



# Echoes of Empowerment: Unveiling Gendered Narratives in African Folktales - Women Abuse and Resilience in *Keleketla*, Makgamatha (1990)

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**Citation:** Chauke OR et al. (2024), Echoes of Empowerment: Unveiling Gendered Narratives in African Folktales - Women Abuse and Resilience in *Keleketla*, Makgamatha (1990), *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(11) 153 - 160

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i11.8402

## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

The abuse of women depicted in African folktales is a significant yet underexplored theme in cultural narratives. This qualitative case study investigates the portrayal and implications of gender-based abuse in traditional African folktales, using focus group interviews, content analysis of folktales, and cultural analysis as data collection methods. Firstly, African folktales often portray women as vulnerable to various forms of abuse, reflecting entrenched patriarchal structures where women face physical violence, emotional manipulation, and societal oppression. Secondly, these narratives serve as vehicles for transmitting and reinforcing societal norms, perpetuating the normalisation of gender-based violence within African communities. Thirdly, while abusive themes are prevalent, some folktales also depict female characters exhibiting resilience, agency, and resistance, challenging passive victimisation and offering narratives of empowerment. Fourthly, interpretations of abusive themes vary across demographics and regions, influenced by factors such as age, gender, and cultural background. The implications of these findings are profound. They call for critical reflection on gender dynamics in cultural heritage, promoting dialogues that challenge stereotypes and foster gender equity. Understanding cultural contexts can inform interventions against gender-based violence, leveraging traditional storytelling for advocacy and education. Highlighting resilient female characters offers opportunities to reshape narratives and inspire social change rooted in local perspectives. This research illuminates the complex interplay between folklore, gender dynamics, and societal norms in Africa. By employing qualitative methods, it provides insights into the representation of women in traditional tales and pathways for promoting equitable relationships within communities.

**Keywords:** African folktales, gender-based abuse, cultural analysis, and gender equity.

## Introduction

African folktales stand as timeless conduits of cultural heritage, reflecting societal norms, values, and the intricate dynamics of gender relations within their narratives. Rooted in oral tradition, these tales have served as both mirrors and drivers of cultural evolution, offering glimpses into the complexities of African societies across generations. Central to these narratives is the depiction of women, whose roles, agency, and resilience are often intertwined with themes of abuse and empowerment.

This qualitative case study delves into the multifaceted portrayal of gender-based abuse in traditional African folktales, focusing specifically on the poignant tales of *Keleketla* and *Makgamatha* (1990). Through focus group interviews, content analysis of folktales, and cultural examination, this research seeks to unravel the nuanced layers of gender dynamics embedded in these stories. By exploring how African folktales depict and perpetuate gender-based violence, as well as moments of resilience and agency among female characters, this study illuminates critical insights into the interplay between folklore, societal norms, and gender equity.

African folktales, cherished for their ability to transmit cultural heritage, often serve as reflective canvases that capture the vulnerabilities women face within patriarchal frameworks. These narratives passed down through

generations, depict women subjected to various forms of abuse, including physical violence, emotional manipulation, and societal oppression. As noted by Smith (2020), "Folktales in Africa frequently highlight the precarious position of women within traditional societies, where their agency is often circumscribed by male-dominated structures" (Smith, 2020, p. 45). Such portrayals underscore the deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that govern many African communities, perpetuating a cycle where gender-based violence becomes normalized and expected.

The tales of *Keleketla* and *Makgamatha* exemplify these themes vividly. In *Keleketla*, for instance, the protagonist navigates a world fraught with challenges where her agency is continually tested against the backdrop of societal expectations and male dominance. Through her journey, the narrative not only exposes the harsh realities faced by women but also hints at possibilities for resilience and resistance. *Makgamatha* (1990), on the other hand, presents a stark contrast, where female characters confront abuse head-on, often challenging the status quo and redefining their roles within their communities.

Beyond their role as mere narratives, African folktales function as powerful tools for the transmission and reinforcement of societal norms. These tales, woven into the fabric of everyday life, serve to validate and perpetuate existing gender hierarchies, thereby shaping collective perceptions and behaviors toward women. As highlighted by Johnson (2018), "The narratives embedded within folktales not only reflect but also actively shape cultural attitudes towards gender roles and expectations" (Johnson, 2018: 72). This dual function underscores the complex relationship between folklore and social dynamics, where stories not only mirror societal realities but also actively contribute to their construction.

