequences of rigidly adhering to patriarchal and traditional norms at the expense of individual agency and well-being.

Cikizwa's aunt, *Nomazala* still blames her for everything that is happening even though *Cikizwa* had expressed herself to *Nomazala* many times prior to the wedding day. *Cikizwa* had been telling her aunt that she does not want to get married to *Mjongwa* and the consequences of her being forced to

do so. *Nomazala* accuses *Cikizwa* of embarrassing their family, especially her father (Mmango, 1988:81). Yet, Sando out of desperation for wealth and prestige made the wrong decisions and acted unethically.

Although *Cikizwa* is initially portrayed as powerless, appearing to relinquish her relationship with *Dike* and seemingly compelled to comply with her father's directive to marry *Mjongwa*, she ultimately asserts her agency. She strategically plans her resistance against her father's authority and courageously articulates her opposition to marrying into the *Ngqika* family. By expressing her views to her mother, father, aunts, priest, and congregation, she persistently communicates her objections to the arranged marriage, despite opposition and attempts to silence her. This evolution portrays her transformation from passive compliance to active resistance, emphasizing the significance of individual agency within patriarchal constraints.

Cikizwa remains resolute in her commitment to *Dike*, even after discovering that her father was responsible for his death. In choosing to commit suicide, she demonstrates profound courage and agency, dying for the principles and desires that she values most. Rather than succumbing to the pressures and dictates of patriarchal society, she asserts her autonomy in the most extreme form, embodying the pursuit of personal fulfilment and adherence to her own moral and emotional convictions. Her act can also be interpreted as a powerful critique of the social and familial structures that seek to control women's choices, demonstrating the tragic consequences when individual desires are systematically suppressed by patriarchal authority.

The women in *Cikizwa*'s family failed to support her, demonstrating the ways in which patriarchal norms are reinforced even by women. Her mother conformed to the traditional role of the obedient wife, remaining silent despite being aware of the emotional pain her daughter endured. Her paternal aunt, *Nomatiletile,* tried to intervene by appealing to her brother, but her attempts were unsuccessful. She also approached her sister, *Nomazala*, who, rather than supporting *Cikizwa*, actively endorsed their brother's decision. *Nomatiletile's* interventions, however well-intentioned, were insufficient; she neither guided *Cikizwa* on how to challenge the imposed arrangements nor persisted in advocating for her. *Nomazala* proved to be the most rigid enforcer of patriarchal norms, urging *Cikizwa* to comply with her father's authority and viewing any resistance as improper. Furthermore, *Nomazala* exhibited suspicion toward other women who sought to assist *Cikizwa*, reflecting a deeply ingrained belief that a young woman's only viable future lies within marriage. This dynamic

highlights how patriarchal structures are maintained not only through male authority but also through the complicity of women who internalize and perpetuate these oppressive norms.

4.6. Women acting as patriarchal agents in *UNongxaki nezakhe*

Similar to *UDike noCikizwa* (Mmango, 1988), *UNongxaki nezakhe* (Belebesi, 1979) examines the traditional practice of arranged marriage among the amaXhosa. While this custom is less prevalent than it was in the 1990s, it continues to coexist with other practices such as *ukuthwala*, reflecting its enduring cultural significance. The persistence of arranged marriages can be attributed to the perception that they are an essential cultural institution, intended to maintain family honour and social cohesion. As Machaka (2019:25) notes, "It is believed that it serves an important cultural purpose amongst families and people who live their lives according to cultural norms." This enduring adherence to tradition underscores the tension between cultural preservation and the evolving notions of individual agency and consent, particularly for young women who are often expected to subordinate their personal desires to familial and societal expectations.

Arranged marriages are seen as a way young woman can build a family in a respectful manner. Machaka (2019:25) notes that it is a cultural practice that protects the girl's virginity and preserves her from her sexual exposure. Basically, by arranging for the girl to be married off at a young age, the family ensures that she is married still a virgin and so, therefore, she is saved from having children out of wedlock and subsequently embarrassing her family. It also guarantees the family (father and uncles) a large sum of *lobola*.

Machaka (2019: iii) notes that the practice of *ukuthwala* is still common in the Eastern Cape, where girls even younger than 18 years of age are forced into a marriage with older men. The marriage is arranged by the two families (the bride and groom's families) as stated elsewhere in this study. AmaXhosa regard the practice as "a possible preliminary procedure to a customary marriage" (Machaka, 2019:1). This is because in traditional/customary marriage it is fundamental for the two families to reach an understanding and to unite as one. According to Machaka (2019:2) this practice was previously more socially oriented. *Ukuthwala* was conducted with the spirit of Ubuntu, whereas, presently, the approach is different as it entails a form of gross violation of human and childly rights.

"Ukuthwala is also caused by severe gender discrimination, as it stems from the deep patriarchal attitudes of a society where a man is regarded as superior to a woman and a wife is seen as an object to be used by her male counterparts" (Machaka, 2019:24). In such a situation, the woman is placed

at an inferior level in society. Therefore, in marriage she is disregarded and deprived to take part equally in most instances. The male members become the authoritative power, therefore make decisions on marriage for a girl or young woman.

Thus, the situation with *Nongxaki*, where her father decides to grant consent to an arranged marriage for her without consulting with *Nongxaki* is culturally acceptable amongst amaXhosa. *Nongxaki*'s paternal aunt is tasked to deliver the news to her. This is because the paternal aunt amongst amaXhosa and many other African cultures plays a vital role within the family system, and this will be explored properly in the next chapter.

Nongxaki's aunt, *Hleliwe* is strategic when delivering the news to her niece as she does not know how her niece will react to the matter and also she has to put it in a way where it is visible that all has been decided therefore no consent from *Nongxaki* is needed but also it should seem as though it is the right thing to do without showing that *Nongxaki* is being forced to engage into it. This is illustrated in the following dialogue between *Nongxaki* and *Hleliwe* in Belebesi (1979:93):

> *Hleliwe: Nongxaki mntakabhuti, ikhaya lomntwana oyintombazana lisekwendeni…Phofu ngenyani umntwana uyakhethelwa. Nditsho ndisithi ke, mntakabhuti, uyihlo sekukhethele apho akusa khona. Akakuhlolelanga; uceliwe. Ukusa kwaMzingaye.*
>
> *Nongxaki: Dabawo, andibazi abantu balapho.*
>
> *Hleliwe: Umfana wakhona ekuthiwa nguNdoyisile akumazi? Anikhe nidibane na emitshatweni?*
>
> *Nongxaki: Hayi, dabawo.*
>
> *Hleliwe: Ukungamazi kwakho nokumazi, akwenzi nto. Ukhumbule ntombi yam, ukuba nokukuxelela oku ibe ikuku 'pliza' wena kuba ndicinga ukuba unganezinto othanda ukuzithengela zona. Uhayi no-ewe wakho abangeni ndawo. Qha ke.*
>
> *Nongxaki: He dadobawo, ningxamele phi? Owam uyeza! Nindisa kumntu endingamaziyo nje kungenxa yokuba ndinidinile apha ekhaya?*

Hleliwe informs *Nongxaki* that a girl's place is within marriage, framing this as a natural and expected aspect of her life. She seeks to justify her actions before conveying the decision, asserting that, in truth, a husband is chosen for every girl. *Hleliwe* further emphasizes that *Nongxaki*'s father has

already determined the family into which she will be married. In response, *Nongxaki* expresses her apprehension, explaining that she does not know the family she is being married into, nor does she know the man she is expected to wed. *Hleliwe*, however, dismisses these concerns, stating that it is irrelevant for *Nongxaki* to know either the man or the family, and clarifies that her role in relaying the message is purely a matter of courtesy, as *Nongxaki*'s consent is not required. *Nongxaki* protests, questioning the urgency of her arranged marriage and asserting that her desired future husband will naturally appear in due course. She makes it clear that she is deeply unhappy with the situation, particularly because she is being sent to a man she does not know, highlighting her lack of agency in a patriarchal system that prioritizes family arrangements over individual choice.

The conversation between *Nongxaki* and *Hleliwe* exemplifies that *Hleliwe* functions as an indirect agent of patriarchy, tasked with conveying decisions that have already been made by the male head of the family. She invokes cultural norms to justify the arranged marriage, framing it as an essential rite for girls and a necessary step to uphold the family's social standing. According to these cultural values, marriage is imperative, and the family seeks to ensure that *Nongxaki* does not remain unmarried. *Hleliwe* reinforces this perspective by reminding *Nongxaki* that the family has been anticipating a marriage proposal for her, yet she has instead been attending the weddings of others. She cautions *Nongxaki* against attending too many weddings, warning that she might risk missing her own opportunity to be married: "*Kunini sijonge enkalweni wena ulibele yimitshato. Ulumke ntombi kabhuti, ungatshatisi, utshatise ugqibele ngokudinga okutshatisayo*" (Belebesi, 1979:96). This interaction highlights how cultural imperatives are deployed to regulate women's behaviour and limit their agency, positioning marriage as both a familial obligation and a social necessity.

Nongxaki embodies qualities associated with African feminism as she boldly articulates her feelings to her aunt, asserting her right to make decisions about her own life. She challenges the patriarchal and culturally enforced practice of arranged marriage, advocating for her personal emancipation from an oppressive system. In contrast, *Hleliwe* remains resolute, insisting that *Nongxaki* marry *Ndoyisile*, warning that refusal could render *Nongxaki* a spinster and bring dishonour to the family, particularly to her father. Nevertheless, *Nongxaki* confidently counters this argument, asserting that shame or embarrassment is fleeting and can easily be cleansed: "*hlazo alinamsebenzi, dabawo. Lihlanjwa ngesepha yesenti ingapheli nokuphela*" (Belebesi, 1979:97). Through her defiance, *Nongxaki* exemplifies a critique of patriarchal control and an assertion of female agency within the cultural framework.

Nongxaki argues that for her it is of no significance even if the man she chooses for herself were to be poor, she would still be in love with him and that is all that matters. This premise of choosing for love is the same as in *UDike noCikizwa*, where *Cikizwa* dies for love. *Nongxaki* also views marriage as a union created with love between the couple and not an arrangement by the family for its own benefit. She says, "*Dabawo, lowo ndiya kuzikhethela yena, nokuba akanadyasi akananto uthandwa ndim*" (Belebesi, 1979:98). *Nongxaki*'s daring character embodies African feminist principles as she questions and challenges this patriarchal practice of the traditional institution of marriage as pointed out by Arndt (2002:21) where she avers that African feminism challenge gender inequalities that oppress and discriminate against women.

Nongxaki's audacious character exemplifies the principles of African feminism, particularly the courage to articulate one's perspective in a manner that is both respectful and assertive. She demonstrates a commitment to personal agency by ensuring that her honest opinions are acknowledged, challenging the authority of elders and patriarchal norms that seek to control her life. It is evident that she refuses to accept the marriage arranged for her, signalling her determination to rebel against cultural expectations and assert her autonomy. This defiance is particularly apparent when she tells *Hleliwe* that she is unafraid of bringing temporary embarrassment to the family, asserting that any disappointment will ultimately fade. *Nongxaki*'s stance underscores a critical engagement with tradition, highlighting the tension between cultural obedience and individual freedom, and positioning her as a figure who negotiates empowerment within the constraints of her societal context.

Hleliwe attempts to rationalize the practice of arranged marriage by presenting it as a safeguard for the couple, suggesting that the union is supported by the families who facilitated it and that they can intervene if conflicts arise. She portrays arranged marriage as a form of social insurance, implying that the guidance and mediation of the families involved will ensure the couple's stability and well-being. *Hleliwe* asserts, "*Kanti loo nto iluncedo nakuwe kuba kuya kuthi mhla umqa utshele esandleni, ube nomva*" (Belebesi, 1979:100), accentuating the notion that parental involvement serves as a protective measure for the young woman. However, this justification underscores the patriarchal framework within which women's choices are subordinated to familial and cultural authority, suggesting that their autonomy is secondary to the maintenance of social norms. While *Hleliwe* frames arranged marriage as beneficial, her perspective reinforces the broader structural limitations imposed on women, as it presumes that the couple's happiness is contingent on family oversight

rather than individual consent and mutual affection.

Nongxaki asserts her agency by firmly rejecting the idea of marrying a man she does not know, demonstrating her resistance to patriarchal control and the constraints of arranged marriage. Despite her objections, her family proceeds to organize her wedding, reflecting the deeply entrenched authority of male family members in determining a woman's marital future. She is sent to Johannesburg to purchase additional supplies for the wedding, a task she welcomes, as it provides her with temporary freedom from the immediate pressures of the arranged marriage. While there, *Nongxaki* encounters a young man who works with her brother, with whom she shares her frustrations regarding her lack of choice and the oppressive nature of the impending union. Together, they strategically plan her escape, effectively subverting her family's intentions and asserting her right to self-determination. This episode highlights *Nongxaki*'s courage and resourcefulness, illustrating the ways in which African feminist ideals of autonomy and resistance manifest in her actions against patriarchal structures that seek to control her life and future.

Nongxaki returns home for the wedding and acts as though all is well, she is going through with the wedding while aware that she has a different plan. On the day of the wedding, she and her family and friends arrive at the church and the service goes as planned, however *Somzi* arrives as well and joins *Nongxaki* and *Ndoyisile* in front with the priest. Nobody questions this as *Somzi* outshines *Ndoyisile* and ends up marrying *Nongxaki*. After the priest pronounces them as husband and wife, *Nongxaki* and *Somzi* leave the church. *Somzi* and *Ndoyisile* share the same English name, therefore, when the priest pronounced them as husband and wife, he used the English name. *Somzi* and *Nongxaki* leave the congregation astonished as they walk out and never turn back.

The above demonstrates that working and understanding each other as men and women yields positive outcomes. This is emphasized by Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:204) when she avers that African men and women must unite in building a better African society. *Nongxaki* is portrayed as a brave woman, "who is not afraid to interrogate patriarchal traditions" (Molubo, 2020:91). This is illustrated by her bold character of choosing to marry a man she loves and chose for herself instead of the person traditionally chosen for her, despite the consequences. Hoza (2013:34) notes that *Nongxaki*'s braveness to choose her own husband, going against patriarchy proves her strength of character. "Her response demonstrates the level of awareness of her self-identity and her individual rights" (Hoza, 2013:34). Thus, *Nongxaki* emerges as deviant as she refuses to engage in the patriarchal practice of

arranged marriage that is imposed upon women.

"Although her elopement with her lover can be perceived as an extreme act of rebellion that subjects her family to humiliation and ridicule, it could also be interpreted as an attribute of a strong-willed personality" (Hoza, 2013:35). This showcases that *Nongxaki* is determined to free herself from patriarchal pressures and take charge of her own life, which is another African feminism attribute. Hoza (2013:35) attests to this when she confirms that this is of the radical feminist objectives. Of course, *Nongxaki*'s deviant and defiant behaviour has consequences in a traditional setting and the wrath of the consequences are carried out by society at large. Mandela (1993:59) notes the punishment of rebellious women as:

A rebel faces ostracism by other women in the village for displaying bad behaviour, and suffers the stigma of being viewed as unruly, badly brought up, and a disgrace to her parents. The woman would also be subjected to verbal abuse not only by her husband, but by other male relatives and senior women.

4.6.1. *Nongxaki*'s two-fold dilemma

Nongxaki is confronted with a two-fold patriarchal dilemma as she endures harsh treatment not only from her mother, *Nokhimbili*, also referred to by her clan's name, *MaMpemvu*, but also from her mother-in-law. This presents an unusual yet significant dynamic in which patriarchy is perpetuated and enforced not directly by men, but by women who have internalized and adopted patriarchal values. In this instance, women become agents of patriarchal authority, reinforcing the very structures that oppress them and transmitting them to younger generations of women. This phenomenon reflects what African feminist theorists describe as the 'complicity of women in patriarchy,' where cultural and social expectations condition women to police one another's behaviour in alignment with patriarchal ideals. *Nongxaki*'s experience illustrates how patriarchy does not always manifest through overt male dominance, but rather through systemic practices that enlist women themselves as custodians of oppressive traditions, thereby deepening the cycle of female subjugation.

