



The Violation of Men's Rights in Selected Northern Sotho Texts

Ramohlale M I¹, Chauke OR^{2*}, Maluleke N³

^{1,2,3}Department of Languages, University of Limpopo, Republic of South Africa

^{2*}Email: osborn.chauke@ul.ac.za, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7121-678x>

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the violation of men's rights in selected Northern Sotho texts. The study is guided by a qualitative approach. The approach involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. In this study, purposive sampling was employed. The researcher deliberately chooses whom to include in the study based on their ability to provide the necessary data. Data are collected using content and document analysis from sampled texts. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research methods, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning. Thematic analysis was also used as the method of systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across the dataset. New Historicism is advocated in this study; this theory seeks to find the meaning of a text by considering it within the context of the prevailing ideas and social assumptions of the historical era in which the text is produced. The rise of New Historicism is predicated upon the Poststructuralist tenet that appealed to New Historicism was the assumption that history was always 'narrated' and therefore the first sense of the events of the past are unreasonable and cannot be defended successfully. As a theory emerging as a reaction to old Historicism which viewed the text 'as an autonomous entity' (Ryan, 1999: 128), The study finds out that men also become victims of abuse, and the violation of their rights is just as criminal as the violation of the rights of their female counterparts. This study also inspires harmony and peaceful coexistence among consumers of its content. It is recommended that more studies of similar kinds should be undertaken to influence humanity to desist from violating the rights of other human beings.

Keywords: Man abuse, Dinonwane, Northern Sotho texts, ATR (African Traditional Religion) & Traditional Doctors.

INTRODUCTION

An ideal African family is made by the mother, father, and children; the father is known always fend for his family, and go out to look for a job in order to put considerable bread on the table. Mothers on the other hand are known to remain at home, care for children, and manage the money she receives from their husbands to buy food and make sure that all the children lead a prosperous life. It is on this score that whenever children go wayward, women will often threaten to report all the mischief to the father who is capable to inflict severe corporal punishment on the wayward child. Men in the families began to be followed by the dark cloud of fear, and brutality instead of being approachable and loving fathers. On the contrary, women are perceived as simple and approachable beings. In the family circles men accepted that role of being threats to their children probably for the sake of reinforcing the acceptable behaviour of their children even when they are far from home, not realising that they are being abused and further used as a means to an end.

In African folktales, men had always adopted the roles of being ogres (giants) who would cause an uproar and fear the societies. These ogres were alleged to prey on young boys and mostly girls for food. They would chase, catch, kill, and cook these children for their supper. Women folk never inherited the role of being ogres, but instead, they are the rescuers of the captured young boys and girls; this is how rife men are abused in the Northern Sotho texts. In the Northern Sotho *dinonwane*, the ogre usually appears as a trickster who tries to

imitate the traditional tricksters but lacks the cunning and intelligence necessary to play that role. The ogre is believed to be a human being turned animal, who has given up his intelligence and capacity for social interaction just because he has given in to unrestricted greed (Makgamatha 1991: 305). His actions make him appear to be persistently trying to be readmitted into society. Often called Dimo, Lekgema, or Temankgolo in the Northern Sotho *dinonwane*, he is usually presented as a wicked monster who is ugly and fearful because he has only one eye and one big toe or lone leg which enables him to run very fast, who is huge in size and has a deep rough voice. **He** delights in hunting humans, whom he kills and cooks in a big pot. His victims are invariably young, inexperienced, and unprotected children – usually girls (Makgamatha, 1993:66).

Matsepe (1996) in his novel *Megokgo ya bjoko* portrays the controversial male character, *Leilane* who is always in the middle of conflicts and the cause of disputes between the kings in the novel. Matsepe introduces Leilane as the male character who eats the dead fetus of the cow; his wife *Mohlatša* began to vomit profusely after realising that her husband is committing that illicit activity. Leilane began to assault his wife and alleged that she has no right to despise his food to the extent to vomit. Male characters in many Northern Sotho texts are vindicated and abused and their images are tarnished; this tendency must change because men are loving folks as well.

NEW HISTORICISM THEORY

The study was guided by the new historicism theory as espoused by (Ryan, 1999: 128), New Historicism is a theory that seeks to find the meaning of a text by considering it within the context of the prevailing ideas and social assumptions of the historical era in which the text is produced. The rise of New Historicism is predicated upon the Poststructuralist tenet that appealed to New Historicism was the assumption that history was always 'narrated' and therefore the first sense of the events of the past are unreasonable and cannot be defended successfully. As a theory emerging as a reaction to old Historicism which viewed the text 'as an autonomous entity

New Historicism 'reposition the text in the original discursive reality of the age in which it was produced' (Mukesh, 2003: 118). Led by Greenblatt, the New Historicists view history as not just an account of events that took place in the past, but rather an intricate description of human reality which is regarded as a tenet by the society in question. While a literary work may or may not tell us about the factual aspects of the world from which they emerge, it will tell us about the prevailing ways of thinking at that particular time. It is in this line that a literary work 'should be considered a product of its time, place and circumstances of its composition rather than an isolated creation of a genius' (Sharma: 2014).