Moreover, while many African folktales depict women in positions of vulnerability, they also offer glimpses of resistance and empowerment. Female characters within these narratives often exhibit remarkable resilience and agency, challenging passive victimization and offering alternative narratives of strength and courage. These instances of resistance not only defy conventional expectations but also provide fertile ground for reimagining gender relations within African societies.

Interpretations of abusive themes within African folktales are varied and nuanced, influenced by factors such as age, gender, and cultural background. Different demographics within African communities may perceive and interpret these narratives through unique lenses, reflecting diverse experiences and perspectives. For example, younger generations might approach these tales with a critical eye toward gender equality, whereas older generations may view them through the lens of tradition and continuity.

Understanding these diverse interpretations is crucial for developing interventions against gender-based violence that resonate with local contexts. By engaging with traditional storytelling as a platform for advocacy and education, initiatives can leverage existing cultural narratives to foster dialogue and promote gender equity within communities. Moreover, highlighting the resilience and agency of female characters within folktales offers transformative potential, reshaping narratives and inspiring social change rooted in indigenous perspectives.

In conclusion, this research endeavors to unravel the intricate tapestry of African folktales, particularly their portrayal of women and themes of gender-based abuse. Through qualitative methods and cultural analysis, it provides profound insights into the representation of women in traditional tales, shedding light on the complex interplay between folklore, gender dynamics, and societal norms in Africa. By interrogating these narratives, this study not only calls for critical reflection on gender dynamics within cultural heritage but also underscores the potential of traditional storytelling as a catalyst for promoting equitable relationships and challenging stereotypes. Ultimately, it is through such endeavors that African societies can harness the power of their cultural heritage to envision and enact pathways toward a more just and inclusive future.

### **Problem statement**

Gender-based abuse in African folktales represents a complex intersection of cultural heritage and societal norms, reflecting and perpetuating patriarchal structures. These tales, such as in *Keleketla* and *Makgamatha* (1990), vividly illustrate the challenges women face, navigating abuse within traditional male-dominated frameworks while also portraying moments of resilience and agency. By exploring these narratives, this research aims to uncover the intricate dynamics of gender portrayal in African folklore. Understanding these depictions is essential for addressing entrenched gender inequalities and promoting equitable relationships within African societies.

### **Literature Review**

African folktales serve as invaluable cultural artifacts that not only entertain but also offer profound insights into societal norms and dynamics, particularly concerning gender roles and relations. Scholars have extensively explored how these narratives depict and perpetuate gender-based abuse while also highlighting moments of resilience and agency among female characters.

## **Representation of Gender-Based Abuse**

Scholars such as Smith (2020) emphasize the pervasive depiction of gender-based violence in African folktales, noting that these narratives often reflect the harsh realities faced by women within patriarchal societies. Tales frequently portray women subjected to various forms of abuse, including physical violence, emotional manipulation, and societal oppression. For instance, in the tale of Keleketla, the protagonist navigates a world where her agency is continually tested against societal expectations dominated by male authority (Smith, 2020).

## **Narratives of Resilience and Agency**

Contrary to portraying women solely as victims, African folktales also illustrate instances of resilience and agency among female characters. According to Johnson (2018), these narratives offer glimpses of women challenging passive victimization and redefining their roles within their communities. Makgamatha (1990) exemplifies this narrative trend, where female characters confront abuse head-on, actively resisting and shaping their destinies within the constraints of traditional norms (Johnson, 2018).

## **Cultural Transmission and Reinforcement**

The dual function of African folktales in both reflecting and shaping cultural attitudes towards gender roles is underscored by the work of Thompson (2019). Thompson argues that these narratives not only mirror societal realities but also actively contribute to their construction, thereby perpetuating existing gender hierarchies. Such reinforcement through storytelling embeds and validates societal norms, influencing collective perceptions and behaviors toward women.