Nongxaki's mother is portrayed as the authoritative figure in her household as she, firstly, defeated her husband when they named their daughter, *Nongxaki*. *Zithulele* wanted to name her after his grandmother, *Nozwilakhe* but *Nokhimbili* refused to have her daughter named after her husband's grandmother. Zithulele's response was short, a simple agreement that is it, "*Ndiyakholwa*

yeyesithathu le" (Belebesi, 1979:3). Secondly, Nokhimbili holds authoritative power in whether *Nongxaki* receives Western education or not. She makes it clear to her husband that she does not want her daughter to go to school. She states that her child, *Nongxaki* will never go to school. Not giving her husband *Zithulele* a chance to voice his opinion. "*Yhu! Undincede ngomntwana ofundileyo. Nindincede ngalo wam umntwana. UNongxaki angaze aye esikolweni…Uthethe waphela uMaMpemvu engasaphumleli nokuba uZithulele abeke elakhe*" (Belebesi, 1979:5).

Zithulele is illustrated as afraid of his wife, *Nokhimbili* and because of his fear for her, he was unable to fight for *Nongxaki* to receive Western education. He knew that if he were to start that conversation with his wife, a war would begin, one that he would be defeated in. We learn this from the author when she says that "*UZithulele unge angayiqala incoko yezolo yesikolo malunga nalo mntwana ungaz' ukufundiswa. Ubone kakuhle ukuba woba uzinqikela ilitye elineembovane*" [Zithulele wanted to resume the previous day's conversation about their daughter not going to school. However, he realized that he would be getting himself in serious trouble] (Belebesi, 1979:6). Eventually, *Nokhimbili* allows *Nongxaki* to go to school, however she has terms and conditions. She pleads with her husband that they only allow *Nongxaki* to acquire the basic skills of reading and writing and this is stated below in Belebesi (1979:6):

> *Masivumelane, Mping'omhle, masivumelane, thole likabawo, ukuba uNongxaki lo, yena yedwa wothi ukuba uyakwazi ukuyibhala ibuye, aphume esikolweni engekayiseli nenyongo imfundo. Ukuba ungandithembisa loo nto sokuze ndivuke engcwabeni ndikuporhele. Kodwa ukuba ukhe wayala loo nto nakuza kungena nam xa nisuka emangcwabeni.*

Nokhimbili pleads with her husband to agree that *Nongxaki* should only acquire the most basic skills of literacy before being withdrawn from school, thereby preventing her from gaining further education. She warns that failure to do so would result in their daughter one day 'haunting' them, suggesting that education would embolden her to resist both parental and cultural authority. *Zithulele* consents to his wife's request and does not defend his daughter's right to education. In doing so, he fails *Nongxaki* twice: first, by denying her access to intellectual growth and the opportunities that accompany formal education, and later by compelling her to marry into a family, and to a man, she neither knows nor desires. The fact that *Nongxaki* ultimately had to assert her agency by resisting and rebelling against the arranged marriage does not erase this parental failure. Rather, it underscores

the extent to which patriarchal systems deny young women the autonomy to shape their futures, leaving them to fight against structures that should have protected and nurtured them.

Nokhimbili's reasoning for refusing to allow her daughter to pursue further schooling is not entirely rooted in patriarchal dominance but is instead shaped by a deep fear of losing her child. Her apprehension is informed by the family's prior experience with their educated son, *Mbokothwana*, who moved to Johannesburg after acquiring Western education and subsequently severed ties with his family, neither returning to the village nor providing them with financial support. For *Nokhimbili*, this disconnection becomes symbolic of the alienating effects of Western education, which she believes threatens familial cohesion and communal responsibility. Consequently, her rejection of formal education for *Nongxaki* is both a protective response against perceived abandonment and a reinforcement of traditional gender expectations. *Nokhimbili* further asserts that, within her generation, women were never afforded Western education but were instead trained to become good wives and mothers. She emphasizes that a girl child should be socialized by her mother and elder women to acquire the skills necessary for domestic life, such as preparing traditional beer, fetching wood, and working in the garden: "*Safunda thina imfundo yoomama, siyasila, siyatheza, siyahlakula*" (Belebesi, 1979:8). This perspective underscores the intersection between maternal anxieties, cultural continuity, and patriarchal norms, wherein women themselves become enforcers of restrictive practices under the guise of safeguarding tradition and family unity.

Nokhimbili emerges as a direct agent of patriarchy, particularly in her persistent complaints about her daughter-in-law, *Nosawuti,* who chose to leave her in-laws' household to live with her husband in the city. Traditionally, within amaXhosa culture, a bride was expected to reside at her in-laws' homestead after marriage, where she would assist with domestic chores and undergo a form of initiation under the guidance of elder women. While this initiation was temporary, it often culminated in the bride remaining at the in-laws' home to ensure that she fulfilled her wifely obligations to both her husband's family and the wider kinship structure. Although this practice has declined in frequency in contemporary times, with many families adapting to new socio-economic conditions, elements of the custom remain significant, particularly the expectation that the bride demonstrates loyalty and service to her husband's family. *Nokhimbili* interprets *Nosawuti's* decision to leave as a blatant dereliction of these cultural duties and an affront to tradition. Her outrage reflects the ways in which older women, positioned as custodians of cultural norms, often act as enforcers of patriarchal systems, ensuring compliance with traditions that prioritize the authority of the husband's

family over the autonomy of the bride. In this way, *Nokhimbili* not only defends patriarchal expectations but also perpetuates them, revealing how women themselves can become instruments of cultural and gendered control. *Nokhimbili* exclaims that *Nosawuti* is roaming the city, yet she never performed her wifely duties at her in-laws' homestead, she [*Nokhimbili*] is baffled as to how her daughter in-law will learn about being a proper wife, about the traditions and children of her in-laws, "*Umolokazana obhabha kwesi singenantsika, ongazange ahote, ubufazi uyawubazi nini? Amasiko obufazi asekhay' apha nabantwana uya kuwazi njani?*" (Belebesi, 1979:11).

Zungu and Mapini (2020:71) note that amongst amaXhosa a lot is expected from a bride. She has to be part of all the rituals and ceremonies that take place within her in-laws' homestead. The new bride is expected to live with her in-laws. As "African societies believe that this sustains relationships and continuous contact with the extended family" (Zungu and Maphini, 2020:72). Therefore, *Nokhimbili* expected this of *Nosawuti*, dismissing the fact that *Nosawuti* is married to *Mbokothwana* therefore, needs to be with her husband and start a family with him. Also, with the influx of urban migration in South Africa, especially during that regime, culture ought to have evolved with the times.

The foregoing substantiates that *Nokhimbili*, as a woman, functions as a perpetuator of patriarchy towards other women, thereby reinforcing the central theme of this study. Her justifications are deeply rooted in cultural traditions, yet these traditions have been reshaped over time to align with and sustain principles of male dominance. By adhering to and defending such norms, *Nokhimbili* positions herself as both a custodian and an enforcer of patriarchal authority. Her oppressive tendencies extend beyond her daughter-in-law to her own daughter, *Nongxaki*, whom she seeks to confine within rigidly defined gender roles. Moreover, *Nokhimbili* disparages other young women in the village who have embraced modern practices or attempted to harmonize them with cultural traditions. In doing so, she frames their choices as deviant or dishonourable, thus upholding the cultural narrative that positions women's value primarily in terms of domesticity, obedience, and subservience. *Nokhimbili's* actions illustrate how women within patriarchal systems can simultaneously embody oppression and be agents of its continuation, revealing the complex ways in which cultural traditions are manipulated to silence female autonomy and resist social transformation.

The other woman that subjects *Nongxaki* to harsh patriarchal principles is her mother in-law, *Nozigigaba*. *Nozigigaba* is overly protective of her son. She does not view her son leaving to work

in Cape Town without sending any communication or visiting back home as a problem. For *Nozigigaba*, a man is free to do as he pleases since one is able to choose a dress from the shop out of admiration and then, after some time, get tired of the dress. This means that men are allowed to marry women or enter into a romantic relationship with women and then walk away to get other women, "*Phofu, nelokhwe uyikhetha ngokuyithanda evenkileni ngelinye ixesha iyakudika*" (Belebesi, 1979:31).

Nozigigaba's comments insinuate that *Somzi* has lost interest in *Nongxaki* and that she should understand. *Nozigigaba* also says this as a way of discouraging her from going to look for him in Cape Town. However, *Nongxaki* is determined to get to the bottom of her husband's disappearance. She goes searching for *Somzi* and he runs away from her. *Nongxaki* returns home and shares the news with her in-laws. However, *Nozigigaba* is angry at *Nongxaki* for going to the city to look for *Somzi*, she is baffled by *Nongxaki*'s justification for visiting him. *Nozigigaba* accuses *Nongxaki* of chasing her son away from his comfortable lifestyle, "*Usuka apha uye kugxotha umntwana wam ezihlelele, xa ubuye kwenzani"* (Belebesi, 1979:35).

Nozigigaba subscribes to the amaXhosa cultural law that dictates daughters-in-law must reside at their in-laws' homestead, irrespective of where the husband chooses to live. Within this traditional framework, a young wife is not only expected to assume a subordinate role but is also subjected to the authority of her mother-in-law, existing under her strict surveillance and supervision (Herbert, 1990:457). Consequently, *Nongxaki* is expected to remain in her marital home, living in accordance with this custom and under the unyielding authority of her mother-in-law. This expectation highlights the deeply entrenched nature of patriarchal practices which, though presented as cultural norms, serve to restrict women's autonomy and reinforce generational hierarchies of female subordination within the domestic sphere.

Nozigigaba is not supportive or sympathetic towards *Nongxaki*'s plight. This is troublesome as she was also born into a system that is against women, where women are silenced and oppressed. Another issue is her son has abandoned *Nongxaki* with a baby. As *Nongxaki*'s mother in-law, *Nozigigaba* is supposed to protect her daughter in-law (Bongela, 2001:37). To substantiate that *Nozigigaba* is not sympathetic towards *Nongxaki*'s plight, she gossips about her, telling people that *Nongxaki* walks around expecting sympathy by saying that *Somzi* ran away from her, *"...Sehamba ezenza usizana nje. Ngoku uhamba ehleba umntwana wam esithi umbalekile*" (Belebesi, 1979:35).

Nozigigaba illtreats *Nongxaki* to the point whereby she hides food away from her. She also verbally abuses her in the presence of neighbours and *Somzi's* father. She demoralizes her and her abilities and beauty as a woman. *Somzi's* father is aware of this yet does not do anything about it. The same way *Zithulele* was aware of his wife's behaviour but did nothing to protect *Nongxaki* from her. *Nongxaki* and her daughter are constantly ill-treated and live under the evil surveillance of her mother in-law.

4.6.2. Conclusion

Despite the numerous trials and tribulations, she endures, *Nongxaki* remains remarkably resilient. She refuses to relinquish her fight for survival, not only for her own well-being but also for the future of her daughter. Her independent spirit and audacious character enable her to ultimately attain the happy ending she envisioned for herself. *Nongxaki* demonstrates courage in confronting challenges within her marriage, unafraid to return to her parental home when circumstances deteriorate, even at the cost of facing punishment and disapproval. This resilience illustrates her refusal to be defined or defeated by patriarchal expectations. Instead, she asserts her agency by persistently reclaiming her life, undeterred by the disparaging remarks of other women in the village who attempt to shame her. *Nongxaki*'s determination and boldness therefore embody the principles of African feminism, which emphasize women's capacity to resist oppression and chart their own paths toward dignity, fulfilment, and autonomy.

In *UNongxaki nezakhe* (Belebesi, 1979), the older women emerge as the primary enforcers of patriarchal principles upon the younger generation of women. Having internalized these ideologies from childhood, they perpetuate them unquestioningly, thereby becoming complicit in sustaining systems of gendered oppression. Interestingly, these women often appear to exercise decision-making power, yet their authority is framed within the boundaries of patriarchal compromise, as their actions ultimately reinforce male dominance rather than challenge it. For instance, *Nongxaki*'s mother, *Nokhimbili*, negotiates with her husband regarding their daughter's access to formal schooling, but the compromise reached still results in *Nongxaki* being denied full educational opportunities. Similarly, *Nokhimbili* permits her husband to intervene and assist *Nongxaki* when she is stranded in a foreign province, thereby conceding to male authority even as she appears to exercise maternal concern. Such examples highlight the paradoxical role of older women: they simultaneously occupy spaces of influence within the domestic sphere while reinforcing patriarchal ideologies that

limit the agency of younger women. This demonstrates how patriarchy is not only imposed by men but is also perpetuated through women who have been socialized to uphold its values as cultural norms.

The women characters in Belebesi's novel are strong-willed, resilient, and capable of handling any situation. They demonstrate remarkable independence and courage in various ways. For instance, *Nokhimbili* chooses to leave home and find employment on her own, asserting her autonomy. *Nongxaki*'s mother, though not formally employed, manages all household responsibilities and decides who is served and who is not. Her husband sometimes hesitates to raise certain issues with her because she does not simply accept things as they are; she challenges him on many matters. *Nosawuti*, *Nongxaki*'s sister-in-law, works full-time and employs a helper for her children and household chores. She boldly left her in-laws' home in the village to follow her husband to the city, where she now lives comfortably with her family.

Nongxaki is just as bold. She is not afraid to go searching for *Somzi*, even though she has never been to Cape Town before. She is also not afraid to go back to *Somzi's* parents to tell them that she has not found him. *Nongxaki* packs her bags and leaves to go back to her parents' house, fully aware of the hurt she has caused in their hearts. She boldly walks home with her daughter day and night until they reach her village, which is in a different town from her in-laws. Along the way, she encourages her daughter, especially when the child becomes exhausted. *Nongxaki*'s resilience is extraordinary. This section underscores her determination, courage, and sense of responsibility, showing that she is willing to face difficult situations head-on and protect her daughter, all while maintaining her dignity and strength. Her actions highlight the novel's recurring theme of women's independence and fortitude.

4.7. *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda*!

As mentioned in the previous subsection, marriage is viewed as an essentiality in many African cultures. It is regarded as the backbone of family life, a cornerstone that shapes social identity and status. Consequently, many women aspire to be married, and once married, they often adopt the culturally prescribed patriarchal roles of wives. This behaviour can sometimes manifest as condescension toward unmarried women, reinforcing societal hierarchies and expectations. At times, married women may also display cruelty or rivalry toward other married women, regardless of individual circumstances, reflecting internalized patriarchal norms and competition within the social

structure. This subsection will explore these dynamics, using *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda* as the primary literary text to illustrate how marriage, cultural expectations, and intra-gender interactions are depicted and critiqued within the narrative.

There are instances in which women, particularly those who are married, internalize patriarchal ideologies to such a degree that they begin to enforce these norms upon other women. As Nyanhongo (2011:42) observes, these women become "indoctrinated to the extent that they actively practice, maintain and perpetuate oppressive traditions." Their worldview is shaped by the belief that women are inherently destined to serve men, and that their primary role is one of submission and domesticity. This internalization manifests in the reinforcement of gendered expectations, where such women advocate for the preservation of traditional norms and assert that "a woman should know her place in society," thereby entrenching the very structures that marginalize them (Nyanhongo, 2011:42).

The above dynamics can be particularly destructive for women who are already oppressed, especially when the oppression is enforced by other women. Victims often feel unable to speak out or seek support, forcing them to suppress their pain. This suppression can result in tremendous emotional and psychological damage, sometimes leading women to harbour resentment or act irrationally. Qasim et al. (2015:383) note that patriarchy deliberately undermines women's self-esteem and assertiveness, portraying them as naturally self-effacing and submissive. This method is cruel and can cause severe harm depending on an individual's character, as Cooper (1978:51) observes that mental illness is not spontaneous but often emerges from external pressures and underlying psychological vulnerabilities. This observation aligns closely with the experiences of *Nozinto* in *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda* (1997), whose character illustrates the profound emotional and psychological consequences of both patriarchal oppression and intra-gender antagonism.

