

THE JOURNEY TOWARD A LIBERATED WOMAN CHARACTER IN SISWATI LITERATURE

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Abstract

This paper presents a feminist comparative analysis of siSwati prose, which was published in different eras such as the last decade of the 20th century, as well as the first and second decades of the 21st century. The purpose is to examine the role played by these stories in portraying women's struggles and triumphs in their fight for liberation, in a cultural and patriarchal ESwatini. The focus will be on two selected short stories, which were published in different eras, as well as a novel. The short stories are 'Lijazi Lensimbi' by Oscar J. Sibandze, from the anthology Idubukele by E. T. Mthembu and 'Sewesitsatfu Lomnyaka' by Thembekile Msibi, from the anthology Khulumani Sive by Zodwa Motsa. The novel is UmSamaliya Lolungile by Betty Dlamini. This is a qualitative study that employs the thematic content analysis method. Data was sampled purposively and conveniently. The findings reveal the crucial role of literature in the fight for women's liberation, as there is a magnificent shift in the behaviour of women between the two eras. As the decades pass, cultural strongholds slowly lose their effect on women, as they become a force to be reckoned with, and can unleash the shackles of abuse. It is recommended that more studies of this nature be conducted, to explore the behaviour of women currently and the struggles they face.

Keywords: short story, novel, characterisation, patriarchy, women.

Introduction

Even though siSwati literature portrays the liberation of women, so far, no study has been conducted focusing on this aspect. It is then of utmost importance to take note of the role played by writers of literature in the portrayal of women's struggles and the fight for liberation in ESwatini. Thus, this study aims to focus on the influence of literature in this regard, to compare how far the liberated woman character that is portrayed in current literature comes from. The issues women are faced with in the different eras and societal pressures and expectations shall be exposed in a way to reveal the nature of the journey. It is also worth mentioning that there

are limited research works that analyse siSwati literature therefore, more reasons to explore this field.

Data Collection

Since the study deals with literary texts, the qualitative approach to data collection and analysis was adopted. Mostly, library and internet sources were used, therefore, the thematic content analysis methods were applied as data was analysed, transcribed, and interpreted. As Silverman (2019: 2) states, these methods pay little attention to the sequential organisation but are based on the naturalistic model which focuses more on what people think and feel. Sampling was done purposively and conveniently. The samples, which are the selected short stories and the novel, are small due to limited time and space and the fact that they are a representation of different eras. No ethics were violated.

Theoretical framework

The study is grounded in the theory of feminism which focuses on women's rights and empowerment. Another reason for choosing this framework is the evidence of some feminist traits in the stories under discussion. Watkins (2000:1) defines feminism as a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. She believes feminism is for everybody, not just a bunch of angry women who want to be like men, as most societies think. Freedman (2001:1) classifies feminism into three loose groups: liberal feminism, Marxist or socialist feminism, and radical feminism.

According to Salami (2012:1), feminism in Africa started in the early 20th century with women like Adelaide Casey-Hayford, the Sierra Leonian women's rights activist referred to as an 'African Victorian Feminist.' She contributed widely to both Pan-African feminist goals. Others include Charlotte Maxeke who, in 1918, founded the Bantu Women's League in South Africa, and Hoda Shaarawi who, in 1923, founded the Egyptian Feminist Union, became its president and a symbol of the Arab women's rights movements. Others further include Margaret Ekpo and Funmilayo Anikup-Kuti who fought against colonialism and patriarchy in Nigeria.

The 21st century stories reflect, indirectly, the factual incident in which, in 1995, a delegation of emaSwati women attended a popular women's rights conference in Beijing, China. This conference caused a major shift in the way society perceived women. Though there was an uproar, the good thing was that, for the first time, the nation was talking about women. This was the first sign of change, no matter how negative some of the opinions were perceived to be.

It is imperative to note various Non-Governmental Organizations that contributed to the fight for women's rights and liberation in ESwatini. These are: The Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse (SWAGAA), the Family Life Association of Swaziland (FLAS), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the National Emergency Response Council on HIV and AIDS (NERCHA), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the World Health Organisation (WHO). These were put in place to educate the nation about the spread of HIV and AIDS, issues concerning reproductive health, human rights as well issues on gender-based violence.