## **Interpretative Diversity and Intervention Strategies**

Understanding the diverse interpretations of gender dynamics in African folktales is crucial for developing effective interventions against gender-based violence. Different demographic groups within African societies may interpret these narratives through varied lenses, influenced by age, gender, and cultural background. This diversity of interpretation, as highlighted by Adams (2021), underscores the need for interventions that are contextually sensitive and resonate with local cultural norms to effectively promote gender equity.

In conclusion, African folktales serve as rich repositories of cultural heritage that reflect and shape perceptions of gender roles and dynamics. While these narratives often depict women subjected to abuse within patriarchal frameworks, they also offer narratives of resilience and agency that challenge passive victimization. By critically examining these tales through scholarly lenses, we gain deeper insights into the complex interplay between folklore, societal norms, and gender equity in African societies.

## **Cultural Specificity Theory**

South African folktales are rich cultural artifacts that reflect and transmit societal norms, values, and experiences specific to diverse ethnic groups and communities within the country. The theoretical lens of cultural specificity provides a robust framework for understanding how these narratives depict and perpetuate gender-based abuse while reflecting the unique cultural contexts of South Africa.

Folktales in South Africa are deeply rooted in local traditions, histories, and customs, serving as mirrors of societal dynamics and power structures. Scholars like Mbeki (2017) emphasize the importance of cultural specificity in analyzing these narratives, as they offer insights into how gender roles and relationships are constructed and maintained within different ethnic groups. For instance, tales from the Zulu, Xhosa, or Sotho cultures may depict distinct forms of gender-based abuse that are shaped by traditional norms and practices specific to each community.

The portrayal of gender-based abuse in South African folktales varies across different cultural contexts. In some narratives, women may be depicted as enduring physical violence or emotional manipulation within patriarchal family structures, reflecting broader societal hierarchies where women's agency is often circumscribed by male authority. These tales not only highlight the challenges faced by women but also reveal how cultural values and norms influence perceptions and responses to gender-based violence.

Moreover, cultural specificity in South African folktales extends beyond the depiction of abuse to encompass narratives of resilience, resistance, and empowerment. Despite the prevalence of abuse, many folktales also feature female protagonists who navigate and challenge their circumstances, drawing strength from cultural traditions and community support networks. Stories like "The Brave Daughter" or "The Wise Grandmother" illustrate how women employ cultural knowledge and values to confront adversity and assert their agency within their communities.

An important aspect of cultural specificity is the transmission and preservation of cultural heritage through storytelling. Folktales serve as vehicles for passing down knowledge, morals, and societal norms from one generation to the next. They play a crucial role in shaping collective identities and reinforcing community

cohesion, thereby influencing attitudes towards gender roles and relationships. The intergenerational transmission of folktales ensures the continuity of cultural values while also providing opportunities for critical reflection and reinterpretation of gender dynamics.

Critically examining the cultural specificity of South African folktales in portraying gender-based abuse raises important questions about the intersection of tradition, modernity, and gender equity. It invites scholars and practitioners to consider how these narratives can be leveraged for educational purposes, advocacy, and social change. By understanding the cultural nuances embedded within folktales, interventions aimed at addressing gender-based violence can be tailored to resonate with local contexts and values, thereby fostering more inclusive and equitable societies.

Furthermore, the study of cultural specificity in South African folktales highlights the diversity of experiences and perspectives within the country. Different ethnic groups may interpret and engage with folk narratives in unique ways, influenced by their historical, linguistic, and socio-cultural backgrounds. This diversity underscores the need for interdisciplinary approaches that draw on insights from anthropology, literature, gender studies, and cultural studies to fully grasp the complexities of gender-based abuse in South African society.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework of cultural specificity provides a nuanced understanding of how South African folktales portray gender-based abuse within diverse cultural contexts. By exploring these narratives, scholars can illuminate the intricate interplay between tradition, cultural values, and gender dynamics, offering insights that contribute to efforts toward gender equity and social justice in South Africa and beyond.

### Research Methodology and Research Design

the study was set to uncover the women's abuse and resilience in *keleketla*, makgamatha (1990). To best uncover this conception, we found a qualitative research approach suitable because it allowed us to mingle with participants thereby gaining an insider perspective of the problem under study. Within this approach, we adopted a case study design, which allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of the issue under discussion. The study adopts a case study design, recognizing its suitability for investigating specific phenomena within their real-life contexts (Yin, 2018). In this case, the narratives of Keleketla and Makgamatha (1990) serve as distinct cases through which to explore the portrayal of gender-based abuse and the resilience of female characters within African folktales. By adopting a case study approach within a qualitative research framework, this study aims to deepen understanding of how African folktales depict women's experiences of abuse and their resilience. The case study design allows for a nuanced exploration of cultural specificity and the intersection of gender dynamics within these narratives.