The political and cultural angle that the theory provides in the interpretation of any literary work encourages literary studies to re-establish a link with the political and social world that gave rise to it (Howard, 1986). Other than intertextuality and the historical reading of the text, New Historicism contends that no reading of a literary or cultural text is definite. With the assumptions of New Historicism in place, it will be impossible to imagine a single response to the complexity presented in a text. New Historicists provides multiple reading and possibilities to a text rather than suggesting a conclusive idea to the text and it is through this provision of a multiplicity of meaning that the New Historicists contends that 'a work is not an autonomous body of fixed meanings, but represents a diversity of dissonant voices and unresolved conflicts in a specific culture' (Ukkan 2004, 22-33).

From the text above we extracted the following three main themes that directly pin on the nucleus of the study: one) that events of the past are unreasonable and cannot be defended successfully, two) that history is an intricate human reality that is regarded as a tenet by the society in question and thirdly) that no reading of a literary or cultural text is definite. Men were unreasonably used as wicked, unsympathetic, and mischievous characters in scripts of all genres, in folktales, novels, poetry, and songs, men inherit the characters who always put their image on the firing line. This norm is unreasonable for men and no culture can defend it successfully; thus men are loving being and do not deserve to be perceived negatively. The wrongful past of men as portrayed in African texts, Northern Sotho text in particular was embraced and advocacy condoned by the African societies in all African stories men will be ogres and giants used to scare children and it seems that men as well are content with these characters. This study is passionate to employ the turnaround strategy and persuade novice authors to write and develop texts in which men participate as well-intend beings. This will consolidate the fact that cultural texts are not definite but can be changed to suit contemporary circumstances.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY RESEARCH DESIGN

The study was determined to bring light to the violation of men's rights in selected Northern Sotho texts; to best address this notion, we found a qualitative research approach suitable because it allowed us to intermingle with the participants and thereby gain an insider perspective of the problem under study. Within this approach, we adopted the content and documents analysis which requires that data be examined and interpreted in order

to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge. The advantage of document analysis includes efficiency which means that it is not time-consuming but is more efficient than other research methods. Its effectiveness entails that it is less costly and makes it the method of choice. Thematic analysis was also used as the method of systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across the dataset. The data sets involve careful more focussed, reading and–reading data. Two main reasons to use thematic analysis are its accessibility and flexibility, the two criteria which allowed one to gain a deeper understanding of the issues at play. More specifically, like many other qualitative researchers, we adopted the notion of a case study as advanced by Stake (2010) because our epistemological stance is that knowledge is constructed and not discovered. This allowed us to become what he calls qualitative researchers interpreters and gatherers of interpretations.

STUDY SITE AND SAMPLING

The study took place in four South African schools, in Limpopo Province in Capricorn South District over a period of three months (in the last term of the year). Out of almost 200 secondary schools and 250 primary schools in the District, we selected two secondary schools and two primary schools because of their close proximity and relatedness in the curriculum. Our study, therefore, embraced the purposive sampling method since participants were selected for the purpose of having knowledge of Northern Sotho texts and are employed at strategic stations of interest for the study. We selected educators from each selected school (male and female) to form part of the research study. We finally had a total of 8 educators, 4 males and four females from both primary and secondary schools. Their schools are situated in a semi-urban context where educators learn cultural history from texts prescribed for their learners. The schools are classified under quantile three. The South African schools are classified under four quantiles. Quantile three represents schools that are at a moderate level by virtue of being located in developing townships next to the big Mankweng hospital and the University of Limpopo and are characterised by moderate poverty. Such schools are mostly no fee schools and provided food on a daily basis.

We gave a detailed explanation of the purpose and procedure of the study to participants and sought their consent. We explained to them that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary. We pledged our commitment to confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity to the participants as much as possible. Participants were then made to sign a consent form upon agreement (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

DATA COLLECTION

Following their agreement to participate in the study, we began to create a cordial atmosphere where we allowed them to tell us their experiences on how they were in overseeing the implementation of the curriculum in their schools. Data was constructed through two methods, semi-structured and document analysis.

Interviews

A semi-structured interview schedule was used to open up discussions with the teachers. We found the semi-structured interviews more appropriate to elicit the level of the women's experiences in the implementation of the curriculum in their schools. We probed extensively to allow the participants to elaborate more about their experiences in the implementation of the curriculum. This helped us to develop our own theoretical understanding of what constituted social change.

Data were collected using content and document analysis from sampled texts. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research methods, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning. Thematic analysis was also used as the method of systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across the dataset.