In 2001, the government of ESwatini undertook a campaign to build the Constitution of the Kingdom to be in line with global concerns about human rights. Women got a chance to voice out their concerns with regard to some cultural norms they did not like. The constitution was adopted in 2005, after being reviewed and, for the first time in centuries, there were laws in

favour of women. These include equal treatment and equal opportunities in political, economic, and social activities. The call to end discrimination, freedom to own land as well as not being forced to adhere to customs not favourable to them, are also highlighted. Many women now occupy leadership positions, but a lot still needs to be done regarding shifting perceptions. Before the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence (SODV) Act was enacted in 2018, women and children were still being marginalised and some were forced into marriages. Domestic violence and rape cases were the order of the day. In July 2015, it was once reported, in the *Times of Swaziland* that there were 124 rape cases committed within three months. The SODV Act has created a lot of awareness amongst citizens and, of late, many GBV cases have been dealt with and some are still pending in court.

Definition of Concepts

This section defines the concepts of prose, characterisation and culture.

Prose (Novel and Short story)

Abrams (1999: 246) defines prose as an inclusive term for all discourse, spoken or written, which is not patterned into the lines of metric verse or free verse. He states that written discourse can be descriptive, expository, narrative or expressive. Thus, the novel or short story can be categorised as written discourse.

The short story, according to Abrams (1999: 286), is a brief work of modern prose fiction in which the types and narrative techniques, as used in the novel, are applicable. Mamba (2009: iv) concurs that the short story is a brief tale that focuses mainly on one or two key elements. Hendry (1991: ii) defines the short story by firstly tracing its history. He states that the short story is a modern literary genre that started around the time of Edgar Allan Poe, and which has developed through the early part of the Twentieth Century into a recognizable literary form, incorporating some of the general elements of all fiction and others particular to itself. These elements that Hendry refers to are the plot, character, point of view, setting, theme, and style.

All the above scholars agree that the brevity and conciseness of the short story set it apart from other forms of prose fiction such as the novel. Ebewo (1997: 78) defines novel as a long fictional prose narrative involving characters, plot, and actions. He mentions the different types of novels which are the apprenticeship novel, detective novel, historical novel, political novel, propaganda novel, sociological novel, and psychological novel. Abrams (1999: 286) briefly discusses the differences between the novel and the short story. He highlights that the distinction lies in the length, time, form, characters, plot, and setting, all of which are treated more economically in a short story than in a novel.

Characterisation

Hendry (1991:106) defines characters as the people who act out the plot and who interact with one another within the established setting. He states that the list of characters may even include the author or the persona. He explains that the brevity of the short story calls for simplicity in the rendition of characters and they will often be essentially the same at the end of the story as they were at the beginning.

Roberts (1999:53) defines character as a verbal representation of a human being. He mentions that through action, speech, description, and commentary, authors portray characters that are worth caring about, rooting for, and even loving, although there are some we may laugh at, dislike, or even hate. He points out that in literature, unlike in life, all actions, interactions,

speeches, and observations are deliberate. He then highlights five ways authors use to make their characters live as follows:

1. Actions by characters reveal their natures.
2. The author's descriptions, both personal and environmental tell us about the characters.
3. What characters say - dramatic statements and thoughts - reveals what they are like.
4. We learn about characters from what others say about them.
5. The author, speaking as a storyteller or as an observer, may tell us about characters.

Abrams (1999:33) explains two methods of characterization in a narrative, and these are showing and telling. These are the methods Mtumane (1995: 74 - 98) discusses as expository and objective, for showing and telling, respectively. Abrams (*Op cit.*) says that in showing, the author simply presents the characters talking and acting and leaves the reader to infer the motives and dispositions that lie behind what they say and do. The author may also show the character's inner thoughts, feelings, and responsiveness to events. In telling, the author intervenes authoritatively to describe, and often evaluate the motives and dispositional qualities of the characters.

Hendry (1991:106) further states that a character can be revealed in a variety of ways, depending on the narrative point of view. The third-person narrator writes as an observer and records only what the characters do, while the omniscient narrator can also describe what they are thinking and so reveal the motives for their actions. He goes on to classify characters as dynamic and static, round, and flat, protagonist and antagonist, and stereotypes and caricatures.