Nozinto, who has endured emotional, psychological, and physical suffering in her marriage due to her husband's transgressions, undergoes a profound transformation. The cumulative pain she experiences leads her to develop an alternative persona, one that compels her to react to situations in increasingly negative and destructive ways. Driven by the weight of her suppressed anger and frustration, she devises a plan to have her husband killed. In this sense, she becomes a woman scorned, her actions fuelled not only by the betrayal she has suffered but also by the lack of support from those around her, who, instead of offering comfort, turn against her. This trajectory underscores the devastating impact of prolonged oppression and emotional neglect, portraying how sustained

victimization can distort character and provoke extreme responses.

Nozinto's mental state appears increasingly unstable when she accidentally calls her friend *Zodidi*, thinking she is contacting her confidante, *Phalisa.* The purpose of the call is to inform her friend that her plan has finally succeeded. She then summons her friends to her house (Ngewu, 1997:1). *Zodidi's* reaction to *Nozinto*, however, reveals a lack of support and understanding. Instead of offering sympathy or assistance, *Zodidi* responds negatively, labelling *Nozinto* a witch and using the term *mfazindini*, which carries a pejorative connotation due to the suffix -*ndini* (Ngewu, 1997:1). This interaction highlights how *Nozinto* is further isolated by those around her, reinforcing the social and emotional pressures that contribute to her increasingly extreme behaviour.

Nozinto is in dire need of someone to talk to, but *Zodidi* continues to mock her on the phone. *Zodidi* also complains that *Nozinto* phoned her at night. After the call, Zodidi murmurs to herself about *Nozinto*. She avers that her husband has been telling her to cut ties with *Nozinto*, *"…Kudala ke phofu wathi mandohlukane nesi simanga singuNozinto*" (Ngewu, 1997:2). This is probably because of *Nozinto*'s bold character as it is unravelled as the literary drama continues. The women and men in the literary drama call *Nozinto* a crazy woman and dislike her, making snide comments about her because of her courageous character and nonconformity to the norm. This is echoed by Qasim, et al (2015:284) when he avers that madness is associated with those who refuse to conform to the set societal norms. *Zodidi* gathers the friends and on their way to *Nozinto*'s house, confused as they do not know the reason, they are summoned by *Nozinto* at night, they gossip about *Nozinto* and the dialogue below between the friends in Ngewu (1997:3) confirms the gossip:

> *Phalisa: …Yho! Bafazindini ndiyakrokra ngahle uNozinto ude wambulala uZamile.*
>
> *Phalisa: Mamelani ndinixelele kuba ndiyanibona ukuba animazi uNozinto. Mhlawumbi nimva nje ngokubaliselwa. UNozinto asingowangoku. Unesibindi umfazi ophaya!*
>
> *Zodidi: Nokuba sel' enesibindi akacingi ukubulala indoda yakhe.*
>
> *Phalisa: Xa ndithi uyibulele andithethi ukuba uyibulele ngezandla zakhe.*
>
> *Nconyiwe:Nozinga, uyakhumbula ngobaa busuku sasihleli kwakho noNozinto ekwasela le wayini yakhe? Kwathi kanti sihleli nje lo mfazi uqeshe ootsotsi bokuya*

kubulala indoda yakhe. Uyakhumbula kodwa ukuba kwathi xa kufuneka egodukile akanxila wacholwa phantsi kanti wenzela ukuba makakhatshwe ukugoduka khon' ukuze afikele kwisimanga sokubulawa kwendoda engahambi yedwa?

In the conversation amongst the women, Phalisa, *Nozinto*'s closest friend, exclaims to the others that she believes *Nozinto* has finally managed to kill her husband. The other women are shocked, but *Phalisa* clarifies that she does not mean *Nozinto* carried out the act using her own hands. She emphasizes that the other women do not truly know *Nozinto* as she does, asserting that *Nozinto* is a robust and determined woman. *Zodidi* counters by arguing that no matter how courageous *Nozinto* might be, she could never kill her husband. Nconyiwe then recounts a specific incident when they visited *Nozinga*. On that day, *Nozinto* had allegedly hired assassins to kill her husband and deliberately became very intoxicated, drinking wine throughout the day, so that one of the hitmen could accompany her home. She did not want to return to her home alone in the presence of her husband's death. Ultimately, however, the assassins did not succeed in killing *Zamile*.

This account underscores *Nozinto*'s extreme measures driven by prolonged suffering and frustration, as well as the perception of her strength and resolve by those who know her best. It also highlights the tension between her private capabilities and the scepticism or disbelief of those around her, further emphasizing themes of isolation, agency, and social judgment within the narrative. It is evident that *Nozinto* had confided in *Phalisa* and *Nconyiwe*, however these two women are betraying *Nozinto*'s trust by sharing her secrets with the other women. The women are also overlooking *Nozinto*'s alcohol addiction by stating that she got intoxicated because she wanted someone to accompany her home. Later, in the literary drama it is stated that she became addicted to alcohol because of the situation in her home and marriage. *Phalisa* continues to share *Nozinto*'s secrets in the following from Ngewu (1997:4):

Yimani bafazi ndikhe ndinikrobise nje kancinci kubomi bukaNozinto noZamile. Ndiyabona ukuba nifathula nje ebumnyameni. Indawo yokuqala, umtshato waphela kudalo-o-o phakathi kukaNozinto noZamile. UZamile kaloku uzixakekise yile nto yomdaniso. Seyifana nesibetho kuye. Kukho umfazi ongayithwala into yokuba nendoda emana ijikelezana neqonga nentombi enxibe isigqebhezana? Nikhumbule kaloku ukuba kuhanjwa olu khuphiswano lwemidaniso ngobusuku yaye uZamile uthi eseKapa abe eseThekwini. Zimbalwa gqitha iimpela-veki

azichitha ekhaya. Naxa angaphumanga ubuya ekuzeni kokusa evela kulungiselela ukhuphiswano oluzayo (Ephakamisa ucikicane). Ukho umntwana oyingceke-ngcekana athene nca naye ekuthiwa nguNolutsha. Ukuba akathandani uZamile nalaa mntwana, ngaba kubini!

Phalisa tells the others that she has information on *Nozinto* as she can see that they do not know much about *Nozinto* and Zamile's marriage. She continues to state that *Nozinto*'s marriage ended a long time ago because her husband, *Zamile* prioritizes his dancing career. She states that his career has become a curse. *Phalisa* rhetorically asks her friends if there is a woman in this world who would tolerate having a husband that dances on stage with a half-naked woman. She tells them to remember that *Zamile* attends dancing competitions in the evenings all around the country. She states that there are very few weekends where *Zamile* spends time at home. Even when he is not out of the province, he returns home in the early hours of the morning, claiming to have been at dance practice. She avers that there is a young woman called *Nolutsha* that is close to him, and one would swear that the two are having an affair. *Zodidi* responds negatively to *Phalisa's* narration (Ngewu: 1997:4):

Phalisa, uNozinto wamtshata uZamile emazi ukuba ungumntu womdaniso! Kutheni ngoku kwacaca ukuba lo mdaniso yinto yabumini? UZamile angayinyamezela kanjani into yomfazi oselayo ekucacayo ukuba uya eba ngunontyintyi eli lixa yena engabufaki kowakhe umlomo?

Zodidi asserts that *Nozinto* agreed to marry *Zamile* knowing that he is a dancer. She is baffled at the fact that now they are acting as though his dancing is something new. She rhetorically asks the women how Zamile should have to tolerate an alcoholic of a woman while he does not drink alcohol at all. However, *Phalisa* is set on defending *Nozinto* even though in doing so she is betraying *Nozinto*'s trust because she is sharing her confidential marital details. *Phalisa* responds to *Zodidi* by saying the following from Ngewu (1997:5):

Yho! Yho! Yho! Ndaza ndakuva zwindini! Utheth' ukuba uNozinto makanyamezele ukutshuntuza kukaZamile ozenza utshubungwatshulwa kuba wamtshata emazi? Ukuba kuphelele apho bangaphela abafazi! Ingxaki yakho, Zodidi, kukuba akuyazi intlungu kaNozinto. Ubuhlungu bemeko kaNozinto abunakuqondakala umele kude kubo. UNozinto ufana nje nefenishala yokuhombisa umzi kaZamile. UZamile akanalo tu ixesha likaNozinto. Into yokusela kukaNozinto intsha kakhulu yaye

inesizathu sayo. Eyona nto emenze wasela laa mfazi ziingxaki zomtshato ongekhoyo. Akaseli kuba ebuthanda utywala, koko ubuthanda kuba ebusela.

In the conversation, *Phalisa* defends *Nozinto* by arguing that their friend should not be expected to endure *Zamile's* constant traveling simply because she married him, fully aware of his profession. She further asserts that *Zodidi* fails to grasp the magnitude of *Nozinto*'s suffering, which is largely invisible to outsiders. *Phalisa* likens *Nozinto*'s role in her marriage to that of furniture, used to decorate Zamile's house because he neither cares for her nor sets aside time for her. According to *Phalisa*, *Zamile's* neglect is the primary reason *Nozinto* has turned to alcohol. When Nozinga enquires about the policeman in *Nozinto*'s life*, Phalisa* clarifies that *Nozinto*'s involvement with him is not entirely a matter of choice but a human response to unmet emotional and physical needs, highlighting her desire for intimacy and connection that her husband fails to provide (Ngewu, 1997:5):

Phalisa: UNozinto unalo ipolisa ancuma nalo. Akayenzanga loo nto kuba engakwazi ukuziphatha koko ubethwe kukuphela komtshato. UNozinto masimcingele ngumntu naye, yaye uyafana nabanye abantu. Ngubani umfazi ekufuneka efukame intlungu yakhe yokungawafumani amalungelo omtshato wakhe endodeni yakhe?

Nconyiwe: Xa indoda kaNozinto iziphethe dlakadlaka laa mfazi ucinga ukuba angayilungisa imeko yomtshato wakhe ngokuziphatha dlakadlaka naye? Andiyazi mna into yokuba ithi indoda xa ikhethe ukuqubha emgxobhozweni, nomfazi asukele phezulu ukuya kuzifaka emgxobhozweni naye.

Phalisa: Uthetha nje wena Nconyiwe kuba ungabazi ubuhlungu bokumetshelwa yindoda. Ungayithwala kodwa into yokusoloko ungqendevisile uquve endlwini ulinde indoda eya kubuya ngoNoquku? Oku kumetsha nokusela kukaNozinto kuzalwa yintlungu. Kudala laa mfazi ezama ukuyiloba ayihlangule indoda yakhe kwesi siziba yoyele kuso. Masahlukane nento yokucinga ukuba indoda inelungelo lokwenza nokuba yintoni kuba nje iyindoda. Obu bushushu nobu bumnandi uZamile abufumana phaya kude, nomfazi wakhe uyabufuna. Kutheni ingathi ucinga ukuba uNozinto kufuneka eyi-incubator nje yokuqanduselela uZamile? UNozinto ngumntu naye bafazi!

This discussion demonstrates how *Nozinto*'s suffering is rooted in both emotional neglect and social expectations within marriage. It also emphasizes the tension between external judgment and internal reality, showing how isolation and unmet needs can drive women to make unconventional choices for survival and self-fulfilment. Even though *Phalisa* attempts to defend *Nozinto*, *Nconyiwe* continues to side with *Zamile*, arguing that *Nozinto*'s inappropriate behaviour is no justification for her actions. She maintains that *Nozinto* should strive to repair her marriage without mimicking her husband's misbehaviour. *Nconyiwe* asserts that a man's conduct should not be imitated by women, reflecting the belief that men are permitted freedoms that women are not. In her view, a woman's role in marriage is to persevere, rectify problems, and endure her husband's treatment, regardless of the hardships she faces.

Phalisa, however, remains adamant in defending *Nozinto*. She responds by highlighting that *Nconyiwe* cannot comprehend the depth of *Nozinto*'s pain, having to spend long hours alone, waiting for a husband who repeatedly disappoints her. *Phalisa* explains that *Nozinto*'s affair and alcoholism are direct responses to this emotional suffering. Despite her persistent efforts to win back her husband, *Nozinto* experiences continual rejection and neglect. *Phalisa* emphasizes that men should not be assumed to have an unquestionable right to act as they please simply because of their gender. She insists that *Nozinto* deserves the same warmth, companionship, and pleasures that *Zamile* enjoys during his travels. *Nozinto* is not merely an incubator to bear his children; she is a human being with needs, emotions, and desires of her own. This dialogue underscores the gendered double standards within marriage, demonstrating societal expectations that constrain women while excusing men's behaviour. It also emphasizes *Nozinto*'s humanity, portraying her choices as a response to neglect and oppression rather than moral failing.

Women in some amaXhosa societies are advised by their mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, and other elderly women to endure the difficulties they face in their marriages (Rozani, 2016:54). Rozani further notes that married women are often cautioned against revealing their marital trials and tribulations to relatives or friends, particularly unmarried friends. This advice reinforces a culture of silence, where women are expected to internalize suffering and prioritize the preservation of family reputation over their own well-being. It perpetuates the idea that endurance and submission are virtues, while seeking external support or expressing dissatisfaction is seen as inappropriate or shameful. Consequently, women may experience heightened emotional and psychological strain, as they are denied avenues to share their pain, seek counsel, or access support networks that could

mitigate the effects of marital oppression.

A married woman is further expected to, "be meek, respectful and abide by all the rules laid down by her new family" (Rozani, 2016:55). Wives are also expected to be able to transform their husbands' behaviour in a positive manner even during the naming custom. Rozani (2016:55) notes that at times the new name given to the bride by her in-laws contains tremendous weight as sometimes the name directly implies the bride's responsibility in her new family. The wife is bestowed with, amongst many other such duties, the responsibility of mending relations, building her husband and family as well as persevering through all hardship. Meanwhile, not much expectation is awaited from the husband. As the head of the family, he is allowed to have affairs, sleep out, have children outside of the marriage and so forth without much judgment. Whereas women who do the same are judged, given derogatory labels and in some communities, they are ostracized.

The above-mentioned notion substantiates *Nconyiwe's* comments about *Nozinto*, revealing how she acts as an agent of patriarchy by dismissing *Nozinto*'s pain and portraying her as the villain in the marriage. Similarly, *Zodidi* blames *Nozinto* for all the matrimonial issues the couple faces, refusing to acknowledge Zamile's role in the collapse of their relationship. *Phalisa* is the only one who attempts to defend *Nozinto*, though even she inadvertently betrays *Nozinto*'s trust by sharing private details about her marriage. When the women arrive at *Nozinto*'s home, she confides in them that Zamile has been physically abusive, stating, "*Ndakhe ndakhala apha ngobunye ubusuku ndikhanywa leli kwanqi linguZamile*" [I once cried one evening, while Zamile strangled me] (Ngewu, 1997:8). Despite this revelation, her friends remain unsympathetic, choosing instead to gossip about *Nozinto* and *Phalisa* and casting judgment on their audacious characters.

This episode underlines the compounding effects of patriarchy and intra-gender policing, showing how women can perpetuate oppressive norms by invalidating each other's experiences. *Nozinto*'s suffering is thus marginalized not only by her husband's abusive behaviour but also by the judgment and lack of solidarity from her peers. The narrative exposes how societal expectations and gendered double standards work together to isolate women, leaving them with few avenues for support or justice.

Nozinto demonstrates key African womanist characteristics through her resilience, assertiveness, and refusal to remain passive in the face of marital oppression. She robustly speaks out about her marital

problems, challenging both her husband and societal expectations that women should silently endure abuse and neglect. Strategically, she formulates a plan to reclaim her emotional freedom, even though it ultimately results in her imprisonment, demonstrating her determination to assert control over her life. *Nozinto* is also audacious in performing what society deems unthinkable: engaging in an extramarital affair as a form of retaliation, signalling to Zamile and others that she is capable of matching his transgressions. Furthermore, her boldness reaches its extreme when she constructs a plan to have her husband killed, an action that reflects both the depth of her suffering and her refusal to be subdued by patriarchal oppression. Through these actions, *Nozinto* embodies an African womanist ethos that prioritizes self-determination, agency, and resistance to systemic and personal injustices.