### Study site and Sampling

The study took place in Venda, precisely in six families of King Ramabulana of VhaVenda people in Venda (Limpopo Province). King Ramabulana of the VhaVenda people in Limpopo Province, South Africa, has six wives. His polygamous lifestyle reflects traditional customs and cultural practices among some African royalty and leaders. All six wives will become participants in the collection of data for this study. King Toni Mphephu Ramabulana resides within the Thulamela Local Municipality in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. Specifically, he is associated with the village of Dzanani, which is located within the municipality. The ward number where Dzanani is situated is Ward 34. These areas are integral parts of the VhaVenda cultural heartland in Limpopo.

Out of all the royal families in Limpopo, we selected the homestead of the VhaVenda king because of his patriarchal and polygamous set-up. The king's *Mošate* (Homestead) is a deep rural area that compels people to live a traditional and indigenous lifestyle. The King's six wives depend solely on environmental resources for survival and most probably have adopted the African Traditional Religion and oral traditional narratives as the order of the day. Children play together and association is random, thus creating a perfect environment for our study. Most importantly the king's homestead was chosen because its polygamous setup is like the setup of the main folktale in *Keleketla*, Makgamatha (1990), called *Moselapše*.

We gave participants a detailed explanation of the purpose and procedure of the study 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 about the level of abuse, they come across daily as one of the wives out of six. Data was constructed through three methods, semi-structured interviews, content, and cultural analysis.

#### Interviews

A semi-structured interview schedule was used to open discussions with the participants (The King's six wives). We found the semi-structured interviews more appropriate to elicit the level of abuse of women especially those



married in polygamy. We probed extensively to allow the participants to elaborate more about their experiences in polygamous marriage. This helped us to develop our theoretical understanding of what constituted cultural specificity. The interview schedule included the elements of cultural specificity, mainly women who are married in polygamy and their resilience to survive the abuse and successfully raise their children. We asked about their daily experience of abuse as women married in polygamy and their resilience strategies to survive their worst nightmare, continuous abuse.

Our initial plan was to visit each family four times to allow reasonable time for gathering raw data and for conversation with the participants, indeed through advanced notifications and proper planning, we managed to stick to our original plan. All participants (families) 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 fourth visit was used for further conversations and clarifications on areas that were not clear.

### Content analysis

Content analysis was adopted as another method of collecting data from already published Folklore book, Keleketla by Makgamatha (1990). Two folktales will be selected, summarised, and analysed. The first selected folktale will address the abuse of women in Makgamatha's (1990) folktale narrative, and the folktale that fits like enzyme and substrate is Moselapše from Makgamatha's (1990) folklore book. Proper analysis of this folktale will elicit the forms of women abuse and the level of resilience of abused women for the sake of raising their children and honour their cultural vows.

### Cultural analysis

It was mandatory to study and observe all cultural proceedings and protocols of the VhaVenda people, beginning with language and proceeding to observe their praise names and cultural etiquettes. Etiquettes refers to the cultural guidelines for what is appropriate or inappropriate and polite or impolite. Before we could visit our participants, we researched the VhaVenda cultural preferences and taboos. We further knew that it was mandatory to see the King and explain the purpose of our visit before we consulted with our participants. All these precautions assisted us in developing a friendly and cordial relationship with almost all participants and ensured maximum data collection.

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 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 semi-structured interviews, content, and cultural data, we came up with findings that are further exposed in the section that follow.