Culture

Culture refers to the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organisation of a particular country or group. It is the beliefs and attitudes about something that people in a particular group or organisation share (Hornby, 2015: 364). In the words of Mtumane and Motlounge (2022: 41), "culture generally refers to attitudes and behaviour that characterise a particular social group". Mamba *et al.* (2006: vii) highlight that emaSwati are well known for observing and conserving their customs and traditions. These are important aspects of their society that keep the nation intact and instill order among the young and old. Abrams (1999: 53) considers cultural studies as a fast-growing cross-disciplinary enterprise for analysing the conditions that affect the production, reception, and cultural significance of all types of institutions, practices, and products. He emphasises that literature is accounted as one of many forms of cultural signifying practices.

ESwatini is a cultural society that holds onto traditions. The well-known Mr. Sotja Dlamini, The Prime Minister of Eswatini in the 90s (Matsebula, 2000: ix), states that before the introduction of formal school education in the country, it was every parent's duty to teach the history of the family and of the nation so as to lay a solid foundation on which to build a disciplined and progressive nation that is proud of its historical and cultural heritage.

However, some of the traditions also portray ESwatini as a patriarchal society because men still dominate. The country is governed by the kingship system, with The King being the ruler and His mother, The Queen, supporting him. Alongside are also *emabandla* (the king's advisors who are mostly men), chiefs (mostly men) who are rulers of communities, who also report to him, and then the regiments (men only) as his traditional warriors. In communities, men have always been rulers and heads of families ever since. Before the Constitution, which was published in 2005, and a couple of years later, women have always been regarded as minors

or the weaker sex. This means that all decisions concerning the running of the country, down to communities and homes, were made by men.

In the home, the wife could only 'support' the husband. This was regardless of whether they were married through civil rights or siSwati law and custom. Women had always known their place which was the home, as well as the duties society expected them to do, such as bearing children and rearing them, housework, fieldwork and, most of all, pleasing, and always respecting the husband and in-laws. Above all these, women had to demonstrate certain qualities for them to earn the respect of their in-laws, the community, and society at large. These included, among others, submission, meekness, patience, strength, humility, respect, faithfulness, hard work, dedication and, most of all, long-suffering. Women were and are still groomed from a tender age to demonstrate these qualities. The short stories to be discussed herein, demonstrate these issues. These short stories are 'Lijazi Lensimbi', 'Sewesitsatsu Lomnyaka', and the novel *UmSamaliya Lolungile*.

Plot Summaries

This section focuses on the plot summaries of the two short stories, 'Lijazi Lensimbi' and 'Sewesitsatsu Lomnyaka', and the novel, *UmSamaliya Lolungile*.

'Lijazi Lensimbi'

This story depicts the set-up of a polygamous home. The first wife, Monase is worried because her husband, Madasidi, is very sick so she runs to her mother for help. As they talk, Monase blames her mother for giving her a love potion some years back when Madasidi married a second wife by the name of Hlaleleni. Monase does this because she suspects her husband could be sick due to this love potion. Monase's mother justifies her own actions by explaining how frustrated and scared Monase was when Madasidi married Hlaleleni, who was just a good-for-nothing woman, so she felt for her as a mother. Since the traditional healer who gave them the *muti* has died, they resolve to try another one to undo the spell.

When Monase goes back to her matrimonial home, she finds that her brothers-in-law have come to see her husband. They suggest to Madasidi that he sees a traditional healer, but he refuses because he is a Christian who is a member of the Zion Church. So, he prefers to call his priest to pray for him. When the Zion priest comes, he is shocked that Madasidi has been sick for some time, yet he does not know anything about it. He holds a powerful service with his congregation and there is some drama as they are all 'engulfed by the Holy Spirit'. Some rush outside and, within a few minutes, they come with Monase's mother, and everyone is shocked. Some grab Monase and Hlaleleni and throw them up to the roof. They are all forced to confess. Monase confesses to giving her husband a love potion whilst Hlaleleni also confesses to having received some love potion from her friend some years back, but she was afraid to use it. When the service is over, Madasidi is already well.