The interview schedule included the three elements of the New Historicism Theory, firstly, that events of the past are unreasonable and cannot be defended successfully. Secondly, that history is intricate of human reality which is regarded as a tenet by the society in question, and thirdly, that no reading of a literary or cultural text is definite. We asked about educational texts in which there is evidence of men's abuse, secondly the persistence of African culture to portray men as malevolent beings in Northern Sotho scripts. It was initially planned that each secondary and primary school would be visited four times to allow reasonable time for gathering raw data and for conversation with the participants, indeed all schools and participants were visited four times as planned. but during the search, our plan coincided with the school's examinations and unplanned workshops. Subsequently, the participants were visited four times. The first visit was for the arrangements and the introduction of the study. The second visit was for the initial interviews. The third visit was used for feedback and debriefing. The last secondary school was visited four times. The fourth visit was used for further conversations and clarifications on areas that were not clear.

Documents and Content Analysis

Document analysis was adopted as a method for data collection in order to complement interviews. Documents in the form of curriculum literary annual teaching plan for the past five years were perused to find all types of content in the form of literature books once prescribed and still prescribed for primary and secondary school

learners. Over and above the use of document analysis, we further employed the use of content analysis which entailed finding and selecting relevant content from folktales, short stories, novels, poetry, and songs in which men are abused and in some cases are made to inherit mischievous characters; selected texts were collected for scientific analysis. Analysed data were identified and systematically organised offering insight into patterns of meaning across the dataset.

Since data analysis involves organizing, reducing, and describing data collected by the researcher. We began right at the beginning of the study to analyse data. The audio-tape was played and notes were taken in order to re-organize it. Data was read again and again until categories emerged. The categories were then developed into themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the analysis of both interviews, documents, and content analysis, we came up with four main findings; which we classified under four themes: i) social issues, ii) cultural issues, iii) political issues, and iv) religious issues. These are further exposed in the sections that follow:

Social issues

Social issues are issues emanating from social circles; these are issues that involve societal perceptions and judgments. Each society has adopted certain judgments and agreements about the laws that must govern their societies, acceptable social organisation, and socially acceptable division of labour. Out of all the social elements that direct societies, social organisation are key and most relevant to this study. The social organization of most African families is embedded in a patriarchal and hierarchical system that precludes the possibility of women, who generally have lower status than men in the society to make deliberate choices on the number of children they want to have (Makinwaadebusoye2001:5). At marriage women tend to have lower status than all the members of their husband's family. The lower social status is actually what causes women to hand all powers and powerful responsibilities to men. Men therefore because of their masculinity, are spontaneously charged with delicate responsibilities to care for their families, fend for them and maintain discipline amongst their wives and children. Women who spend much of their time with children quite often will reprimand mischief with threats of reporting all mischief to their husbands. These innate characteristics of men lead them to develop a character of fear and rejection in society; this led to man's association with fearful characters in many African folktales.

The ogre as a trickster in the Northern Sotho *dinonwane* is sometimes witty, though in a stupid way. His ugly description clearly makes him represent some unwelcome evil in society, such as witchcraft. His ugliness, the size of his stomach, as well as his uncontrollable appetite for fat and tender young girls, make him an understandable cultural symbol; he may, for instance, represent rapists with their insatiable lust for young girls. As he clearly represents the evil that lurks in society, one understands why his trickery is always accompanied by stupid concessions which make it fail (Makgamatha, 1993:66).

Cultural issues

Culture serves to distinguish a people from others, and Aziza (2001: 31) asserts that:

Culture...refers to the totality of the pattern of behaviour of a particular group of people. It includes everything that makes them distinct from any other group of people, for instance, their greeting habits, dressing, social norms and taboos, food, songs and dance patterns, rites of passage from birth, through marriage to death, traditional occupations, religious as well as philosophical beliefs.

It is the cultural norm that a man must marry a wife and have children; a man is regarded as incomplete without a wife. A man must provide for his family, fend for them and protect them, thus a man who cannot perform all these duties is regarded as incompetent and a societal misfit. In many Northern Sotho texts, men are the only ones who transgress this cultural trait, even if somewhere in life there are women whose families are in disarray under their watch and management and in the absence of their husbands who are out to work. Men in African culture and Northern Sotho texts are always on the firing end, and this must be corrected.

In the drama *Bokgoni bja Basadi* by Mokoena (2015), the author managed to write a drama book with a powerful message that men must fend for and support their families. In this drama, *Sepekwa*, the antagonist is always working against the goals of the drama by having a secret lover at work. the conflict is raised to the next higher level when the man stays with Ruth the secret lover, discontinued to send money to his family and over and above discontinued to visit home. *Sepekwa* the antagonist receives his pension money, he squandered it with Ruth and when the money is finished Ruth chases *Sepekwa* out of the house that was built by the man. *Sepekwa* is forced to return to his wife whom he abandoned for many years and surprisingly his wife *Mmalebotho* embraces him.