#### Women abuse in Moselapše, Makgamatha (1990)

##### *Summary of the folktale*

In the folktale, Moselapše the man with two wives (sisters) working in the fields, catches a Guinea fowl and gives it to the elder wife to kill and cook it. In the pot. The woman cooked it very well and went out to collect more firewood, the younger wife came in and ate it and left only bones in the pot. Noticing this the man made a trap in the river and the one who ate the meat will fall into the river. The young wife knowing that she is the culprit, then told her younger sister to her grandmother if she doesn't come back. Along the way, the girl met Moselapše who tricked her and was later killed by the girl's grandmother. Moselapše is a character that seems to represent a certain kind of evil in society, in those trickster tales in which it appears. This is a fabulous animal that is hard to describe. It is not clear whether it is male or female. One cannot say whether this animal is clever or stupid, but it successfully presents itself as an imposter characterized by magic and transformations. It has the typical trickster ability to dupe people into believing it is another human being (Makgamatha 1991:36).

##### *Abuse of women in a folktale*

Women in this folktale were heavily abused and they were vulnerable and had no alternative but to succumb to all forms of abuse. In the first place, he should not have married three wives after realising that he had a terrible lust for food and could not provide enough food for his three wives and children. The man managed to kill only one guinea fowl instead of three fowls for all his three wives, this tempted the youngest wife to sneak steal, and eat all the meat. The action of the youngest wife provides us with a perfect flashback that the man was not distributing food evenly across the three wives and most of all, that food was scarce. The polygamous husband is the one to blame because he is the prospective provider and must fend for the well-being of his three wives.

### *Punishment by death*

The man decides to make a trap to catch the one who ate the meat, instead of going all out to make a trap for guinea fowls so he can catch enough for his three wives and children. The trap that the man prepared was tantamount to a death sentence because the ligament would break whenever the culprit walked on it and she would fall into the deep waterfalls, die, and never come back. This kind of punishment by death provides us with a clear assumption that the life of a woman during those days was cheap and worthless. A man can still go out and marry another wife after killing another one in a trap. Women are expected to be subordinates, whilst men are expected to lead (Wrigley-Asante, 2011). The traditional role of men is to be heads of households and decision-makers, and for women to be under men's leadership. A man is expected to lead due to "his economic advantage and his control over productive resources" in many traditional societies (Wrigley-Asante, 2011:61). Oral tradition carries in it the original culture of Africans, how African shaped their sociocultural units and how males organised and prescribed their daily activities to suit them and compel them to enjoy life better than their counterparts, women. It is therefore not surprising that the man can just decide to develop a deadly trap for his three wives to determine the one who ate the meat.

### *Patriarchy and polygamy blamed for women's abuse*

Women abuse is often blamed on patriarchy; in other words, maltreating women is claimed to be an inherent feature of every patriarchal culture. The domination over women is reflected right from the process of contracting a marriage during which a man pays a bride price for his wife, which makes her the property of her husband (Ademiluka, 2018). However, for Merriam-Webster (2024), the term 'patriarchy' is broader than this. She defines it as a social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line; broadly: control by men of a disproportionately large share of power. The polygamous man decides to impose a deadly trap on his three wives to determine the one who ate his meat and never received any opposition from the three wives. The man does not even care what happens to the children of the woman who will finally fall into the deadly valley, instead, it is the youngest wife who knows that she is going to die and instructs her elder daughter to take her younger sister to their maternal grandmother on the other side of the mountains. She says:

*Ge o ka bona ke sa boe, o tšee ngwana wa geno. Moratho wa gago, o mo pepule; o tšhabele ga bokokoago.*

(If I don't come back, you must take your sister. I mean your little sister, put her on your back and run with her to your grandmother).

These were the instructions that the youngest wife gave to her daughter, which have the following implications: i) the youngest wife knew that her children would not be taken care of by her husband and the other two wives in her absence. She instructed her children to run to their grandmother with the complete hope that they would be taken care of this implies that the mother is supreme. The concept of mother is supreme is further reiterated by Achebe (1994), *Things Fall Apart*. In this novel Achebe uses a proverb to describe woman's sacred space in one's life that is Mother is Supreme. Okonkwo commits evil against the Earth goddess by killing his kinsman inadvertently. There is only one punishment for Okonkwo he must flee from Umuofia into exile for seven years. Hence, Okonkwo's family comes to Mbanta to live there for seven years. Mbanta is Okonkwo's mother's village where she is buried. In African culture when a woman is handled with respect, she will remain with her in-laws; but when things get rough, she will immediately flee to her mother's place, hence Mother is supreme concept. Polygamous marriage is survival of the fittest, is like the three women must navigate through all the struggles, and abuses to make her and her children survive. But if it comes to a push the woman will take her children, and the youngest one on her back and hear for her mother's home because the mother is always supreme. The same was done by the youngest wife, to instruct her elder child to take her sister and run to her maternal grandmother if she doesn't come back. I only wonder how the child realised that her mother was not coming back, and that emotional stress as a child to take her little sister and the two children alone running in the bush to the other side of the mountains. It was not surprising that they met the trickster, Moselapše who managed to trick her but later identified, that the two children were at risk of coming across dangerous wild animals that could have devoured them.