'Sewesitsatfu Lomnyaka'

This is a story of triumph and commitment in love. Dvuba is a depressed and lonely man because his wife, Nodoli, is away furthering her studies. Nodoli is doing her master's degree in America. She has been gone for almost three years and Dvuba is still struggling to do a lot of things in the house. He fails to keep the house in order and misses his wife so much. This also affects other areas of his life. Thus, at work, he is unproductive and is always deep in thought. The house is always a mess, and the helper comes only when she feels like it and steals teaspoons. Dvuba sometimes finds solace in his son, Sonkhe, whom he talks to occasionally. They both express their loneliness and struggles since Nodoli left. Nodoli is also faced with

challenges in a foreign land. She is working hard and, as a result, her course is shortened by six months. There is also a man, Ajurra, who is pursuing her. She tries to ignore Ajurra but the latter is persistent. She feels tempted because Ajurra is good-looking, but she remembers her husband's words and tells Ajurra off. She then writes a letter to Dvuba, telling him that she is coming home over the weekend.

UmSamaliya Lolungile

This is a social novel that portrays the main character, a woman, within the setting of a culturally bound society such as ESwatini. Sebentile is an educated liSwati woman who is raised and groomed to be a good submissive wife. She comes from a well-known rich family and is raised well because she keeps herself pure until marriage. She gets married and fulfills all her duties as a wife. Unfortunately, her husband, Zebedewu becomes too abusive. Sebentile perseveres until she cannot anymore and is bold enough to leave her marriage after going through decades of abuse. Both are high school teachers.

The story is told in a conversational style that is full of flashbacks. The conversation is between the liberated Sebentile and her former student, Bindzile, who meet at the airport after twenty years of separation. The story goes back in time and the intrusive narrator reveals how these two met. In the process, Sebentile's private life is also portrayed. That is how she and Zebedewu met, dated, and eventually got married. They got married traditionally and through civil rights. Sebentile reveals the old cultural perceptions of a bride price (*emalobolo*) and a married woman who had to submit to her husband. All these cultural values, being clouded by love and the nature of her character, make her ignore the warning signs of abuse in her marriage. As a result, she is abused physically, emotionally, financially, verbally, and sexually. Zebedewu also sexually abuses innocent destitute children under their care, such as Bhacile and Bindzile, as well as their maid, Londziwe. Sebentile is unaware of this until it is too late. Another abuser who is revealed, is the school headteacher, Mr. Tsabedze who sexually abuses young girls in the school.

Sebentile mentions that she kept persevering and enduring all the suffering she went through in her marriage, all in the name of being a good woman and the fear of being called *libuya* (divorced woman). It is when she is on the verge of a nervous breakdown and is faced with the reality of sexually transmitted diseases, which put her at risk of contracting HIV, that her eyes are opened. After her divorce, she gets an overseas job (in Geneva) at a non-governmental organisation that involves empowering women, especially abused ones, to stand up and fight for their survival.

Critical Analysis

This section focuses on the critical analysis of the short stories 'Lijazi Lensimbi', 'Sewesitsatsu Lomnyaka', and the novel, *UmSamaliya Lolungile*.

'Lijazi Lensimbi'

Sibandze uses mostly the dramatic and less of the expository method to reveal characters. The story is told in the third person narration but there is a lot of dialogue between characters, especially the major ones, Monase and her mother LaMasangu. As they speak, their characters as well as the challenges they face, are depicted. Monase is a frustrated first wife in a polygamous marriage and she confides in her mother. This is culturally acceptable. Polygamy is also very common in this era, as some emaSwati still practice it even today. Monase's name has a negative connotation as it means 'one who is jealous.' This is because, the first wife, in this era, is expected to gladly share her husband and welcome all her co-wives no matter how

she feels. As a first wife, already she assumes a high status in the family, which is closer to her mother-in-law, and thus, should appreciate that. She should also be happy that she will not be overburdened by chores, as the other wives will help her. Notably, the second wife's name, Hlaleleni, has a negative connotation too. It means 'Why are you sitting and doing nothing?', which implies that she is lazy. Laziness is never acceptable in ESwatini culture.

