

## The Socio-cultural Depiction of a Swazi Woman

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**ABSTRACT** This paper is a feminist study on character portrayal in Swazi plays and society. A Swazi woman is portrayed as a character who assumes various roles in literary work: the cruel killer; jobless, a witch, an object and a heartless creature. The main focus of feminist standpoint is to look at the experiences of women and the meaning that is attached to those experiences. It emphasizes gender inequality and the power imbalance in socio-cultural situations. It is a qualitative study which depicts various socio-cultural incidents. The portrayal of women in the plot structure of some cited Swazi plays from exposition, dialogue, conflict and climax to denouement, reflect a stereotyped perception. Culture in general, is looked at in relation to gender and the feminists approach.

### INTRODUCTION

Social relationships are controlled and regulated by special behavioural patterns accepted as norms and beliefs of that society. The society acquires the custom, which is the machinery for controlling the interaction of individuals in any society. What shall be a mode of operation is indicated by the customary and practices. There is the so-called *hlonipha* custom (euphemism or respect custom) among the Swazis, which is applied. Women are the ones who mostly apply it. Though men also apply it, it seems the most affected gender is women.

In Siswati culture the euphemism or avoidance custom subjects a woman to respect her in-laws. This custom is also applied to young girls. They are taught to conform to traditional patterns of behaviour in speech and perceptions. It is also applied to a woman before she gets married. The sisters of the husband update the bride about the important members of the family so that she can respect them. This makes it easy for her to know the status of each person in the family. A woman is bound by the euphemism custom not to call her husband by his personal name. She may call him after his first-born child or any of his children, like father of Simlindile (*babe waSimlindile*). She is also expected to show the same respect to the brother of her husband. She may call him after her children, for example, father of Hlengiwe (*babe waHlengiwe*). This form of re-

spect applies to both genders; therefore it applies to the sister of the husband too. She may call her after her children, for example, mother of Zodwa (*make waZodwa*). This also shows how women are treated in the Swazi culture.

To support this Krige (1936: 30) stated the following:

... *she even has to respect the name of her husband, calling him "father of so-and-so" or using his regimental name.*

Khanyeza (1983: 9) supported Krige's assertion when he said:

*In this way a married woman respects more people than an unmarried one. She is expected to avoid the name of her husband but identify him with his son, for example, uyise waSipho (Sipho's father) or even use his regimental name. On the whole more respect is expected from a woman to the affinal relatives than vice versa.*

In the Swazi nation the father or an elderly male has authority over the family group. He is the one who makes all decisions. One may find a married man who is a home-owner but without any control over his home. He regards it as his father's home (*umuti wababe*). His father has authority over his home.

Swazi women have no rights in traditional systems. Their husbands rule them. Their lives depend on their husbands. The norms and values of their society govern them. There is a taboo, which restricts women from eating certain

foods. As a sign of respect (*hlonipha*) she is not expected to eat eggs, meat and milk. She is not expected to look at her in-laws in the eyes. She is expected to kneel down when talking to them and when giving food to any member of the family, including her husband. Women are not expected to utter words involving members of her father in-law's name. To support this Kuper (1970: xvii) stated that:

*As an in-law she must wear the heavy skin skirt on marriage; she must not eat certain foods, including milk of her husband's cattle; she must go around and not in front of the shrine hut associated with his lineage; and most pervasive of the avoidance rules she must learn a new and more restricted language, a language of circumlocution which avoids the use of names or words similar to the first syllables of the names of the senior males in-laws.*

Khanyeza (1983: 10) had nearly the same view as Kuper above, when he stated that:

*A married woman may not use the name of her relative's in-law, nor may she use any word having phonological similarity with such names. If her in-law's name, for instance, Mahamba, she may not use the verb hamba in her speech. She would better use a hlonipha equivalent verb khija.*

She uses the avoidance language, which is why we have the euphemism words in Siswati. This is due to the avoidance language which is used in everyday language, for example:

<i>Person's name</i>	<i>Original word</i>	<i>Hlonipha/Respect word</i>
Tjwala	Tjwala (beer)	Emahabulo
Langa	lilanga (sun)	Imphakama
Mfana	Umfana (boy)	Umkhapheyana

The avoidance customs subject a bride to avoid certain actions. She must put them into practice. She is not expected to eat in front of her husband's elder brother. The elder brother must give her a small amount of money before she can eat in his presence. The bride is also expected to show respect to the parents of the husband.

To support this Sikhosana (1997: 22) stated that:

*The bride is expected to show more respect to the parents and ancestors of her husband. Because of their age they deserve more respect than ordinary people and they are also regard-*

*ed as semi-Gods of the home. They can control the affairs of the people still living, therefore they have to be given more respect especially the bride who is a stranger. The bride will give birth to children who are said to be a gift from the ancestors. Consequently in order to be given this gift of children she is expected to refrain from all that can anger the ancestors.*

The bride always tries her best to avoid situations where her parents will have to pay a penalty usually a cow (*inhlawulo*), by observing all the rules related to *hlonipha* custom. If the language or actions of the bride are not acceptable, her in-laws send representatives of the family to accompany her to her parents in order for her to be disciplined and be showed the way (*imiyalo*). This is a way of showing that they love her and that she did not learn on how elderly people must be treated. In doing so, the in-laws show that they do not want to break the relationship. It is a way of showing their love for the bride and they are giving her a chance to change her ways. If there is a need for a penalty (*inhlawulo*), her parents have to pay it.

The bride is also expected to keep all the secrets of her home, since she is part of the family, though she is a stranger. If she mistakenly points her mother in-law or father in-law as a witch, she is expected to abide by the rules and situations of the home. As a sign of euphemism, the bride is expected to wear something on her head.