### *Resilience*

Resilience is the capacity and dynamic process of adaptively overcoming stress and adversity while maintaining normal psychological and physical functioning (Russo, Murrough, Han, Charney, and Nestler, 2012). In the folktale Moselapše, resilience is shown by the third youngest wife for doing everything at her disposal to fend for her children by stealing the meat cooked by the eldest wife thus risking her life and that of her children. We know for sure that a woman cannot just eat the meat alone while she has two children, we deduce that the youngest woman stole the meat from the eldest wife's home to feed her children. This behaviour usually happens when the man is not giving all his wives equal treatment and the one ill-treated is compelled to fend for her children even if it means stealing so that her children can survive.

Another form of resilience was observed when the youngest wife did not want to confess that she was the one who stole and ate the meat. On page 48, the last paragraph, the narrator says:

*Monna yola wa batho o tseleng. O lapile. O ra mosadi yo mogolo o re: "Mogatsšaka, ke swerwe ke tlala. Mphe nama yela ya ka ke šebe." Mosadi yola o ile a re ka pitšeng, a hwetša nama e le marapo fela. Monna a thoma a botšiša a re: "Bagatsšaka, nama, molato ke eng?" Yo mongwe le yo mongwe a re: "Nna ga ke tsebe; nna ga ke tsebe."*

(That poor man is on the way home, he is tired and hungry. He called to his first wife: “My wife gives me the meat so I can eat” In the pot, the eldest wife could only find the bone of the meat. The man asked: “My dear wives, what happened to the meat?” and all of them said: “I don’t know, I don’t know”).

The assumption we made from this folktale is that, had he found the meat intact, the man was going to eat the whole of it alone while all his wives and children watching. This act displays the greediness of the men during the pre-colonial period of wanting to have more wives and children but having the predatoriness to survive alone.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has illuminated the profound complexities embedded within African folktales, particularly in their portrayal of women and themes of gender-based abuse. Through qualitative methods and cultural analysis, we have gained critical insights into how these narratives serve as reflections of societal norms, perpetuating gender hierarchies while also offering glimpses of resilience and agency among female characters.

African folktales, deeply rooted in oral tradition, serve as timeless vessels of cultural heritage. They mirror the societal dynamics of their times, often depicting women as vulnerable to various forms of abuse within patriarchal frameworks. As noted by Smith (2020), these narratives highlight the precarious position of women, where their agency is circumscribed by entrenched male-dominated structures (Smith, 2020: 45). This portrayal underscores the normalization of gender-based violence within African communities, perpetuating cycles of oppression that shape collective attitudes and behaviors towards women.

However, amidst these narratives of victimization, African folktales also weave stories of resilience and resistance. Female characters within these tales frequently exhibit remarkable agency, challenging passive victimization and offering alternative narratives of strength and courage. The tales of Keleketla and Makgamatha (1990) exemplify these themes vividly, depicting protagonists who navigate adversity and confront abuse head-on, thereby redefining their roles within their communities.

Moreover, beyond their role as mere stories, African folktales function as powerful tools for the transmission and reinforcement of societal norms. They validate existing gender hierarchies, shaping perceptions and behaviors towards women (Johnson, 2018: 72). This dual function underscores their significance in both reflecting and actively constructing cultural attitudes towards gender roles and expectations.

Interpretations of abusive themes within these folktales vary across demographics and regions, influenced by factors such as age, gender, and cultural background. Such diversity in interpretation highlights the dynamic nature of these narratives and their potential to evolve alongside societal changes. By understanding these varied perspectives, interventions against gender-based violence can be tailored to resonate more effectively within local contexts, leveraging traditional storytelling as a platform for advocacy and education.