It is worth noting that the literary works published in this era (20th century) show that women are just mere objects of culture. Their actions, speeches, and thoughts convey them as people who live in a society that influences them greatly. The title, 'Lijazi Lensimbi' is a proverb that can be loosely translated as 'a coat of iron'. This refers to *sidliso* which is a *muti* or love potion that a woman can use to bewitch her husband and make him love her more. It is common in both monogamous and polygamous marriages, where the wife feels threatened by a mistress or a rival wife. Some wives use it as a way of strengthening their marriages because they don't want their husbands to cheat. One should highlight though, that the woman who uses this love potion does it at her own risk because, if she is caught, she is at the risk of losing everything, since witchcraft is an unforgivable act in the siSwati culture.

The idea of a love potion shows that this is a common act among women at this time. It is their only weapon and means of survival in a society where they have no voice, yet men have the liberty to do whatever they please. Monase bewitches her husband because she is scared, he might love Hlaleleni, the second wife, more than her. She does this as a desperate attempt to hold on to the dying love and attention she used to get from her husband before he married another wife. However, this has negative consequences, as Madasidi gets very sick. Surprisingly, even the new wife, Hlaleleni is tempted to also use a love potion because she knows that polygamous men never get satisfied, so, sooner or later another wife might come. This depicts the fear most women live with in this era. This is the fear of rejection. The writer makes the women confess to portray the effects of these love potions, and to warn women in general, against using them. Thus, this shows that women are expected to do good, no matter what the situation, which then leaves them as helpless victims.

Madasidi is a polygamous man who does not care much about his first wife's feelings when he marries a second wife, because culture allows him to marry as many wives as he pleases. He does not even consult his first wife about the second marriage, as culture expects him to. Culturally, when a man wants to marry another wife, he consults the senior wife. The first wife holds a very important position as, even the other wives consult her in matters concerning the home. However, this does not always make her happy, as she is often referred to as *saliwakati* (the neglected wife), since the husband spends more time with the younger wife who is always referred to as *intsandvokati* (the loved wife) or *indlu yekugugela* (youngest wife) or *nabondvuku tihlala kakhe* (the wife that is given a lot of attention). This is proven by Monase's frustrations in her dialogue with her mother (LaMasangu) which happens to be a flashback of a past event. LaMasangu says this as she responds to Monase's accusations:

"Angitsi nguwe Monase loweta lapha kimi watsi ucela kutsi ngikuyele kuMakobhane ngiyekutsengela lijazi lensimbi ngobe indvodza yakho seyitsetse indlu yekugugela? Watsi ayisalugcobi lendlini kakho? Watsi ayisadli nekudla kwakho? Watsi nome ngabe itfuke yeta lekakho kudla loyiphakele kona ifane ikutsi chokoloti ikuyekele nome ngabe kumnandzi kanjani?" (Sibandze, 1987:100)

(Isn't it you who came to me asking that I go to Makobhane to get you a love potion because your husband had married a second wife? Didn't you say he wasn't coming to your house anymore? That he wasn't even interested in your cooking? And that

even if he came to your house, he would just take a few bites and leave no matter how delicious the food was?)

Thus, Monase bewitches Madasidi out of frustration and desperation to be loved, whilst Hlaleleni is also tempted to do it out of fear that in the future, another wife might come. This is ironic in the sense that, as men think they are favoured by culture to do as they please, they are actually creating problems for themselves. That is why Madasidi eventually becomes sick. Since culture makes women helpless in the hands of men, thus, to cope, women find solace in friendships and their mothers. They persevere in dire situations for the sake of their children and their survival.

Another trait of women portrayed in this era is the fact that most are uneducated and stay at home as mothers. This is because most emaSwati in this era do not believe in educating girls because they will eventually get married and depend on their husbands who are also expected to take care of them. Thus, girls are raised for marriage. They are trained to be submissive wives who will take care of their husbands, in-laws, and children, whether they are in polygamous marriages or not. That is why nothing is mentioned about Monase and Hlaleleni's education or jobs.