Many Northern Sotho authors have the tendency of writing negatively about men and allocating them to vindictive and villainous characters in their books. Men because of their leadership qualities and masculinity

by nature and kind heart are always vulnerable; there are many wicked women out there whom the author could have written about but the author preferred to use men's character for the bad character.

Political issues

In literary texts, political issues were best presented through poetry. It was through poetry that many South African poets were able to convey emotional messages to their fellow black Africans to weaken the former apartheid regime. Political poems were approved because poets used subtle and hidden language easily interpreted by native speakers but hidden from white supremacy. For that reason, poets would communicate with the oppressed without fear to account and being arrested. Although poets managed to find the breakthrough, the only inconsistency was that most poems would address mostly appalling deaths of political male activists and none about female politicians.

Mojalefa, in his poem *Chris Hani*, wrote about the distressing death of Chris Hani; the poem formed part of the orthography of poems in the poetic book, *Montshepetsa bošego* compiled by Mamabolo (2016:51-52). Chris Hani was an ANC activist and one of the military wing generals. The poet narrated how he was killed and the impact of the shockwaves on the whole country because the son of the soil was assassinated. In stanza 1, poetic lines 1 & 2, the poet says:

*"E hlabile fase ka lenaka ye kgolo,
Mokgapamogolo o wele tuu! Ka lefase"*
(He feels down on his horn, the great one
The great hero has truly fallen)

The two poetic lines describe how Chris Hani died; the poet's description is not comforting but sends a shock to analysers of his poem. If the poet was describing the brutal death of a woman, he could have used comforting words instead of this harsh and inconsiderate words as in the case of a fallen man.

In stanza 3, poetic lines 1 to 4, the poet says:

Bahlokakhutšo ba mo nyaka,
Ba mo nyaka, ba mo nyaka,
Ba mo nyaka, ba mo hwetša,
Ba mo hwetša go sa gopola motho
(Agitated and cruel people searched for him,
They searched for him,
They searched for him, and found him,
They found him before anyone could think/know.)

Using the quotations of poetic lines above, the poet used words at will without any sympathy, precisely because the person who passed on/ killed is a man; if it was a woman or a child whom cruel people killed, then the poet could have used a sympathetic language and could have selected words to avoid a lot of criticism.

Religious issues

Across the whole African continent, Africans are known to worship ancestors; thus their religion is African Traditional Religion (ATR). In the African belief system, the family is made up of both the living members and the ancestors. The ancestors are still present, watching over the household and the property of the family. They are the powerful part of the clan, maintaining a close link between the world of men and the spirit world. They are believed to be interested in the welfare of their living descendant. They even exercise protection and discipline any erring member of the living belonging to their clan. Thus they are the guide of family affairs, traditions, customs, ethics & morality, health, and fertility. They punish cases like incest, stealing, adultery, bearing false witness, and other moral vices are regarded as elders of the family and they are reincarnated into the family (Ige, 2006:27).

Based on the above description of the ATR (African Traditional Religion), Rafapa (2015:49) in his novel *Leratosello*, portrayed a male character, *Mahlaba* (King *Sephuma's* traditional doctor) who is telling his king that he could not sleep the previous night because the ancestors kept on pestering him the whole night. *Mahlaba* says:

Badimo ba letše ba mpontšhitše tše dikgolo. Ba re madira a ga kgoši *Lehlagare*
A tseleng, a tllilo hlasela motse wo...badimo ba mpontšhitše le seolo, e lego seo
a tlogo tsorama go sona gore a bone le sa kua kgolekgole.
(The gods showed me big issues last night. They say troops King *Lehlagare*
are on their way to come and attack us. The gods even showed me the termite
hill which our spy must squat on it so as to have a better view of the enemies).

The character's claims clearly consolidate the African belief that ancestors do exist in African religion and most of all these claims of Ancestral existence are surfaced by the traditional doctor who is a man. Men are vulnerable, in most literary texts men are associated with malevolent statements like the unfounded claims that ancestors talked to them. Such claims are usually made by deceptive traditional doctors and in all literary texts

traditional doctors are men, men are always in jeopardy and always on the firing line; this behaviour must change.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that men also become victims of abuse, and the violation of their rights is just as criminal as the violation of the rights of their female counterparts. The study also inspires harmony and peaceful coexistence among consumers of its content. It is recommended that more studies of similar kinds should be undertaken to influence humanity to desist from violating the rights of other human beings. Literature is a reflection of what transpires in the community. According to Eagleton (1996:45), a literary work is a reflection of the social institutions from which they originate. A further recommendation is suggested that change must begin with the African societies where authors of Northern Sotho texts are coming from.

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