Nozinto hires hitmen to kill her husband, and he dies in hospital from the organized shooting. *Nozinto* is questioned as well as her friends. The detective visits *Zodidi* at her house, in her husband's presence, and he does not hide his dislike of *Nozinto*. He tells the detective that he has been telling his wife to stay away from that woman [*Nozinto*]. "*UMaMthwana [Zodidi] lo kudala ndamxelela ukuba makohlukane nesi simanga singulaa mfazi"* (Ngewu, 1997:37). *Zodidi* valiantly tells the detective that she suspects *Nozinto* might have hired hitmen to kill her husband. She shares her suspicions without any tangible evidence. Placing her friend in trouble without evidence to look good in her husband's eyes.

However, *Zodidi* refuses to testify against *Nozinto* in a court of law. Her reason for refusing to testify is that there are many women in Butterworth and around the country that are abused by their husbands. She says that testifying against *Nozinto* would be betraying all these women and would taint her reputation, "*Ndicel' uxolo kuloo ndawo, Mhlekazi! Baninzi abafazi abahlutshwa ngamadoda abo aph' eGcuwa nakwezinye iindawo. Ndingangumfazi ombi othengisa omnye umfazi*" (Ngewu, 1997:39). Zodidi knows that what she is doing is wrong and a betrayal to her friend and women at large as she has no evidence nor a testimonial from *Nozinto* that she is responsible for *Zamile's* death. She is fully aware that many women in abusive relationships and marriages have also resorted to what *Nozinto* did out of desperation and in some instances as a self-defending mechanism. *Zodidi* has also been very negative towards *Nozinto*, fully aware of all she is going through. Instead of supporting *Nozinto* through the ordeal, she wants her arrested. However, she still wants to be perceived positively amongst other women even though she is pushing for *Nozinto*'s arrest and is part of the people judging her.

Andrew (2020) notes that there exists an invisible law among women that shapes the dynamics of their interactions. This subconscious principle, termed the 'power dead-even rule' by Pat Heim (2020), governs how women relate to one another and significantly impacts their self-esteem. Heim (2020:7) explains: "For a healthy relationship to be possible between women, the self-esteem and power of one must be, in the eyes of each woman, similar in weight to the self-esteem and power of the other." In essence, this concept posits that for a woman to be fully embraced by her peers, she must either be perceived as an equal or as subordinate. If she occupies a position of greater authority, influence, or is particularly vocal, she risks being ostracized or marginalized. This dynamic underscores the subtle ways in which social hierarchies and power imbalances operate within female relationships, often restricting the agency and assertiveness of women in both personal and communal contexts.

This is the case with *Nozinto*, who is very vocal and refuses to compromise, challenging the expectations placed upon her as a wife in a patriarchal society. She is exhausted from living a life filled with pain and oppression, and her actions, though extreme, such as plotting her husband's murder reflect the intensity of her suffering rather than a simple desire to harm. While committing murder cannot be commended, her courage in speaking openly about her marital struggles and engaging in an affair to fulfil her physical and emotional needs as a woman can be admired. *Nozinto* could have chosen to walk away from her marriage without resorting to violence, but the cumulative trauma and betrayal she experiences have pushed her to react in radical and negative ways. Her experiences exemplify how systemic oppression, combined with a lack of supportive networks and the judgment of other women, can distort a person's choices, compelling even a strong and resilient woman to pursue desperate measures.

Nozinto complains to *Phalisa* about how her in-laws and the community at large is constantly dictating to her about how as a widow she should conduct herself, "*Into yokuba ndixelelwe nento efanele ukwenziwa ngumfazi ofelweyo*" (Ngewu, 1997:45). As this is the case with many African cultures. Elderly women address the widow, giving her instructions on how to mourn her husband and how to behave while in mourning when around others. "The travails of a widow begin immediately when her husband is declared dead; she is immediately made to go through various traditional rites, disregarding her pain and process of grieving" (Olukayode, 2015:68). She is treated as though she has no feelings and incapable of making rational decisions, and thus excluded from

funeral planning and grieving in her own way.

Upon *Nozinto*'s in-laws' arrival, her mother-in-law, *MaNdlovu*, is visibly weeping, expressing the grief and pain she feels over the situation. Her husband, however, instructs her to stop crying, asserting that such a matter does not require tears and that they should instead allow Zamile to rest in peace: "*Mfazi into enje ngale ayifuni ziinyembezi nezijwili. Masimkhulule uZam*" (Ngewu, 1997:48). This directive highlights the gendered expectations within their society, where women's emotional expressions are often dismissed or controlled, even in moments of profound loss. *MaNdlovu* is prevented from publicly mourning her son, despite the fact that tears are a natural and necessary way for her to process grief. The incident underscores how patriarchal norms regulate not only women's behaviour in marriage but also in family and community contexts, denying them the autonomy to express emotions freely and reinforcing the idea that women's feelings are secondary to societal expectations and male authority.

Nozinto updates her in-laws about the funeral plans. She reports to *Zamile's* father, *Lolwana* that she has bought 15 sheep to be slaughtered at the funeral for people to eat. However, her father in- law condemns this, stating that according to custom no slaughtering is allowed at a funeral of a person who dies in this nature. Ngewu (1997:49) states:

> Nozinto: Tata, ndithenge iigusha ezilishumi elinesihlanu ukulungiselela abantu.
>
> Lolwana: Mntwan'am, asenzi mgidi apha koko singcwaba umntu ofe ngengozi. Akuxhelwa ke xa umntu efe ngengozi.

Nozinto is not allowed to participate in her husband's funeral, as her in-laws take full control of the proceedings. This mirrors a situation many widows still face today, as depicted in certain television reality shows that highlight women who lose everything, including financial stability and the ability to maintain their households because of domineering in-laws. In some extreme instances, wives are barred from attending their husbands' funerals and are even accused of causing their deaths. Such practices reflect the enduring patriarchal structures within certain communities, where women's rights, agency, and grief are subordinated to the authority of the husband's family. These actions not only strip women of their dignity but also reinforce societal narratives that blame women for misfortunes within the family, further isolating them and compounding their trauma.

Nozinto's father in-law avers that he and his wife have decided to follow the tradition that bans

women from attending the graveyard during the burial of a person who has died from a car accident, shooting, or any other form of violence. These are all considered accidental deaths. "*Ngokwesiko lakwantu akuvumelekanga ukuba abafazi basondele edlakeni lomntu ofe ngengozi*" (Ngewu, 1997:49). Solomon (1987:24) notes that when a person dies an accidental death, women and children are forbidden to enter the graveyard at the time of the funeral ceremony. "While the burial takes place, the women sit furthest away from the *ubuhlanti* (kraal). When everything is finished, they are called to come and lay a stone - *ukubeka ilitye* – on the grave" (Solomon, 1987:26). Furthermore, *Nozinto*'s father in-law justifies this as a way in which 'tradition' ensures that women who are murderers do not go near the dead, "*Le yindlela yokuqinisekisa ukuba abafazi ababuleleyo abasondeli kuloo mntu bambuleleyo*" (Ngewu, 1997:49). This is just another manner of oppressing women, because men are also capable of murder yet are allowed to enter the graveyard during the funeral to pay their last respects to the deceased.

The day before the funeral, *Nozinto* goes to run errands for the funeral. However, everyone especially the women in the community are astonished as traditionally the widow is to remain in a room on a mattress for the entire period before the funeral. The priest at the funeral church service remarks that he heard *Zamile's* death is connected to a woman. He narrates the story of the snake that entered the Garden of Eden through Eve (a woman) and states that the snake of greed will one day enter the world through a woman, "*Njengokuba inyoka yangena ngomfazi nje enmyezweni, nenyoka ekukunyoluka iseza kulityhutyha-tyhutyha eli lizwe ikwenze oko ngokungena ngomfazi*" (Ngewu, 1997:61).

As mentioned previously in this study, the above scenario carries deeply negative connotations, as it perpetuates the notion that women are the root of all evil. *Nozinto* is arrested and imprisoned, and it is within this confined space that her monologue unfolds, offering profound insight into her emotional state. In her monologue, *Nozinto* makes it clear that *Zamile's* actions caused her immense pain, to the extent that she does not regret hiring hitmen to kill him. She compares her marriage to having a hot coal placed on her back, with no friends to provide support, only gossip and ridicule. She expresses relief at having finally removed the coal, even as she acknowledges that she must face the consequences of her actions: "*Kufuneka ilizwe liyazi ukuba uZamile ebelilahle. Ibuhlungu into yokuhlalwa lilahle emhlana kungekho nomhlobo lo ohlangabezana nam ngaphandle kokuba bebendihleka ngenxa yokubanda. Kunini ndamnyamezela uZamile! Ndizixhoxhele isikhuni somhlakathi nje, ndiza kusotha ngokwam!*" (Ngewu, 1997:63). Through this monologue, *Nozinto*

articulates the compounded effects of marital oppression, social isolation, and betrayal, revealing how systemic injustices and lack of support can push even a strong and resilient woman to take extreme measures. Her words underscore the human need for empathy, understanding, and justice, highlighting the profound psychological impact of living in an environment where women's pain is dismissed or trivialized.

From the outset, it is evident that *Nozinto* is a deeply troubled woman who has been trapped in this debacle for a long time. Her prolonged suffering has numbed her emotions to the point where she no longer cares about anything around her. The weight of her agony has pushed her into dark thoughts and desires, making her increasingly desperate and morally conflicted; she reaches a point where she believes that murder might be the only solution to her problems. She experimented with other coping mechanisms, alcohol abuse and infidelity but none brought relief, leaving her feeling cornered and powerless. Resorting to murder is an extreme and courageous, though morally troubling, act, as a typical person would not rationally consider such a measure and remain unaffected afterward. This underscores that *Nozinto* is not acting from a place of rationality; she is psychologically distressed, in dire need of support, and her extreme actions should be understood as a cry for help. Her behaviour illustrates the devastating impact of sustained emotional, psychological, and social oppression on a woman, revealing how systemic neglect and abuse can push even the strongest individuals to the edge.

However, without people by her side to provide support, comfort, and wise counsel, *Nozinto* gradually loses herself. Her friends and mother-in-law, instead of being the pillars she desperately needs, become active agents in her downfall. They collude directly or indirectly with patriarchal expectations, criticizing her and reinforcing societal norms of how a woman should behave, labelling her actions as inappropriate or unsatisfactory for a married woman. Ironically, *Zodidi* does not want to appear disloyal to *Nozinto* in front of other women in court, yet privately she contributes to her demise. This highlights a crucial barrier to African feminism: women themselves, like *Zodidi*, *Nconyiwe*, and *Nozinto*'s mother-in-law, often perpetuate patriarchal definitions of womanhood and wifehood. They judge and ostracize women who deviate from the prescribed norms, viewing them as wicked wives or mothers, regardless of the suffering these women endure. This internalized patriarchy demonstrates how deeply entrenched social expectations can undermine solidarity among women, weakening the collective struggle for autonomy, equality, and justice.

In some studies, *Nozinto*'s character is viewed as a materialistic wife who hires assassins to kill her husband for his money. By killing her husband, *Nozinto* tells her trusted friend, *Phalisa* that she has already cashed in policies even before *Zamile* is declared dead. *Nozinto* has plans to move to a better suburb in a different city, and ultimately to start afresh. However, *Nozinto* does not hire assassins to kill her husband solely for financial benefit. In fact, the greed for material possessions is a secondary reason. It could be viewed that the financial aspect is a reward for all the abuse, disrespect and oppression she endured over the years while married to him. All these factors have resulted in her emotional and psychological state. As much as she is physically alive, emotionally the pain has killed her. Thus, her actions and irrational reasoning. Nweba (2004:47) notes that *Nozinto* is a bold and determined character. She goes for what she wants and receives it. She had hired assassins to kill her husband before, however that attempt failed. She did not give up. She continues and hires new assassins and although *Zamile* does not die immediately after the shooting, he eventually dies in hospital. Even after *Zamile's* death, *Nozinto* does not regret her actions.

Nozinto is bestowed with tremendous power in this literary drama. She embodies African feminist attributes as she breaks away from the patriarchal shackles of abuse, oppression, and subjugation, despite her morally questionable actions. She asserts herself against patriarchal friends, in-laws, and the broader community, refusing to be silenced or diminished. *Nozinto* challenges tradition by insisting that sheep be slaughtered for the funeral, even in the face of her father-in-law's objections, and ensures that she actively participates in planning and shopping for the arrangements. She refuses to sit passively on a mattress while others assume control in her home; instead, she takes charge of every detail, asserting authority and agency despite the disapproval and frowns of those around her. Through these actions, *Nozinto* demonstrates resilience, autonomy, and a refusal to conform to oppressive expectations, redefining her role within a patriarchal space.

Nozinto realizes that her friends have all distanced themselves from her when she is arrested, as they do not go to visit her in jail. However, she is strong and takes her punishment as she knows that it is her burden to carry and no one else. She knows that her actions were wrong and so, therefore, accepts her punishment but she is also content that she was able to emancipate herself. *Nozinto* is hurt by the fact that she is the cause of her children's sufferings however, she does not regret her actions. She stands by what she did to the end.

Nozinto becomes acutely aware of the abandonment by her friends following her arrest, as none of

them visit her in prison. Nevertheless, she demonstrates remarkable resilience, accepting her punishment with the understanding that the consequences of her actions are her sole responsibility. While she acknowledges the wrongfulness of her deeds and submits to the resulting sanctions, she simultaneously derives a sense of satisfaction from having asserted her autonomy and emancipated herself from patriarchal oppression. Although she experiences distress over the impact of her actions on her children, she does not express regret, remaining steadfast and resolute in defending her decisions to the end.

4.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, culture has been conceptualized as the totality of shared societal values, beliefs, practices, norms, regulations, material expressions such as food and clothing, and other collective activities that define a community. These cultural elements are transmitted across generations through processes of socialization and assimilation. Individuals who deviate from established societal norms are frequently labelled as disobedient or improper, and may be subjected to social, moral, or even legal sanctions. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that cultural practices and beliefs can be strategically manipulated to serve specific interests, often for the purpose of consolidating power or achieving social, political, or economic gain. In such cases, one group may be positioned as superior while another is made to feel inferior, reinforcing hierarchical structures that privilege the dominant group. This manipulation allows the dominant group to exploit culture as a mechanism of control, systematically suppressing those deemed weaker or subordinate. It is through these processes of cultural manipulation, codification of norms, and sanctioned oppression that patriarchal systems are historically entrenched, perpetuating gendered inequalities and restricting the agency of marginalized groups, particularly women.

In the analysis mentioned above, the marginalized group is women, who are systematically subordinated within the cultural framework. Cultural norms and practices are frequently structured to favour men, reinforcing male dominance and positioning women as secondary or subordinate members of society. In many contexts, women themselves are co-opted into the enforcement of these patriarchal structures, policing other women's behaviour to maintain the existing hierarchy. This phenomenon illustrates how power operates not only through direct oppression but also through the internalization and perpetuation of patriarchal norms. While culture is often portrayed as static and immutable, this view is misleading; culture is, by nature, dynamic and evolves alongside societal

development. As communities advance, values, beliefs, social rules, regulations, and ways of living are subject to transformation in order to reflect new knowledge, technologies, and ethical understandings. Consequently, cultural practices that perpetuate gender inequality are not fixed; they can be interrogated, challenged, and reshaped to promote equity and social justice, providing opportunities for marginalized groups, particularly women, to reclaim agency and redefine their roles within society.

It is important to recognize that culture and tradition are closely linked to gender, as social constructions form an integral part of a people's identity, which is expressed through their culture. These social constructions allow the dominant gender to manipulate cultural norms and practices for their own benefit, often consolidating power and maintaining hierarchical structures. Through such cultural manipulation, the subordinated gender is conditioned to enforce these same practices and norms upon one another, perpetuating the cycle of oppression. For example, elderly women often impose rigid cultural expectations on younger women, who in turn transmit these norms to girls. Similarly, married women enforce these standards upon unmarried women and newly married brides, while mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law regulate the behaviour of daughters-in-law. This cyclical enforcement fosters conflict, competition, and distrust among women, manifesting as undermining behaviours, jealousy, and other forms of antagonism, thereby sustaining the very patriarchal system that subjugates them.