‘Sewesitsatsu Lomnyaka’

Msibi, in her stories, uses both dramatic and expository methods to reveal character. She also makes use of setting, images, symbols, other characters' comments, and self-analysis or self-introspection within a character. In most of her stories, including ‘Sewesitsatfu Lomnyaka’, she demonstrates the 21st-century living standards. Women are educated, bold, and independent, compared to those in the previous era. Their actions, speeches as well as the narrator's comments about them show that they are living in modern times. However, Msibi also depicts the struggles that these professional women of today face. The major one is that of living in a patriarchal society. She also portrays, vividly, the clash between modernity and siSwati traditional culture.

The title ‘Sewesitsatfu Lomnyaka’ connotes sadness. It is a lament by Dvuba, on how long he has been suffering due to his wife's absence. It also refers to the number of years his wife Nodoli, has been away from home. Msibi shows how women are pillars in the home and how their absence affects the lives of the other family members, especially their husbands.

Nodoli is a professional and independent woman who is brave to leave her husband and go and study overseas. Her actions show that she is an opportunist and a liberated career woman. She takes a risk by leaving her husband alone for about three years, knowing well that there could be serious consequences, but she is a modern woman who is hardworking and determined. However, when she faces challenges and temptations overseas, she remembers who she is. Thus, culture grounds her. A foreign man, by the name of Ajurra, keeps asking her out and it is so tempting, but she remembers her husband's words when she left home, who insisted that she should not shame him. Thus, the respect she has for her husband and the fear of shame deliver her from the trap of sin. Though the conditions are perfect, as no one would see her and it would be difficult for her husband to find out since he is far away, her conscience troubles her. Culturally, a woman must exercise self-control and have high moral standards, so Nodoli is a true reflection of that. The internal conflict within her shows how difficult it is to make the decision and that she is human too, like everyone else:

Walibuka lelikhwa lelisembikwakhe lasemaveni lasenhla neAfrika. Kube khona livi lelikhuluma naye ekujuleni litsi, “Hamba nalomuntfu wena utakushayisa umoya, akusho kutsi sewumganile. Hamba bo! Yekela kutenta sitfotfobala.” Laba khona

livi lelihlebako likhuluma kancane ngekungajaki, libelesela, “U-nga-yi, u-nga-cali.” (Msibi, 2001:117)

(She looked at the handsome man in front of her who comes from North Africa. Then a voice from within her said, “Go with him and have a good time, that doesn’t mean you are lovers. Go at once! Don’t be stupid. Then another one whispered slowly and persistently, saying, “Don’t go, never ever!”)

This shows that the voice of society, which is influenced by culture, is stronger than the voice of temptation. Thus, it proves that Nodoli has been groomed under this ideology and it has been ingrained in her such that, no matter where she is, she is bound to act according to the expectations of her society. This also reveals that in the fight for liberation and better opportunities, women do not have to lose sight of who they are and their moral values.

America also portrays Nodoli as a hardworking woman, as the duration of her course is cut short by six months. So, this setting influences her positively. However, her home is crumbling down in her absence, which shows that a woman sustains the home, and, without her, there is no life. Dvuba appreciates her in her absence as he realizes how much she has contributed to his life. He says this about Nodoli:

“Ngabe nyalo sesilapha embikwami sinatfo lesicandzako, bengitawubutwa nekutsi ngisebente njani.” (Msibi, 2001:112)

(By now I would have been given something to drink, and asked how my day has been.)

Dvuba’s words portray Nodoli as a loving and respectful wife who also took care of him before she left. The fact that he and Sonkhe are miserable in her absence shows that Nodoli is the source of life and the pillar of strength in her home. Sonkhe also values her mother and speaks highly of her. He mentions that her mother has no time for gossip and that she intentionally ignores it.

The above words are a clear depiction of Nodoli’s character. These are good qualities of a liSwati woman. Msibi portrays gossip as an unattractive behaviour amongst women culturally. In fact, as far as a tender age, girls are encouraged to be composed and refrain from talking too much, as this is not a good thing. Gossip also wastes time and results in laziness. All these bad habits are discouraged among women and girls. However, Sonkhe also mentions his mother’s flaw, her short temper, to show that she is not a saint but a human being like everyone else. It is surprising though how society expects women to be flawless, yet men have mistaken too. Men’s flaws are tolerated and easily forgiven. Readers feel for Dvuba and nobody judges him for failing to cook, clean and wash dishes; instead, they sympathise with and are all happy for him when he receives a letter from Nodoli telling him that she is coming home sooner than expected.