In essence, this research calls for critical reflection on gender dynamics within African cultural heritage. By interrogating these narratives, we not only uncover the complexities of gender portrayal in folklore but also emphasize the transformative potential of traditional storytelling. Through initiatives that highlight the resilience and agency of female characters, we can challenge stereotypes, foster dialogue, and inspire social change rooted in Indigenous perspectives.

African folktales stand as poignant reflections of societal norms, showcasing both the challenges faced by women and their enduring strength in the face of adversity. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural narratives shape gender dynamics and underscores the imperative of promoting equitable relationships within African societies. By embracing the richness of our cultural heritage, we can envision pathways toward a more just and inclusive future, where stories continue to inspire and empower generations to come. This conclusion encapsulates the key findings of our qualitative case study on gender-based abuse in African folktales, emphasizing their role in cultural heritage and their potential for promoting social change.

### Recommendations

After going through the discussion and analysis of the study findings, we came up with the following recommendations:

#### Portrayal of Women in African Folktales

The portrayal of women in African folktales offers a poignant insight into the societal dynamics and gender norms prevalent within traditional African communities. These narratives often depict women as vulnerable to various forms of abuse, including physical violence, emotional manipulation, and societal oppression. Such depictions reflect deeply entrenched patriarchal structures where women’s agency is circumscribed by male-dominated norms (Smith, 2020). For example, in tales like Keleketla and Makgamatha, female characters navigate challenges that highlight the constraints and dangers they face within these societies (Smith, 2020: 45).

#### Role of Folktales in Shaping Cultural Attitudes

African folktales serve not only as mirrors but also as active agents in shaping cultural attitudes toward gender roles and expectations. These tales validate and perpetuate existing gender hierarchies, influencing collective perceptions and behaviors toward women (Johnson, 2018). By embedding gender-based violence within the

cultural heritage, folktales contribute to its normalization, thereby perpetuating cycles of abuse and reinforcing societal norms that govern women's lives (Johnson, 2018: 72).

### **Narratives of Resilience and Agency in Folktales**

Amidst narratives of victimization, African folktales also present stories of resilience and agency among female characters. These tales often portray women who exhibit remarkable strength, courage, and resourcefulness in confronting and overcoming adversity. Characters like those in Keleketla and Makgamatha exemplify this resilience, challenging oppressive norms and offering alternative narratives that inspire empowerment and social change (Smith, 2020; Johnson, 2018).

### **Diverse Interpretations and Local Contexts**

Interpretations of abusive themes within African folktales vary across demographics and regions, influenced by factors such as age, gender, and cultural background. Younger generations may interpret these tales through a lens of critical reflection on gender equality and justice, whereas older generations may view them through the lens of tradition and continuity. Understanding these diverse interpretations is crucial for developing effective interventions against gender-based violence that are culturally sensitive and resonate with local contexts (Johnson, 2018).

### **Educational and Advocacy Potential of Folktales**

The educational and advocacy potential of African folktales cannot be overstated. These narratives offer powerful platforms for challenging stereotypes and promoting gender equity within communities. By engaging with traditional storytelling as a means of education and advocacy, initiatives can leverage these narratives to empower individuals and communities to envision and implement pathways towards more just and inclusive societies (Smith, 2020).

African folktales serve as both reflections and influencers of cultural attitudes towards gender-based violence. They provide profound insights into the complexities of gender dynamics within African societies, highlighting the challenges women face while also showcasing their resilience and agency. By critically examining these narratives, we can foster dialogue, challenge stereotypes, and promote interventions that address the root causes of gender-based violence.

These insights underscore the importance of leveraging cultural heritage as a tool for social change and advocacy. By embracing the narratives of resilience and empowerment within African folktales, we can inspire individuals and communities to reimagine gender relations and strive towards more equitable societies. Ultimately, it is through such efforts that African societies can harness the transformative power of their cultural heritage to envision and create futures where all individuals, regardless of gender, can live free from violence and oppression.

This extended discussion emphasizes the dual role of African folktales in reflecting and shaping societal norms, while advocating for their potential as catalysts for promoting gender equity and combating gender-based violence within African communities.

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