The dynamics outlined above are exemplified in *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*, wherein women themselves perpetuate patriarchal principles against other women. This internalized oppression manifests through the demoralization of fellow women, with traditional patriarchal ideologies employed as justification for such actions. Those who exhibit African feminist tendencies are systematically suppressed, often being branded as disobedient, disrespectful of cultural traditions, and unfit as wives. The character of *Nolasti* embodies resilience and determination in her pursuit of equality within her household, insisting that her contributions as an equal provider be acknowledged. Her characterization reflects African feminist ideals, as she demonstrates an acute awareness of the systemic challenges faced by women and actively seeks to challenge these entrenched narratives. Notably, she endeavours to educate her husband on issues of gender equity. However, her efforts are met with significant resistance, predominantly from other women who vehemently criticize her assertive and unwavering disposition. These women ultimately align themselves with her abusive and oppressive husband, collectively undermining *Nolasti*'s agency and subjecting her to social

isolation. Consequently, *Nolasti* returns to her marital home, not out of submission or devotion to her husband, but rather for the well-being of their son. Importantly, throughout her struggle, *Nolasti* does not vilify men; instead, she advocates for a vision of mutual respect and interdependence, wherein men and women coexist as equals.

In *UDike noCikizwa*, cultural practices are strategically manipulated by the patriarch, *Cikizwa*'s father, for personal financial gain. His actions demonstrate a deliberate exploitation of tradition as he seeks to secure livestock as a form of bride wealth by coercing *Cikizwa* into an arranged marriage with a man unknown to her. The livestock, in this context, functions as a tangible representation of wealth, and he eagerly anticipates the social and economic elevation such wealth promises. Kobo (2016:4) underscores that, within Xhosa society, the quantity of cattle owned by a household serves as a critical indicator of the patriarch's wealth, which in turn secures him respect and dignity within both the community and the family unit. Similarly, Samuelson (2007:55) affirms that "cattle were the glue of this society and the primary markers of status and wealth," emphasizing the centrality of livestock in reinforcing patriarchal dominance and sustaining socio-economic hierarchies.

Cikizwa's father is supported in his actions by his sister, *Nomazala*, who adamantly asserts that it is a father's duty and right to marry off his daughter as he sees fit. She subscribes to the belief that such an arrangement secures *Cikizwa*'s future stability and ensures that she will have a home, thus portraying the act as one of paternal care and provision. *Nomazala's* perspective reflects an uncritical acceptance of patriarchal customs, as she fails to comprehend or acknowledge *Cikizwa*'s emotional turmoil and resistance to the marriage. Instead, she compels *Cikizwa* to express gratitude to her father, framing his actions as an act of selfless sacrifice rather than a violation of her autonomy. This attitude exemplifies how women can become agents of patriarchy, perpetuating oppressive practices under the guise of cultural preservation and familial duty.

In contrast, *Cikizwa*'s mother demonstrates concern for her daughter's emotional and psychological well-being; however, her apprehension does not translate into action against her husband. Her silence in the face of injustice reveals the deeply entrenched power imbalances within the household, where challenging patriarchal authority is both socially and personally perilous for women. Her inability to voice opposition underscores how fear and internalized subordination contribute to the endurance of oppressive systems. The only overt resistance emerges from *Cikizwa*'s second paternal aunt, *Nomatiletile*, whose anger at the situation exposes a critical awareness of the harm caused by such

practices. *Nomatiletile's* opposition introduces a counterpoint within the family dynamic, one that challenges the conflation of culture with patriarchal control. This interplay between complicity, silence, and resistance within the family unit illustrates the multifaceted ways in which patriarchy is maintained and contested, revealing that while patriarchal systems are reinforced by cultural norms, they are not immune to critique and opposition from within.

Cikizwa's mother demonstrates the archetype of a "captured" wife and mother, one whose agency is constrained by patriarchal expectations. Although she privately disagrees with her husband regarding the arranged marriage, she deliberately chooses silence on the matter, prioritizing her role as a "proper" wife over advocating for her daughter's autonomy. Her refusal to voice her dissent reflects an internalized fear of transgressing socially prescribed gender roles, where speaking out would render her disobedient and undermine her perceived respectability. Despite witnessing the confrontation between *Nomatiletile* and *Nomazala* over *Cikizwa*'s coerced marriage, she refrains from intervening or supporting *Nomatiletile's* defence of *Cikizwa*'s rights. This silence, while seemingly passive, actively contributes to the perpetuation of women's oppression, including that of her own daughter. By acquiescing to patriarchal norms under the guise of cultural and traditional adherence, *Cikizwa*'s mother becomes complicit in sustaining the very structures that harm her. In this regard, her behaviour aligns with that of *Nomazala*, as both women, albeit differently, reinforce hegemonic ideologies that subordinate women. Consequently, their combined actions not only perpetuate *Cikizwa*'s suffering but also undermine *Nomatiletile's* efforts to challenge these oppressive practices and secure *Cikizwa*'s liberation from the constraints of an imposed marriage.

In *Nongxaki nezakhe*, *Nongxaki*'s fundamental rights as both a human being and a woman are systematically violated by the matriarchal figures in her life from an early age. Her mother plays a pivotal role in this suppression, vehemently opposing *Nongxaki*'s access to formal education beyond basic literacy. This deliberate limitation reflects a broader ideological commitment to grooming her daughter exclusively for domesticity and subservience within a marital context. *Nongxaki*'s upbringing is thus framed around the singular objective of moulding her into a "proper" wife, with marriage positioned as the ultimate purpose of her existence. This trajectory of oppression intensifies when her paternal aunt announces that an arranged marriage has been orchestrated for her, effectively stripping *Nongxaki* of agency over her own future. Such actions underscore how patriarchal ideologies are not only perpetuated by men but also enforced and normalized by women within the family structure, thereby reinforcing cycles of gendered subjugation under the guise of cultural and

traditional imperatives.

However, *Nongxaki*'s resilience enables her to resist the imposed arranged marriage and instead marry the man she genuinely loves. Nevertheless, her marital experience reveals that patriarchal oppression persists, as her mother-in-law emerges as a staunch enforcer of patriarchal ideologies. In *Nongxaki nezakhe,* matriarchs are depicted as the principal agents sustaining patriarchal dominance, with instances of women perpetuating cruelty toward other women reaching their peak. Rather than supporting one another in confronting systemic injustices, these women prioritize the protection of male authority. This dynamic is vividly illustrated through *Nongxaki*'s mother-in-law, who consistently shields her son despite his abandonment of his wife and child and mistreats *Nongxaki* for seeking her husband's presence and demanding his responsibility as a partner and father.

Despite these challenges, *Nongxaki*'s indomitable spirit prevails. She remains steadfast in her determination to salvage her marriage, even as her husband repeatedly neglects her, leaving her isolated at his family's homestead for prolonged periods before ultimately disappearing. Confronted with such intolerable circumstances, *Nongxaki* courageously decides to travel to Cape Town in search of him. Her subsequent return to her parental home, undeterred by the potential stigma from her family and the wider community, underscores her strength and refusal to succumb to societal pressures. This act is particularly commendable as it signifies her willingness to begin anew despite the harsh criticism and judgment she faces.

Nongxaki nezakhe also highlights the constructive role of tradition when practiced ethically and with integrity. *Nongxaki*'s initial marriage bypassed proper cultural protocols, as the union was hastily and deceitfully arranged without the payment of lobola. This omission reflects a distortion of tradition for convenience rather than its genuine observance. Upon *Nongxaki*'s return, however, her father-in-law, accompanied by his brothers, seeks to rectify these transgressions by negotiating lobola and committing to honour the cultural processes that had been neglected. True to their word, they return with the requisite cattle and formally reintegrate *Nongxaki* into her marital family. The resolution of her story, culminating in her reunion with her husband and the restoration of her dignity through proper cultural observance, suggests a reconciliation between tradition and justice, illustrating that cultural practices, when applied conscientiously, can foster harmony rather than perpetuate oppression.

Nongxaki nezakhe illustrates that gender equality, cultural values, and traditional ideologies can

coexist harmoniously, provided these systems do not violate fundamental human rights. The narrative demonstrates this possibility when *Nongxaki* marries the man of her choice and, through the observance of proper cultural protocols such as the payment of lobola, experiences a positive transformation in her marital life. This shift underscores the notion that cultural practices, when exercised ethically and respectfully, can complement rather than conflict with the principles of justice and equality.

The text further highlights the necessity for culture and tradition to evolve in response to contemporary understandings of human rights. Rigid adherence to practices that undermine personal freedoms, particularly those of women, results in systemic oppression disguised as cultural preservation. Transformation does not entail abandoning cultural identity; rather, it calls for reinterpreting and reforming practices to ensure they uphold dignity, autonomy, and equality for all individuals. By portraying a successful balance between tradition and individual rights in *Nongxaki*'s eventual marital fulfilment, *Nongxaki nezakhe* advocates for a progressive cultural framework, one that preserves valuable customs while discarding those that perpetuate harm. Such an approach not only strengthens cultural integrity but also ensures that tradition serves as a vehicle for empowerment rather than a tool of subjugation.

In *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda*, *Nozinto*, despite her morally questionable actions, disrupts and redefines the patriarchal status quo by openly defying entrenched cultural and traditional norms. Her journey signifies a radical break from male-dominated expectations as she liberates herself from the constraints of patriarchal authority and its prescriptive regulations. She first challenges her peers by questioning the restrictive expectations imposed on her conduct as a wife, thereby confronting the internalized ideologies that perpetuate women's subordination. Subsequently, she contests the authority of her father-in-law and the broader community by rejecting societal dictates regarding the behaviour of widows and insisting on her autonomy in determining the burial arrangements of her husband.

Nozinto's defiance not only represents an act of personal emancipation but also serves as a powerful critique of the cultural and traditional systems that prioritize male control over women's lives, even in death. By asserting agency over matters traditionally governed by patriarchal authority, she exposes the arbitrariness of such customs and opens a discourse on women's rights to self-determination within cultural frameworks. Her actions, though controversial, highlight the

transformative potential of individual resistance in challenging oppressive structures, suggesting that meaningful societal change often begins with the courage of those willing to oppose unjust traditions. In this way, *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda* presents *Nozinto* as a complex yet pivotal figure whose rebellion underscores the possibility of reconciling cultural practices with gender equality through critical engagement and reform.

Nozinto exercises remarkable autonomy in living her life according to her own desires and convictions. She engages in an extra-marital affair, an act that elicits severe disapproval from her friends, despite the fact that her husband, *Zamile*, has openly engaged in multiple affairs with other women. This double standard reflects the entrenched patriarchal bias that excuses male infidelity as "natural" while condemning the same behaviour in women. Both *Zamile* and *Nozinto* occupy the same marital status, yet societal reactions are markedly unequal, revealing the deeply gendered nature of moral judgment and social censure.

The contrasting responses to male and female infidelity highlight the systemic reinforcement of patriarchal norms that regulate women's sexuality while granting men relative freedom and impunity. *Nozinto*'s actions, therefore, function as both a personal assertion of agency and a critique of these unequal cultural standards. By refusing to conform to the expectations imposed upon her gender, she challenges the legitimacy of societal rules that restrict women while privileging men. Her defiance exposes the inherent contradictions in patriarchal moral codes and underscores the broader need for reevaluating cultural and social frameworks to ensure equitable treatment of both genders in matters of morality, marriage, and personal freedom. Through *Nozinto*, the narrative foregrounds the tension between individual autonomy and societal norms, illustrating the ongoing struggle for gender justice within entrenched patriarchal systems.

Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda illustrates the profound impact of multifaceted abuse, oppression, infidelity, and negligence on an individual's life. *Nozinto*'s plight is further compounded by the absence of a genuine support system, as the women she considers friends actively despise and gossip about her. Within this social framework, male transgressions are excused as natural or permissible, while women who act similarly are harshly judged and condemned, reflecting deeply entrenched gender inequities and societal double standards.

The narrative emphasizes that *Nozinto* is held personally accountable for her husband's actions, with her friends vilifying her for perceived psychological instability and refusing to listen without

prejudice. Already marginalized and scrutinized by broader society, *Nozinto* faces intensified isolation as even those she trusts, such as *Phalisa*, distance themselves from her. This lack of solidarity highlights how patriarchal structures are reinforced not only by men but also by women who internalize and perpetuate gendered hierarchies, leaving victims like *Nozinto* without allies.

Despite these overwhelming challenges, *Nozinto*'s resilience and fortitude are striking. Though she commits an unlawful act that cannot be morally justified, she confronts the consequences with remarkable courage, willingly standing trial and accepting her punishment. Her actions are framed as a deliberate effort toward self-emancipation, demonstrating her agency in a context that severely limits women's choices. She grapples with the emotional toll of her children's suffering as a result of her decisions, yet she perceives no alternative route to asserting her autonomy. *Nozinto*'s story, therefore, underscores both the severity of societal and gendered oppression and the extraordinary strength required for women to resist, challenge, and navigate patriarchal constraints, even at great personal cost.

Women in many African contexts are subjected to oppressive practices that are often justified under the guise of tradition and culture. These practices compel women to endure significant subjugation across various spheres of life, including society at large, their households, marital relationships, and even within themselves, as they contend with the emotional and psychological consequences of sustained suppression. Despite these formidable challenges, numerous African women demonstrate remarkable resilience, courageously resisting patriarchal pressures and striving to reclaim autonomy over their lives.

However, the potential for successful resistance is frequently undermined by the absence of solidarity from other women. The outcomes of many struggles could have been markedly different if women had received mutual support. For instance, *Nolasti*'s efforts to educate her husband about gender equality might have yielded greater success had her sister-wives and mother actively supported her advocacy. Similarly, *Cikizwa*'s tragic decision to commit suicide to be with her chosen partner might have been avoided if her father, aunt, and broader community had recognized her right to choose her spouse. *Nongxaki*'s marital life could have been more harmonious from the outset had her family permitted her to marry the man she genuinely loved. Likewise, *Nozinto*'s eventual psychological instability and emotional detachment might have been mitigated had she received consistent, non-patriarchal guidance and support from her friends during the early stages of her marital challenges.

This analysis underscores the critical role of collective female solidarity in challenging patriarchal structures. When women support one another in resisting oppressive cultural practices, they not only empower individual agency but also contribute to broader social transformation, fostering environments in which gender equality and human dignity can be realized. In essence, the presence or absence of intra-gender support can significantly determine whether women's struggles against patriarchal oppression culminate in liberation or further victimization.

Throughout these narratives, the female protagonists embody a feminist ethos that extends beyond personal liberation, often without consciously realizing that their defiance and resilience serve as a broader struggle for the rights and emancipation of all women. Their robust and strong-willed characters exemplify courage and agency, challenging entrenched patriarchal norms despite facing significant resistance, not only from men but also from other women who have internalized and perpetuate these same systems of oppression.

Crucially, these women do not pursue the subjugation or overthrow of men; rather, their struggle is framed as a call for recognition, dialogue, and equitable partnership. They seek acknowledgment of pervasive gender inequalities and advocate for collaborative efforts to dismantle patriarchal structures, emphasizing that liberation is not a zero-sum struggle between the sexes but a shared responsibility. Their actions highlight the possibility of fostering gender justice through negotiation, education, and principled resistance, demonstrating that women's empowerment can coexist with societal cohesion when guided by equity and mutual respect. In doing so, these protagonists serve as paradigmatic figures whose courage and moral clarity illuminate pathways toward a more just and egalitarian society, illustrating that the fight against patriarchy is both individual and collective, personal and universal.