Msibi also uses Dvuba’s words to reveal society’s perception of men and women. This is shocking because it comes from an educated and civilized man who allowed his wife to go and study but, because he is a man and has needs, he now blames himself for allowing his wife to leave:

“Bayakhohlwa laba kutsi indvodza iyinhloko, ngiyo leyadalwa kucala umfati weta muva. Umfati akayuze alingane nendvodza nobe ngabe sewuyafisa.” (Msibi, 2001:115)

(Women forget that the man is the head, he was created first and the woman last. A woman will never be at par with a man, no matter how zealous she can be.)

Dvuba's words reveal the traditional societal views and norms about the roles of men and women in the home. The husband is considered as above and the wife beneath, regardless of status or level of education. This is evident in Dvuba's failure to do chores in his house, which shows that culturally that is a woman's job. The fact that he flourishes in gardening and enjoys soccer is also evident of the separate roles society has put in place regarding gender. Dvuba's words also reveal the male ego. Since his wife is now at par with him, he feels threatened and is somehow jealous of her. He also compares his wife's profession to his, to show that he feels superior and undermines Nodoli's achievements, just because she is a woman. These are some of the struggles women face in this era:

... *Kantsi akati kutsi kuye njengaDvuba lokweticu layokulandza kwebunesi akusilutfo. Sisindvo sako nekuhlonipheka kwako kuye akufanani naletakhe ticu tekugcina emabhuku. Noma ticu tingalingana yena ngeke ahlulwe ngumfati noma ngabe uhlakaniphe kwani.* (Msibi, 2001: 116)

(... She doesn't know that to him as Dvuba the nursing degree she will come back with means nothing. Its weight and honour do not compare to his degree in accounting. Even if degrees would be at par, he will not be beaten by a woman, no matter how clever she is.)

This is the patriarchal voice within Dvuba which stems from a strong cultural background. His words also show the competitive nature of men in general. These are some of the struggles women face daily in this era. That is, no matter how good they are, they must constantly work harder to prove themselves.

It is worth noting though that Msibi's men are faithful to their wives. Dvuba does not cheat on his wife, despite being separated from her for almost three years and facing a lot of challenges. Msibi portrays him like this, to encourage all the men in her society to behave this way. This shows that, as an educated man, Dvuba understands the commitment he is in, as he married through civil rights. So, somehow education and civilization have influenced him positively. Msibi also demonstrates that even though it is hard for a man to take care of the house in his wife's absence, that does not mean that it is impossible. That also does not give him the liberty to cheat on his wife, so self-control is possible amongst men too, if a man disciplines himself.

In summation, it is interesting to note that the stories in this era portray women mostly as bold and courageous enough to pursue their dreams, regardless of the challenges and fears they still face. This is due to the winds of change instigated by feminist ideologies. These ideologies are challenging the strong roots of culture which have stood the test of time. One short story worth mentioning is, 'Phumani Nelikhambi', by the same author, in *Khulumani Sive* (2001: 106), whereby a recently widowed woman pulls on a brave face to ask her in-laws to allow her to mourn for three months, instead of the long-standing two years. This is because her husband has left a ton of debts, and she must get a job to make ends meet. As much as she is terrified to do this, at least she is starting an uncomfortable yet important conversation, which the author feels deserves to be initiated in her society.

UmSamaliya Lolungile

Sebentile is a representation of many women during her time. The book is like a recollection or a diary of all the beautiful and painful events in her lifetime. She takes the reader through everything and reveals all the perceptions her society had, back in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s,

towards women. She also depicts how her society has shaped her into the woman she has become, who has low self-esteem, is fearful of judgment and always perseveres and endures hardships all in the name of being a good wife. She gives up her dream career of acting, for marriage. She even portrays how even her family partakes in her suffering because they are shaping her into a good woman. Surprisingly, women are the ones who spearhead all these ideologies. Her aunts and grandmothers give her a lot of advice just before her bride price is paid. They tell her to be a good, respectful, submissive, patient, and enduring wife.