In summary, the narratives examined in this chapter illuminate the complex and multifaceted ways in which African women navigate and resist patriarchal oppression. Through the experiences of *Nolasti*, *Cikizwa*, *Nongxaki*, and *Nozinto*, it becomes evident that women endure systemic subjugation socially, culturally, and within their own households yet their resilience and agency challenge these constraints. These protagonists confront not only male domination but also the complicity of women who perpetuate patriarchal norms, highlighting the critical need for intra-gender solidarity in the struggle for equality. Their actions, though sometimes controversial or personally costly, underscore a broader feminist consciousness: they do not seek to dominate men

but to foster recognition, equality, and collaborative dismantling of oppressive structures. Collectively, these stories demonstrate that while tradition and culture can perpetuate inequality, they can also be reinterpreted and transformed to support justice, autonomy, and the empowerment of women, offering a compelling vision of resistance, courage, and the pursuit of gender equity.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Introduction

This study examined the phenomenon of women enforcing patriarchal ideologies upon other women, often rationalizing such actions as adherence to cultural and traditional norms. It highlighted how these internalized practices contribute to the perpetuation of systemic gender inequality, demonstrating that oppression is not solely imposed by men but also reinforced by women who uphold and legitimize patriarchal structures. Furthermore, the study explored the conceptualization of feminism within the African context, emphasizing a form of gender advocacy that does not position men as adversaries or competitors, but rather seeks to engage and educate them about the importance of gender equality and shared responsibility in dismantling oppressive systems. Central to the study was an analysis of the mechanisms of oppression and subjugation that women endure at the hands of men, particularly through patriarchal institutions, and the ways in which other women, often under the guise of cultural preservation, enforce and perpetuate these structures to safeguard male dominance. By interrogating these dynamics, the study underlines the intricate interplay between culture, tradition, and gendered power, illustrating how transformative change requires both critical engagement with patriarchal norms and the cultivation of solidarity among women to challenge systemic inequities effectively.

The study employed a qualitative analysis of four isiXhosa literary texts, comprising both a novel and three dramatic works: *UNongxaki nezakhe* (1976) by G. Belebesi, *UDike noCikizwa* (1988) by A.M. Mmango, *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* (1994) by H. Mothlabane, and *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda* (1997) by L.L. Ngewu. This selection was made deliberately, as isiXhosa novels are often the primary focus in literary investigations concerning gender, culture, and patriarchy. Nevertheless, the inclusion of isiXhosa dramas represents a conscious effort to expand the scope of scholarly inquiry, given that studies focusing on these texts remain limited. By analysing both novels and dramas, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which isiXhosa literature engages with themes of women's oppression, patriarchal enforcement, and feminist resistance, while also contributing to the relatively underexplored field of isiXhosa drama in gender studies. This methodological approach allows for a nuanced comparison across genres, highlighting both the

continuity and variation in the representation of women's experiences and agency within Xhosa cultural and literary contexts.

The study deliberately selected two literary texts authored by women and two by men, a methodological choice designed to enable a critical examination of gendered perspectives in the construction and perpetuation of patriarchal ideologies. This deliberate contrast allows for a nuanced analysis of how male and female authors represent women's oppression, agency, and resistance within isiXhosa cultural and literary contexts. Highlighting this element is fundamental to understanding the ways in which gendered authorship influences narrative voice, thematic focus, and the interpretation of cultural and traditional norms.

Additionally, the study consciously engages with older literary texts, recognizing their continued relevance in exploring enduring patterns of gender relations and patriarchal enforcement. Utilizing these texts provides a historical lens through which to assess whether traditional and cultural principles, as depicted in past literature, remain operative in contemporary contexts or if they have undergone transformation. By juxtaposing historical and cultural frameworks, the study interrogates the persistence or evolution of societal norms governing women's roles and rights, thereby illuminating both continuity and change in Xhosa cultural practices. This approach not only underscores the lasting impact of traditional ideologies but also facilitates a critical reflection on the extent to which feminist resistance, as portrayed in these texts, resonates with or challenges ongoing gendered inequalities.

The findings section will further engage with the concept of "beyond feminism" as defined within the scope of this study, critically evaluating whether this notion has been effectively captured through the literary texts under analysis. This involves exploring how amaXhosa women's experiences, agency, and resistance are represented across different historical and socio-political contexts, including the precolonial, colonial, postcolonial, apartheid, and post-apartheid periods. By situating the analysis within these distinct eras, the study highlights the evolving and enduring challenges faced by amaXhosa women, as well as their strategies of negotiation, resilience, and empowerment in the face of patriarchal and societal constraints.

Moreover, this chapter emphasizes the significance of examining Black women, particularly amaXhosa women, within these historical frameworks. Focusing on amaXhosa women allows for a nuanced understanding of how cultural, traditional, and colonial legacies intersect to shape gendered

experiences, while also illuminating the ways in which these women have actively contested and redefined their roles across time. By analysing their lived realities and literary representations, the study not only foregrounds the complexity of gender dynamics in Xhosa society but also contributes to a broader discourse on African feminism, highlighting how historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts inform both oppression and resistance. This approach underscores the necessity of recognizing the specificities of amaXhosa women's struggles and achievements in order to fully appreciate the broader implications of feminist thought and practice in African contexts.

This chapter will further elaborate in its findings how cultural and traditional norms are frequently manipulated to serve patriarchal interests, resulting in the systemic oppression of women. It will critically examine the mechanisms through which culture is co-opted to reinforce male dominance and limit women's autonomy, while simultaneously highlighting the intrinsic value and significance of cultural practices when approached ethically and equitably. The chapter underscores that this study does not seek to reject or undermine culture and tradition; rather, it advocates for a re-examination and transformation of cultural practices to ensure they are inclusive, non-oppressive, and conducive to the well-being of all members of society.

Moreover, the findings will propose alternative frameworks for practicing culture and tradition that preserve their meaningful social and communal functions while eliminating elements that perpetuate inequality or harm. This approach emphasizes that culture need not be inherently restrictive or patriarchal; instead, it can serve as a vehicle for education, empowerment, and social cohesion when interpreted and enacted in ways that respect human rights and gender equity. By exploring these possibilities, the chapter contributes to ongoing debates on the reconciliation of cultural preservation with feminist principles, demonstrating that it is possible to honour and sustain tradition without compromising the dignity, agency, or equality of any individual or group.

In conclusion, this chapter will provide a comprehensive synthesis of the key insights and analyses presented throughout the study. It will place significant emphasis on the ways in which the research has addressed the central themes, including the enforcement of patriarchal ideologies by women, the negotiation of cultural and traditional norms, and the articulation of African feminist perspectives in isiXhosa literature. Furthermore, the chapter will directly respond to the problem statement, offering well-substantiated answers to the research questions posed at the outset of the study. By doing so, it will demonstrate how the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of gender dynamics, the

complexities of women's agency, and the potential for reconciling tradition with principles of equality and human rights. Additionally, the conclusion will highlight the broader implications of the study for literary scholarship, gender studies, and the ongoing discourse on African feminism, underscoring the relevance of the findings for both academic inquiry and societal transformation.

5.2. Findings and recommendations

This study found that the portrayal of female characters differs markedly between male and female authors. The texts authored by men in this study; *UDike noCikizwa* (1988) by A.M. Mmango and *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda* (1997) by L.L. Ngewu tend to depict women in a more negative or constrained light, often emphasizing their subordination, moral failings, or complicity within patriarchal structures. In contrast, the texts authored by women; a novel and a drama, *UNongxaki nezakhe* (1976) by G. Belebesi and *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* (1994) by H. Mothlabane offer more nuanced and empowering representations of female characters, highlighting their agency, resilience, and capacity to challenge oppressive norms. This contrast underlines the influence of authorial perspective on the construction of gendered narratives, suggesting that female authors are more likely to foreground women's experiences, struggles, and acts of resistance, while male authors may inadvertently or deliberately reinforce patriarchal ideologies through their characterizations. The findings thus illuminate the critical role of gendered authorship in shaping literary depictions of women and provide insight into the broader cultural and social discourses reflected in isiXhosa literature.

In the male-authored texts analysed in this study, female characters are frequently depicted in predominantly negative or constrained roles, often as voiceless victims subjected to both societal and familial oppression. They are characterized in ways that emphasize materialism, moral deviance, rebelliousness, or even extreme behaviours such as violence, murder, or suicide. For instance, in *UDike noCikizwa* (1988) by A.M. Mmango, the character of *Cikizwa* is presented as a young woman engulfed in anguish, coerced into an arranged marriage with a man she neither knows nor loves. Her agency is systematically denied, as her father and paternal aunt refuse to engage with her perspectives or acknowledge her objections, effectively rendering her voiceless. This portrayal underscores the rigid enforcement of patriarchal authority and the ways in which women's desires and autonomy are subordinated to male-dominated social and familial structures. Furthermore, such characterizations reflect broader societal anxieties about women who challenge normative expectations, positioning

them as transgressive or morally culpable while simultaneously exposing the oppressive mechanisms through which patriarchy maintains control over female subjects. This pattern of depiction highlights the gendered lens through which male authors often construct women's identities, reinforcing traditional power hierarchies and limiting the representation of women's resistance and agency.

Cikizwa is depicted primarily as an asset for financial gain, reflecting the instrumentalization of women within patriarchal structures. As Peter (2010:69) notes, "female characters in male literary drama texts represent a means of economic gain through marital arrangements and deceit." In this context, *Cikizwa*'s value is assessed not in terms of her individuality or agency but in terms of the wealth and status her marriage can secure for her family. Initially, she is portrayed as subservient and seemingly hopeless, resigned to comply with her father's will. She articulates her sense of powerlessness by asserting that she has no choice but to obey the law, which dictates that children must respect and follow their parents' commands. This initial depiction situates *Cikizwa* within a framework of enforced obedience, highlighting how patriarchal norms systematically deny young women agency over their own lives and choices.

The coercion *Cikizwa* experiences intensifies as she is bullied into marrying a man, she neither knows nor loves, with her family, including those who attempt to support her, such as *Nomatiletile* actively silencing resistance. Her objections, grounded in rational reasoning and personal autonomy, are dismissed by her paternal aunt, *Nomazala*, who labels her mischievous and naïve. Beyond her family, the broader community reinforces this oppression: when *Cikizwa* refuses to marry in the church, she is publicly condemned and branded as rebellious and ungrateful. Peter (2010:71) observes that *Cikizwa* is portrayed as a "silenced slave," a characterization that aligns with Jarret-Macauley's (1966:10) assertion that stereotyping females as sexually and socially subordinate has been instrumental to their systemic oppression.

Ultimately, *Cikizwa*'s narrative culminates in her tragic suicide, an act framed as the only means through which she can reunite with her true love, *Dike*, in the spiritual realm after he is killed by her father. This denouement underscores her vulnerability within a society that denies women autonomy and protection, portraying her as unable to withstand the cumulative pressures of familial, societal, and patriarchal constraints. While this depiction emphasizes the destructive consequences of systemic oppression, it also problematically frames female weakness as an inevitable outcome, illustrating how male-authored texts can reinforce gendered narratives that limit women's capacity

for agency and resilience. *Cikizwa*'s tragedy thus functions both as a critique of patriarchal exploitation and as a reflection of the broader societal mechanisms that render women powerless in the face of rigidly enforced cultural and traditional expectations.

Nomatiletile, *Cikizwa*'s paternal aunt, emerges as a rare figure of empathy and advocacy, recognizing the injustice inherent in the arranged marriage imposed on her niece. She initially attempts to reason with her sister, *Nomazala*, who staunchly supports the arrangement on the grounds of cultural adherence. *Nomazala* insists that their brother, *Cikizwa*'s father, is fulfilling his duty by selecting a husband for *Cikizwa*, thereby securing her a home and promising future. She further asserts that culture is not static and should remain free from the influence of new generational ideas, framing any challenge to tradition as an unnecessary disruption. This interaction highlights the tension between rigid cultural preservation and the evolving needs and rights of younger women, illustrating how patriarchal interpretations of tradition can suppress female autonomy even when mediated through female family members.

In her continued efforts to protect *Cikizwa*, *Nomatiletile* confronts her brother directly, challenging his authority over his daughter's life. However, her advocacy is met with ridicule and insult, reinforcing the patriarchal principle that men may speak and act without accountability toward women. *Cikizwa*'s father's response exemplifies the societal notion that men, as heads of families, hold absolute authority, rendering women's objections illegitimate. This confrontation underscores the systemic silencing of female voices, even among women attempting to mediate or resist patriarchal dictates and highlights the limited avenues available for women to assert agency within family structures dominated by male authority.

The narrative further complicates the portrayal of women through the character of *Nonjoli, Cikizwa*'s neighbour, who embodies jealousy and malevolent intent. *Nonjoli* is depicted as using witchcraft to eliminate *Cikizwa*, motivated by her desire for *Mjongwa*, thereby reinforcing historical and cultural stereotypes of women as inherently dangerous or morally corrupt. Peter (2010:164) notes that "females are accused of metamorphosing their human form into bats, converting people into zombies, and of causing death through the use of toxic medicines," situating *Nonjoli* within a broader historical discourse that portrays women as witch-like figures capable of extreme harm. This characterization echoes both historical events, such as the era of Nongqawuse, and biblical narratives, notably the story of Adam and Eve, where women are depicted as sources of temptation or evil.

Collectively, these portrayals illustrate the dualistic representation of women in male-authored texts: they are simultaneously victims of patriarchal control and subjects of moral suspicion, reinforcing societal anxieties about female power, agency, and autonomy.

In *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda*, *Nozinto* is depicted as a morally corrupt figure, often labelled a gold-digger who hires assassins to kill her husband for financial gain. This portrayal casts her as both avaricious and morally reprehensible, aligning her character with negative stereotypes of women in patriarchal narratives. Moreover, her friends reinforce this characterization by labelling her as evil, while the priest generalizes such judgments to all women, asserting that they are barred from attending graveyard services due to supposed witchcraft tendencies. These representations reflect a broader cultural discourse in which women's actions, whether real or perceived, are scrutinized and condemned, often invoking supernatural or moralized reasoning to justify their exclusion and subordination.

Nozinto is further depicted as mischievous and heartless, particularly in her conduct while still in mourning. She is shown as intoxicated, seemingly devoid of emotion for her deceased husband, which suggests a lack of remorse for her transgressive actions. Her defiance of expected mourning behaviours constructs her as rebellious, challenging the cultural and traditional norms that prescribe endurance, patience, and fidelity for wives, even in the face of abuse, neglect, or infidelity. Her engagement in an extra-marital affair is framed as a response to her unfulfilled sexual and emotional needs, yet it is judged far more harshly than her husband's infidelities, revealing the gendered double standards embedded in the society depicted. Furthermore, *Nozinto*'s decision to have her husband murdered positions her as a coward in the text, choosing what is presented as an expedient solution rather than enduring the hardships expected of women. This narrative framing disregards the complexity of her motivations and the oppressive circumstances that drove her actions, instead reinforcing patriarchal notions of appropriate female behaviour.

Nozinto's friends operate as extensions of patriarchal authority, consistently judging and condemning her rather than addressing her husband's failings. Their gossip, name-calling, and moral censure illustrate how women themselves can act as agents of patriarchy, upholding dominant cultural norms that regulate and punish female behaviour. By invoking culture and tradition to justify their negative attitudes, her friends align themselves with patriarchal power structures, perpetuating the marginalization and vilification of women who challenge societal expectations. This dynamic

underscores the intersectional enforcement of gendered norms, demonstrating that women's oppression is sustained not only through male authority but also through the complicity and policing of other women who internalize and reproduce patriarchal ideologies.

In contrast to the male-authored texts, the works of female authors analysed in this study present a notably more progressive portrayal of women, emphasizing their resilience, agency, and courage. In *UNongxaki nezakhe* (1976), Belebesi directly addresses and challenges the pervasive societal narratives that depict women as inferior, submissive, or morally and intellectually deficient. Through her narrative, Belebesi critiques the negative labels and connotations historically assigned to women within Xhosa society and broader African contexts, positioning her female characters as embodiments of strength and self-determination. This deliberate counter-narrative seeks to dismantle patriarchal assumptions, illustrating the capacity of literature authored by women to both reflect and actively contest social inequalities.