Throughout the story, Sebentile is regretful and keeps interjecting how stupid, innocent, and in-exposed she was back then and how cunning and scheming Zebedewu was. Interestingly, Sebentile highlights in Chapter Ten, page 87, that stupidity can take one very far and education does not make one immune to it because she, herself, took very long to recognise that she was being duped by Zebedewu. She refers to him as *lihuzu* (a scheming man), *licili* (a cunning person), *sihlakaniphi* (a clever one), and *imamba* (a dangerous snake).

In Chapter Nine, page 72, Sebentile mentions that their married life looked beautiful to most people because they were good pretenders. She compares it by using the metaphor of a warm coat that has a lot of fur inside. She interjects that most people assumed she was a hard-working woman who liked to earn money to improve her family's welfare, yet they did not know that she was suffering inside because her husband would take all the money and buy cars, livestock and even land. She goes further (page 73) to say that Zebedewu was very good at hiding his cruelty such that, in the community, he portrayed himself as a good Samaritan who helped many disadvantaged children by paying for their school fees. Later in the story, the narrator reveals that Zebedewu impregnated these girls and, when their parents found out, he gave them a lot of cows to silence them.

Sebentile's turning point symbolizes real experiences of women in the country. This is during the last decade of the 20th century when the whole world had begun to talk seriously about women's and children's rights and some emaSwati women had attended the popular Beijing conference, where these issues were discussed. Sebentile's eyes are first opened by the sexually transmitted disease she contracts and when she asks her husband to use a condom, he gets furious. This scenario also mirrors another serious issue (HIV and AIDS) in ESwatini which exposed most of the challenges women face in their marriages. That is, the issue of infidelity and other intimate problems such as women's inability to suggest ways of protecting themselves. HIV and AIDS also challenged most of the long-standing customs which were then identified as perpetrators to the spread of the disease. These customs, which were later discouraged, include *kungena* (marrying a deceased brother's wife), *kulamuta* (sleeping with a wife's sister) and others such as the abduction of young girls to be forced into marriage.

Sebentile eventually leaves her marriage and her home country to work in Geneva. This is also symbolic. Since her country does not give her the freedom she deserves, then Geneva frees her. Geneva is one of the countries that were pioneers in the fight for women's liberation in the world. This is where Sebentile begins to glow physically and thrives in her career, as she also helps other women. In Geneva, she is accepted as she is and is not judged or afraid of anyone. When she meets Bindzile at the airport, after twenty years, Bindzile is shocked at how young and beautiful Sebentile looks. On the other hand, Bindzile looks older than her age due to the hardship she has been through (miscarriage and dropping out of school) but in the end, she opens up to Sebentile who stands up to fight for her. For the first time, Bindzile is relieved, and she smiles.

The story ends with Sebentile expressing her anger and determination to fight for all these girls who have been abused by Zebedewu and Mr. Tsabedze, the headteacher at their school. In the

final chapter, the narrator exclaims, “... *Sekukhale indweba letsi, ‘Kuye! Sa! Khwela kuye!’*” (Dlamini, 2015: 112) (A whistle has been blown and dogs unleashed towards him). This means that Sebentile has started a war against Zebedewu and all these abusive men and she wants justice to prevail.

In summation, the novel is a good depiction of the liSwati women’s struggles in the different eras. Sebentile’s collection of painful memories in her journey towards freedom, from her abusive husband, are symbolic of the many actual struggles emaSwati women have had to face before their liberation. It is interesting to note that in this era (21st century) there is a change in the behaviour of women. With each decade that passes, women are now aware of their rights. They are unafraid to leave unhappy marriages and choose themselves. They are also bold enough to pursue their dreams and take risks.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The article has analysed two short stories and a novel, by looking at how far the liberated woman character comes from, regarding the struggles she has faced in the past, as she has been moving towards liberation. Both centuries (20th and 21st) reveal that emaSwati women, whether educated or not, have been trapped by culture. Since they were raised to be submissive, respectful, patient, and long-suffering, even when subjected to abuse, it took them longer to come out. Another factor was that of other people’s perception of them, as well as the fear of being judged as failures. Therefore, emaSwati writers have played a big role in the struggle for women’s rights and sensitising society on other crucial issues such as the causes and spread of HIV/AIDS. It is recommended that more studies of this nature be conducted to explore how current literature portrays women and the struggles they face nowadays.

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