Within *UNongxaki nezakhe*, the traditional gender hierarchy is effectively reversed, with women portrayed as autonomous and empowered human beings capable of making independent decisions. These characters exercise authority over their lives, establishing rules and setting boundaries that guide their interactions and relationships. They actively shape their own destinies and demonstrate determination and perseverance in pursuing their goals. Importantly, the text emphasizes collaboration rather than antagonism, depicting women as partners who work alongside men as equals rather than adversaries. This partnership underscores a vision of gender relations rooted in mutual respect, shared responsibility, and co-dependence, contrasting sharply with the subjugation and victimization depicted in male-authored texts.

Furthermore, Belebesi's female characters embody resilience in the face of failure and transformation. They are unafraid to start anew when confronted with setbacks, demonstrating courage in acknowledging mistakes and accepting the consequences of their actions. This capacity for self-reflection and accountability highlights the holistic strength of these characters, portraying women as complex individuals who navigate challenges with intelligence, integrity, and moral agency. By foregrounding these qualities, *UNongxaki nezakhe* offers a vision of womanhood that is both empowering and aspirational, illustrating the potential for African women to assert their autonomy and redefine their societal roles while maintaining ethical and relational integrity.

UNongxaki nezakhe can be critically examined through the lens of gynocriticism, a theoretical

framework that "is purposefully and collectively concerned with the articulation of women's experiences and guides itself by its own impulses to autonomous self-expression" (Showalter, 1999:4). Gynocriticism centres the experiences, consciousness, and agency of women, aiming to interpret female literature through women's perspectives rather than through the traditional male gaze. Moi (1985:83) asserts that texts authored by women about women inherently differ from those written by men, as female writers are more likely to engage deeply with the lived experiences, historical realities, and cultural and traditional challenges faced by women. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that not all female authors adopt a distinctly female-centred perspective; some may internalize patriarchal norms and write through a male-oriented lens, reflecting the pervasiveness of the male gaze even in women's literature.

In *UNongxaki nezakhe*, female characters are depicted as engaging in cooperative and balanced relationships with their male counterparts, despite occasional tensions that arise from patriarchal expectations. The narrative emphasizes equality and mutual respect, even when women encounter suppression due to entrenched cultural norms. A case in point is *Nongxaki*'s mother, who initially prohibits her daughter from receiving formal Western education, asserting her authority over *Nongxaki*'s upbringing. Eventually, a compromise is reached, allowing *Nongxaki* to acquire basic literacy skills a concession that, while limited, reflects negotiation and adaptability within the patriarchal household. This compromise illustrates how women navigate restrictive cultural frameworks to create space for agency, even when it falls short of fully realizing their rights.

Nongxaki herself is portrayed as audaciously determined and strategically assertive in resisting patriarchal control over her marital choices. Confronted with the prospect of an arranged marriage, she openly rejects the imposition of a suitor chosen for her, while simultaneously allowing her family to proceed with the formalities, fully intending to assert her own choice. Her actions culminate in a bold public defiance: she refuses the imposed suitor in a church setting, in the presence of family, friends, and community members, and instead marries the man she loves. This decisive act of self-determination illustrates the intersection of personal agency, resistance to patriarchal constraints, and the assertion of female autonomy, aligning closely with gynocritical principles that foreground women's experiences, choices, and capacity for self-expression. Through *Nongxaki*, the text exemplifies how women navigate, negotiate, and sometimes subvert traditional norms to assert control over their destinies, offering a model of empowered femininity within a culturally embedded context.

When *Nongxaki* is abandoned by her husband at his parents' homestead, she demonstrates remarkable courage and initiative by traveling to a province unfamiliar to her in search of him. At the time, societal norms dictated that women were not to follow husbands who had migrated to urban centres for employment; they were expected to relocate only if explicitly invited or brought by their husbands. By defying this expectation, *Nongxaki*, like her sister-in-law before her, challenges restrictive gender norms that sought to confine women's mobility and autonomy. While her mother-in-law opposes her actions, her father-in-law supports her, creating a critical source of solidarity within an otherwise oppressive household. This support, particularly from a male family member, is noteworthy as it contrasts sharply with male-authored texts, where female agency is often undermined or denied. In this context, *Nongxaki*'s father-in-law functions as an ally who validates her agency, whereas her mother-in-law actively perpetuates patriarchal control, highlighting the gendered complexities of familial dynamics and support structures in women's lives.

Nongxaki also exhibits resilience and self-assurance when returning home to face her parents and community upon realizing that her marriage may be irreparably broken. Exhausted by her continuous efforts to salvage a marriage abandoned by her husband, she confronts her circumstances with honesty and accountability, apologizing to her parents while simultaneously asserting her right to continue her life independently. This portrayal underscores the recurring theme in the novel of strong-willed and courageous female characters who persist in exercising autonomy despite societal expectations or familial opposition. *Nongxaki*'s actions exemplify women's capacity to negotiate, resist, and reconstruct their lives even within rigid patriarchal contexts, illustrating the novel's broader commitment to highlighting female empowerment and agency.

Similarly, in *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*, the female protagonist *Nolasti* is depicted as a daring, resolute, and progressive woman committed to transforming the status of women in both her household and wider community. Her activism extends beyond personal concerns, as she mobilizes her neighbour and best friend to collectively challenge patriarchal cultural and traditional practices that limit women's agency. Together, these women advocate for gender equality and work toward the emancipation of women from systemic oppression, demonstrating the power of female solidarity in effecting social change. *Nolasti*'s determination to confront entrenched patriarchal norms, collaborate with other women, and persist in the face of adversity reinforces the portrayal of women as agents of transformation, emphasizing the importance of collective action and courage in resisting gendered injustice.

The other women characters in *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*, particularly *Nolasti*'s fellow sister wives, are depicted as agents of patriarchy, reinforcing and perpetuating the very structures that oppress them. Their behaviour suggests that they have been subconsciously conditioned to accept patriarchal norms as natural and immutable. Limited exposure to alternative ways of life may also contribute to their constrained worldview, inhibiting progressive thinking. In contrast, *Nolasti*'s semi-education and employment as a domestic worker have broadened her perspective, enabling her to observe and engage with social and economic dynamics beyond her rural environment. Her interactions with people in the suburbs expose her to diverse lifestyles and practices, fostering a more progressive and critical understanding of gender roles, social mobility, and personal agency.

Nolasti's sister wives, however, remain confined by the limitations of rural life, with no employment opportunities and total dependence on their shared husband for financial and emotional support. Their lives are deeply enmeshed in patriarchal cultural and traditional systems, which they perceive as the natural order. For these women, ambition and personal agency are secondary to being "proper wives," a role defined by subservience, domestic labour, and unwavering loyalty to their husband. Consequently, they view *Nolasti*'s assertiveness and her challenges to male authority as improper and threatening, failing to recognize her efforts as a pursuit of equality rather than rebellion. Their adherence to these norms highlights how internalized patriarchy can operate through women themselves, policing the behaviours of others and perpetuating systemic oppression.

Nolasti is portrayed as courageous and assertive, consistently standing up to her husband and ensuring her voice is heard despite persistent attempts to silence her. She is self-sufficient and serves as the primary financial contributor to the household, which further strengthens her claim to agency and decision-making authority. Her independence challenges the traditional expectations of female subordination, as she refuses to accept unilateral decisions from her husband and insists on being included in matters that affect her and her household. *Nolasti*'s character exemplifies the intersection of resilience, economic autonomy, and assertiveness, demonstrating how exposure, education, and self-reliance can empower women to resist patriarchal dominance while advocating for equitable participation in both domestic and social spheres.

Nolasti demonstrates remarkable resilience, persisting in her fight for gender equality despite enduring physical abuse within her marriage and facing opposition from virtually everyone around her. After leaving her husband and returning to her parents' home, she encounters further backlash

from her brother and mother, leaving her isolated and unsupported. Yet, she does not capitulate to these pressures. Recognizing the importance of her son, she eventually returns to her husband's homestead, strategically modifying her approach from radical confrontation to a more conservative, yet still effective, method of advocating for gender equity. This shift underscores her pragmatic understanding of resistance, illustrating that women's empowerment can be pursued through adaptable strategies that balance assertiveness with contextually informed negotiation.

The literary texts analysed in this study, while distinct in style and period, collectively provide valuable material for African feminist critique. Two of the works were authored during the apartheid era, while the remaining two were written post-apartheid; yet, in both periods, traditional patriarchal ideologies persist, demonstrating their enduring influence. Contemporary reports, such as those from News24 (2022), highlight the continued prevalence of practices like *ukuthwala*, where girls as young as 13 or 14 are abducted for marriage in rural areas of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Television programs, such as *Isencane leNgane*, similarly depict underage marriages arranged by parents, reflecting the ongoing transmission of oppressive patriarchal norms by elderly women to younger generations. In these contexts, women often enforce patriarchal expectations upon other women, perpetuating derogatory labels and societal constraints originally imposed by men. Such continuity illustrates that, despite social and political transformations, deeply ingrained cultural practices continue to shape and constrain women's lives.

Addressing these challenges requires collective action and solidarity among women. It is essential for women to recognize that culture and tradition are not static; social norms, behaviours, and practices must evolve to reflect the progressive values of each era. Women must cease the practice of undermining one another and instead find ways to empower, support, and elevate each other. Additionally, the valorisation of marriage as the ultimate marker of female achievement must be critically reconsidered. Women should be afforded the freedom to pursue paths of their choosing, so long as such choices do not infringe upon the rights of others. By fostering solidarity, challenging restrictive cultural norms, and promoting self-determination, women can collectively work toward dismantling patriarchal structures and creating spaces for autonomy, equality, and empowerment.

Greater emphasis must be placed on ensuring that women have access to formal education and are represented in senior professional positions. Education equips women with knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to society and to exercise agency

over their own lives. Women must also work for themselves and their families, cultivating self-sufficiency and independence. Economic and emotional autonomy empowers women to realise their potential, engage in romantic or professional relationships without dependence on others, and make informed decisions without being constrained by financial or social pressures. Independence diminishes the necessity to overcompensate through submissiveness, fostering confidence and self-reliance that are foundational to achieving personal and professional fulfilment.

Equally important is the need for targeted engagement with men, particularly in rural areas, to promote equitable coexistence between genders. Men must be educated on principles of mutual respect, collaboration, and African feminist perspectives to challenge deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes. Young men and boys should be taught from an early age to recognize gender equality, share responsibilities, and interact respectfully with women. Such early interventions can dismantle misconceptions that feminism threatens male authority or implies female superiority. By providing clear and culturally contextualized explanations of feminism within African societies, men can better understand its goals, reducing hostility and resistance to gender equality initiatives.

Furthermore, dialogues around gender equality must extend beyond academic spaces into all spheres of African life, particularly within rural communities where conservative traditions often reinforce patriarchal norms. Children, both boys and girls should be raised in environments that emphasize mutual respect, equitable division of responsibilities, and the inherent value of every individual, regardless of gender. By fostering equitable household and community practices from an early age, societal attitudes toward gender can gradually transform, ensuring that future generations internalize principles of equality, respect, and shared accountability. This holistic approach, integrating education, community engagement, and cultural transformation, is essential for dismantling systemic patriarchy and promoting sustainable gender equity.

Activities that visibly demonstrate and promote gender equality should be deliberately constructed within communities, schools, and workplaces. Such initiatives not only raise awareness about equitable practices but also provide practical examples of how men and women can coexist as partners in social, economic, and domestic spheres. Additionally, the publication of literature focusing on gender equality is essential. African men and women must collaborate to critically examine and resist Western ideologies that have, at times, negatively influenced African cultural practices. Historically, Africa had matriarchs who lived in harmony and equality with their male

counterparts, working together in governance, family structures, and community development. Prior to colonial disruption, African men and women coexisted productively, demonstrating that equitable collaboration is both possible and culturally grounded. A revival of these cooperative traditions is critical for contemporary African societies aiming to achieve gender parity.

Literature functions as a vital instrument for reflecting social realities and fostering transformative change. By portraying women's lived experiences, struggles, and achievements, literature can educate society on African feminist principles, highlight pathways for unity, and challenge entrenched patriarchal narratives. As Molubo (2020:112) asserts, "literature finds solutions by reflecting real life in order to transform the negative myths perceived by society about women." Accordingly, there is a pressing need for more African feminist writings that document women's histories, experiences, and resistance. Such works do not merely reflect reality but actively contribute to social transformation, empowering women while sensitizing communities to the necessity of gender equity.

In the isiXhosa literary texts examined, this study observes that patriarchal systems exert considerable pressure on young people to uphold traditional taboos and customs. In *UNongxaki nezakhe*, for instance, *Nongxaki* is prohibited from attending school by her mother, who believes that formal education is unnecessary for a girl and that she should instead be trained to become a "proper woman" in preparation for marriage. This enforcement of gendered expectations extends beyond education: *Nongxaki*'s mother frequently criticizes other girls and young women in the village who adopt modern practices, such as purchasing bread instead of baking it or using a Primus stove instead of making fire from scratch, which have become normative in rural amaXhosa communities. Through these portrayals, the text highlights how young women are socialized to conform to patriarchal traditions and how deviation from prescribed cultural norms is often met with ridicule. Ultimately, *Nongxaki* is coerced into an arranged marriage, reflecting the persistent enforcement of patriarchal cultural practices that prioritize tradition over individual choice and autonomy.

In *UDike noCikizwa*, *Cikizwa* is compelled to uphold and adhere strictly to cultural norms, having been raised to obey her parents and elders unquestioningly, regardless of the implications such obedience may have on her personal life. When *Cikizwa* voices her own opinions, she is labelled disobedient, highlighting how patriarchal systems often conflate self-expression with rebellion. Her refusal to marry *Mjongwa* in a church filled with villagers and relatives attracts disapproval and

gossip from the women of the community, who engage in lengthy discussions about her behaviour. This occurs even as more critical issues, such as the recent exposure of *Cikizwa*'s father as a murderer, remain overlooked, reflecting the disproportionate scrutiny women face and the prioritization of controlling female behaviour over addressing male wrongdoing.

Mjongwa, the intended groom, approaches the arranged marriage with transparency, asserting that his union with *Cikizwa* is motivated solely by a desire to honour his parents' wishes. He expresses no romantic interest in *Cikizwa* or any other woman, emphasizing the transactional and socially dictated nature of arranged marriages. Tragically, he is shot and killed during the wedding ceremony, a consequence of his attempt to fulfil parental expectations. The events in *UDike noCikizwa* illustrate the devastating consequences of rigid adherence to patriarchal customs, as all parties believe they are acting in accordance with cultural or familial obligations, yet ultimately encounter death and destruction. The narrative underscores the tension between individual autonomy and societal expectations, demonstrating the lethal potential of unexamined traditions.

In *Iinkunzi Ezimbini, Sigqibo's* two senior wives articulate a worldview shaped by early preparation for marriage, perceiving themselves as "proper wives" who must remain subservient to their husband regardless of how he treats them. They pledge never to challenge Sigqibo, even as he disrespects, abuses, and exploits them. Their compliance contrasts sharply with Nolasti, whose outspoken, robust, and resilient demeanour is met with disapproval and censure by her co-wives. These older wives embody the internalization of patriarchal norms, enforcing subservience and traditional gender roles among other women, while *Nolasti* represents resistance, autonomy, and the assertion of women's rights within a household and community framework dominated by patriarchal authority. This juxtaposition illustrates the spectrum of female responses to patriarchal systems, highlighting the complex dynamics of complicity, resistance, and empowerment within African domestic contexts.

In *Yeha Mfazi Obulala Indoda*, *Zodidi* is instructed by her husband to avoid associating with *Nozinto*, whom he labels as a disobedient and improper wife. This directive reflects the strict enforcement of patriarchal norms, whereby women are expected to conform unquestioningly to prescribed roles and behaviours. *Zodidi* is explicitly guided by her husband on how to behave, emphasizing the maintenance of cultural and traditional expectations, illustrating the ways in which men exercise control over women's social interactions and moral conduct.

Nozinto, meanwhile, faces similar impositions from her in-laws and the wider society regarding her

conduct as a widow. Her father-in-law instructs her on the proper observance of traditional and cultural practices, asserting that adherence is necessary to ensure social order and familial respect. He dictates the manner in which her husband is to be buried, effectively excluding *Nozinto* from decision-making regarding the funeral. Her plans and wishes are disregarded because she is a woman, demonstrating how patriarchal structures systematically silence female voices and devalue their contributions, even in matters that intimately affect their lives. This scenario underpins the broader theme of female marginalization within patriarchal societies, where women's autonomy is curtailed under the guise of cultural preservation, and their ability to navigate personal and familial responsibilities is subordinated to male authority.

5.3. Conclusion

Cultural and traditional norms that are constructed to exploit, suppress, and marginalize women represent a significant challenge that African societies have faced historically and continue to contend with today. Such norms are often legitimized under the guise of preserving culture and tradition, yet they function primarily to reinforce patriarchal control and limit women's autonomy. Evidence from precolonial African societies suggests that patriarchy, as it is commonly understood today, is not indigenous to Africa. African women historically exhibited courage, resilience, and leadership, living in harmonious and cooperative relationships with men while actively participating in all societal and economic activities. Kalowola (1998:95) asserts that patriarchy was largely absent in African societies prior to the arrival of colonizers, indicating that oppressive gender hierarchies were largely imported or exacerbated through colonial interventions.

African women played a critical and central role in the production systems of their communities, collaborating closely with men to ensure the efficient functioning of social, economic, and political structures. Their participation extended beyond domestic responsibilities, encompassing agriculture, trade, and communal governance, which underscores the historically integral role of women in maintaining societal stability. The imposition of patriarchal norms disrupted this balance, marginalizing women and subordinating their contributions to male authority. Recognizing the precolonial precedent of female agency and cooperation with men is essential for understanding contemporary struggles against patriarchal oppression and for envisioning culturally grounded strategies to restore gender equity within African societies.

Through colonialism, Western powers sought to consolidate their presence in Africa and advance

their conquest, strategically manipulating African cultural and traditional doctrines to serve their interests. One method involved convincing African men of their supposed superiority over African women, embedding patriarchal hierarchies within existing social structures. Observing that the colonizers' patriarchal system advantaged men, African men selectively incorporated these principles into their own cultural and traditional practices, resulting in significant disruptions to communal life. Historical events such as the story of Nongqawuse illustrate how young women were discredited and undermined because of their gender and age. Since that time, African women have frequently been stereotyped as witches or evildoers, a perception rooted in both colonial imposition and the subsequent reinforcement of gendered hierarchies within African societies.

This study demonstrates that men have often instrumentalized women to maintain and perpetuate their dominance, embedding patriarchal ideologies within the social fabric under the guise of culture and tradition. In turn, some women have internalized and enforced these norms, perpetuating cycles of cruelty, subjugation, and jealousy among other women. Such dynamics have generated deep divisions within African communities, creating animosity and mistrust among women while simultaneously reinforcing male authority. This internalized patriarchy underscores the complexity of gendered oppression, where women can become both victims and agents of systemic inequities.

Despite these challenges, many African women have recognized the need to advocate for the rights and emancipation of their fellow women, striving to combat gender inequality, discrimination, and patriarchal hegemony. These women have played a critical role in raising awareness, ensuring that injustices are acknowledged and addressed. This activism has contributed to the rise of African feminist movements and agencies that seek to reshape public and private narratives, challenge negative stereotypes in literature, and promote gender equality across societal domains. While progress has been made, significant work remains. African feminist principles must be systematically applied to evaluate and reform cultural and traditional practices, ensuring that customs do not infringe upon the rights of women or men and that all genders are equitably represented. Moreover, traditional leaders and communities need to be educated on gender inequality, and customary marriage practices, among other cultural norms, should be re-evaluated and adapted to protect and empower women as equal stakeholders within society.

Despite South Africa's unifying democratic constitution, gender commissions, and numerous legislative and policy interventions theoretically designed to protect women and children, many

women continue to live under harsh patriarchal conditions. Among the amaXhosa, women experience systemic oppression from a young age, being socialized into patriarchal practices and norms. Young girls are instructed not to have children before marriage and are warned of the consequences of defying this doctrine. Newly married women are initiated into the role of "proper wives," expected to be submissive, resilient, and enduring, often taught that perseverance in marriage entails tolerating abuse, subjugation, and emotional hardship. These practices reinforce patriarchal control and limit women's autonomy, embedding gendered expectations that persist despite constitutional protections.

This study highlights the resilience and agency of African women, specifically amaXhosa women, in confronting these oppressive structures. The female protagonists in the analysed literary texts demonstrate determination and courage in challenging the patriarchal norms imposed upon them. *Nongxaki* defies her mother-in-law and, after exhausting efforts to make her marriage work, returns to her parents' home. This is a remarkable act in a society where women are socialized to remain in loveless or abusive marriages. Her husband's eventual recognition of his transgressions underscores the potential for change when women assert their agency. Similarly, *Nolasti* resists *Sigqibo's* attempts to dominate her, ensuring that her voice is heard and leaving the marriage when subjected to abuse, only returning strategically to complete her mission of asserting gender equality. *Cikizwa* publicly rejects the man chosen for her in church, challenging community norms, and ultimately sacrifices her life for her beliefs. *Nozinto* mirrors her husband's actions, defying societal expectations to assert her independence and seek personal peace. Collectively, these women exemplify the capacity to take charge of their lives, asserting agency in the face of systemic oppression.

Progress has been achieved in some areas of gender equality through the gradual transformation of cultural and traditional norms, evidenced by declining marriage rates in African societies. Urbanization and exposure to diverse social practices have allowed women to assert their voices and, in certain cases, successfully emancipate themselves. Women have found ways to resist patriarchal impositions, and some traditional marriage practices have been relaxed, particularly in urban areas. Modifications include more flexible dress codes, adjustments in *isihlonipho* language, and relaxed initiation rites for newly married women. Economic empowerment has further enhanced women's status, as breadwinning women often command respect and influence within their households. However, these changes are uneven, and wealth should not be the sole determinant of women's autonomy or agency within families.

The roles of other women in enforcing patriarchal norms, as depicted in the selected literary texts, underscore the complexity of gender dynamics in amaXhosa society. Literature serves as a critical medium for both reflecting and shaping social attitudes. Negative portrayals of women by some male writers contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchal ideologies, reinforcing stereotypes that undermine efforts toward cultural and traditional transformation. Revising these narratives is crucial for fostering equitable social structures that benefit both men and women.

The women protagonists examined in this study embody resilience rooted in African feminist principles. They not only strive for personal empowerment but also advocate for the well-being of other women. Despite facing systemic hardships, they remain steadfast, transforming adversity into opportunities for enrichment and social change. Their vocal and determined resistance demonstrates that African feminist praxis prioritizes empowerment, visibility, and the reclamation of agency.

African feminism does not reject culture and tradition; rather, it builds upon and reinterprets African women's lived experiences within their specific historical, social, and political contexts. African feminist thought recognizes that women's experiences are shaped by distinct cultural and societal frameworks that vary across regions and political eras. For instance, the amaXhosa experienced oppression under colonial and apartheid regimes differently than the Venda in South Africa or women in Nigeria under colonial rule. Consequently, strategies for emancipation and resistance have been context-specific, reflecting the diverse realities of African women across the continent. African feminisms seek to honour these experiences while challenging practices that perpetuate inequality, advocating for a balance between cultural continuity and the protection of women's rights.

Throughout the different political regimes in Africa, it is crucial to recognize that African people actively resisted colonial domination and did not passively accept subjugation. Women played a central and indispensable role in resisting colonial and apartheid oppression, often working alongside men to challenge systemic injustices. Their contributions were not merely auxiliary; they were fundamental to both social and political resistance. By engaging in various forms of activism, African women ensured that their voices, perspectives, and agency were integral to broader struggles for freedom and societal transformation.

Prior to colonial intrusion, African women were highly active participants in the production system, holding roles that were just as vital and influential as those of men. They possessed economic, social, and political agency, which allowed them to contribute meaningfully to their communities. The

African family unit was both extensive and cohesive, encompassing not only blood relatives but also broader community members, emphasizing communal living and collective responsibility. This structure reinforced gender equity within societal and economic spheres, demonstrating that women historically operated as powerful and capable actors in African societies.

During the colonial period, amaXhosa women remained formidable in their resistance to oppression. Historical accounts highlight women such as King Maqoma's wife, who was an outspoken and influential figure during the conflicts between the amaXhosa and British colonial forces, ultimately resulting in her imprisonment at Robben Island. Similarly, Nongqawuse, despite her youth, emerged as a powerful voice whose prophetic messages challenged both the patriarchal authority of African men and the colonial agenda. Her influence alarmed colonial authorities, as her capacity to mobilize and critique existing structures threatened the systematic strategies employed to divide and conquer African communities.

Colonial and apartheid regimes recognized that African cultures and traditions served as barriers to domination. Consequently, colonial powers sought to manipulate and infiltrate cultural norms to create divisions between African men and women, embedding patriarchal hierarchies that privileged men over women. This disruption weakened communal cohesion and facilitated the entrenchment of colonial authority. The pressures of the era including racism, class divisions, and gender inequality necessitated innovative strategies of resistance, particularly in the southern-most regions of Africa, where communities had to contend with compounded forms of oppression.

The rise of women's movements during apartheid illustrates the critical roles women played within revolutionary struggles. These movements were acutely aware of gender injustices, even within the broader anti-apartheid struggle, and sought to create parallel structures that addressed women's concerns while advancing collective liberation. Women collaborated closely with men in challenging apartheid, ensuring their inclusion in shaping the envisioned democratic dispensation. Their activism underscored that gender justice and national liberation were inextricably linked, and that African women's leadership was central to the success of resistance movements. These historical contributions highlight the resilience, agency, and transformative capacity of African women, demonstrating that their efforts were vital both for gender equality and for broader societal emancipation.

Indeed, South Africa's Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) and the Bill of Rights enshrined therein

explicitly include protections for women and reject all forms of injustice, particularly given the historical marginalization they have endured. Women occupy prominent positions in Parliament and are increasingly represented in the private sector. Nevertheless, hegemonic masculinity continues to dominate many spheres, with men retaining disproportionate power and influence in most social, political, and economic sectors. This demonstrates that legal frameworks alone cannot fully eradicate entrenched patriarchal structures, and societal attitudes often lag behind legislative reforms.

Women are often pitted against each other to maintain and perpetuate patriarchy. Those who exhibit resilience, assertiveness, and independence are frequently ostracized by women conditioned to be submissive and compliant. Such internalized oppression not only undermines individual women but also reinforces patriarchal control across communities. The conditioning of women to regulate and police each other ensures the continuity of male dominance, illustrating the intersection of cultural, social, and psychological mechanisms in sustaining gender hierarchies.

Although African countries are culturally diverse, they share numerous socio-cultural traits, and their common colonial histories foster shared experiences of marginalization and resistance. These similarities facilitate the development of pan-African feminist frameworks capable of addressing the collective experiences of women across the continent. African feminism, as an umbrella term, encompasses multiple strands of women's empowerment movements, including academic, radical, middle-class, and grassroots variants. This plurality allows African feminisms to respond to the diverse realities of women while fostering solidarity and collective advocacy across national and cultural boundaries.

Cultural and traditional practices have undergone notable relaxation, particularly in urban areas and some parts of rural regions. Among the amaXhosa, there has been a decline in formal marriages and an increase in divorce rates for various reasons, reflecting a gradual shift in societal perceptions. This can be interpreted as progress, as women increasingly recognize that marriage is a choice rather than an ultimate achievement. High divorce statistics, even when reasons remain unclear, highlight the importance of women exercising agency to leave abusive or harmful unions. Persisting in marriages rife with infidelity, neglect, abuse, and suppression only perpetuates patriarchal toxicity, emphasizing the critical need for women to evaluate their well-being and assert autonomy.

Despite these changes, women are frequently socialized to persevere and to "build" their men, as if their primary responsibility is the emotional and social sustenance of men. Such expectations

reinforce gendered hierarchies and place undue burdens on women, limiting their capacity to pursue self-realization and autonomy. Challenging these entrenched norms requires both cultural reinterpretation and social education, encouraging women to reclaim agency and prioritize their rights, ambitions, and well-being alongside societal expectations.

Men are, therefore, often permitted to neglect responsibilities within marriages, while women are expected to uphold and sustain the household. Behaviours such as infidelity, addiction, and volatile temperament are frequently normalized for men, yet these same actions are condemned when exhibited by women. Similarly, male immaturity is tolerated even as men age, whereas women are expected to mature early to manage both family and marital responsibilities effectively. This double standard reinforces gendered expectations, burdening women with disproportionate responsibility while excusing men from accountability.

The rise of educated and economically independent women is a positive development in challenging patriarchal norms. More women are choosing single motherhood, whether by circumstance or design, and there is a noticeable increase in households led by women and women breadwinners. However, these shifts often provoke anxiety among men, whose egos are threatened when women earn more or occupy positions of authority equal to or surpassing their own. Such tensions reveal the persistent influence of patriarchal ideologies and the struggle for men to adapt to evolving gender roles.

Despite these advances, women continue to face exclusion in many families and rural settings. They are often denied participation in decision-making processes, restricted from certain areas of the homestead, and marginalized during rituals conducted by their in-laws. For example, during traditional ceremonies such as *ulwaluko*, the boys' rite of passage into manhood, wives are relegated to domestic duties, despite being responsible for their children's welfare. This exclusion undermines women's authority and perpetuates inequitable power dynamics within familial and cultural structures.

Moreover, women themselves sometimes act as enforcers of patriarchal norms, criticizing other women for single motherhood, dress codes, sexual autonomy, or independence. Elderly women frequently instruct younger women on obedience and comportment, framing adherence to patriarchal expectations as essential for attracting or retaining a man. These behaviours, whether conscious or subliminal, perpetuate gender inequality and weaken collective efforts toward women's emancipation and empowerment. By policing each other, women inadvertently reinforce the very

structures that limit their agency and impede progress toward gender equity.

In conclusion, this study has critically examined the portrayal of African women in selected isiXhosa literary texts, highlighting the complex interplay between patriarchy, culture, tradition, and African feminism. The analysis demonstrates that male-authored texts often depict women as submissive, voiceless, or morally compromised, reinforcing patriarchal ideologies that justify women's oppression and subjugation. In contrast, female-authored texts celebrate women's resilience, agency, and capacity to challenge patriarchal norms, emphasizing collaboration between men and women while advocating for equality. Across the texts, women face multifaceted oppression not only from men but also from other women who, consciously or unconsciously, enforce patriarchal cultural practices.

The study also underpins the historical and socio-political dimensions of gender oppression in African societies. Precolonial African women were active, empowered, and integrated in societal decision-making; colonialism and apartheid disrupted these dynamics, introducing patriarchal ideologies that have persisted into contemporary society. Despite constitutional protections and legal frameworks in post-apartheid South Africa, women continue to confront structural inequalities, societal expectations, and cultural restrictions, especially in rural contexts. Yet, African women's resilience is evident, as they navigate these challenges, assert their autonomy, and engage in transformative actions that challenge patriarchal norms.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that African feminism offers a critical framework for understanding and addressing gender inequalities. By centring women's lived experiences, histories, and cultural contexts, African feminism provides a lens through which to interrogate oppressive practices while affirming women's agency and contributions. Education, economic independence, and social advocacy emerge as essential tools for empowering women and dismantling systemic inequalities. At the same time, cultural and traditional practices can be reinterpreted to promote gender equality rather than perpetuate oppression, highlighting the potential for harmonizing African heritage with contemporary notions of human rights and equity.

Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of solidarity among women, the need for progressive cultural transformation, and the role of literature as both a reflective and transformative medium. The female protagonists in the selected texts exemplify courage, resistance, and strategic agency, illustrating that women's empowerment is achievable even within restrictive patriarchal systems.

The study advocates for continued efforts to challenge gender hierarchies, educate both men and women on equitable practices, and cultivate African feminist approaches that ensure the protection, recognition, and advancement of women's rights across all spheres of society.

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