According to Sifundza (1997), a woman or mother, takes a prominent role in the Swazi nation. Firstly, she is an important figure at home. She looks after the family. It is the custom that states that before something is reported to the head of the home it must pass via the mother. If by chance a girl is old enough to get married and fall in love, the first person she shares this news with is her mother. It is then that she can go to the father. If something goes wrong or the girl gets pregnant, the blame will be on the mother. In addition, in the Swazi culture there is no prostitution on the side of women. Every woman has to get married. If a married woman meets a woman or girl whom she loves, she can propose her to be her husband's second wife.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research approach of this study is based on the Feminist standpoint theory which is a

feminist epistemology and methodology for feminist researchers in the social sciences. This theory has had the most influence and has been the subject of most debates. It emerged in the 1970s as a voice of the deprived individuals. This research uses the feminist standpoint theory, which is informed by feminist research theories. The feminist standpoint uses the qualitative approach to address their socio-cultural setting. By qualitative research we mean a type of research that produces. The feminist standpoint theory explores the positions, lived experiences behaviours, emotions, and feelings of women and men. The effects of gender processes on one or both organizational functioning and cultural phenomena are considered.

## RESULTS

### Women and Culture

In our society culture plays a very important role. Culture is the manner of living which members of a society adhere to. To support this statement, Khanyeza (1983: 22) defined culture as:

*The sum-total of material and non-material institutions which have been developed by people during a purpose of creating a secondary environment in accordance with human nature.*

This means that culture is the totality of people's values. It shapes the behaviour of a human in that particular society. Deviation from the norms and values of the society means that one is out of the boundaries of the culture. Khanyeza (1983: 2) further said that culture is not a result of an individual behaviour but a communal undertaking. He continues to add to this by quoting as follows:

*Culture is conceived as a patterned system of tradition-derived norms influencing behaviour.*

In African societies a person is expected to totally conform to culture. There is a belief that if one deviates from culture, one is followed by misfortunes. It is believed that if one conforms to culture the ancestors become happy and one is followed by fortunes in everything one does. There is also a belief that a girl is given a husband by her parents before she grows up. In other words, she grows up knowing she will be a wife of so-and-so. In other circumstances she chooses for herself whom to marry but she is expected to follow all the traditional rules of marriage. If a girl abides by what her parents tell

her, they regard her as respectful. However, a girl is also expected to accept a husband that her parents choose for her too.

In the African culture when a girl grows up, she is expected to agree upon a husband she is given by her family without protest. To support this Jafta (1978: 68) said:

*Traditionally parents make the choice for their children because they knew from experience what makes a successful marriage. The background of the spouse is taken into consideration with regard to witchcraft, diseases, mental weakness and general respectability and all whether the man can afford to pay lobola.*

As a symbol of respect, the girl was supposed to abide by the commands of her parents. When *lobola* is paid the girl is supposed to abide by the traditions of a married woman. This is an act of uniting her with the ancestors. According to Magagula (1990), *lobola* signifies that the woman is part of the family as a woman. The woman is announced to the ancestors. She goes to the kraal with a spear in her hand. The spear is pointed down as a symbol of uniting with the ancestors. When all the traditional systems for welcoming the bride have been done, she is regarded as a mother of the whole family. He adds that the elders of the home make all the decisions. If her husband dies, the woman is compelled to marry her brother in-law without any protest.

Satyo (1999: 3) had a similar idea to Jafta. She says there is the so-called customary union, which represents an agreement between the two families. She further quoted as follows:

*The arrangement was decided upon by parents and that the chosen girl remained ignorant of the proceedings and discussions. Cattle, she contends, were not only the deciding factors in such marriages. The character, status and health of the prospective husband's family, clan and tribe were carefully examined and daughters were expected to agree to such arranged marriages without protest.*

Nsibandze (1988: 52) portrayed woman as people who are bound by traditional marriage. In this regard Sebentile's father wants her to marry Mshiyeni by force. Hence, it reads as follows:

*LaMasuku: Babe sitawenta njani ngobe Sebentile akayifuni lendvodza lesimfunele yona?*

*Sibandze: Uyabona LaMasuku, ungonela bantfwabami. Mine angizange ngikutfume kutsi uyombuta Sebentile kutsi uyafuna nobe akafuni kuya kaFakudze. Ngatsi hamba umtjele angasagani embili ngoba indvodza sengimfolele.*

*LaMasuku: My husband, what shall we do because Sebentile does not want to marry the husband we have chosen for her?*

*Sibandze: LaMasuku, you spoil my children. I did not ask you to find out whether Sebentile wants to go to the Fakudze family or not. I said instruct her not to be involved in any relationship for I got her a husband).*

(Nsibandze 1988: 52)

Though Sibandze wants Sebentile to marry Mshiyeni, Sebentile is against the idea. Sebentile tells her mother that she wants to marry somebody else. After explaining that to her mother, her father becomes angry. Sibandze asks Sebentile what she knows about love after she tells her mother she is in love with another man.

In this regard Sebentile is forced by her father to marry Mshiyeni, whilst she does not want to. Satyo (1999), remarks that whenever there is power, there is resistance. This resistance takes diverse forms in societies and cultures, and these forms are shaped by the socio-cultural context in which they develop. When people are mistreated by others, there is bound to be a volatile reaction and protest, as is the case with women in protest against patriarchy.

### **Portrayal of Women as Cruel**

Women are negatively portrayed in many Siswati plays, as can be seen in Magagula (1994: 52), where Nikiwe is depicted as cruel. She is widowed; Khanya, her husband is deceased. She has a son named Sibusiso and a daughter named Nomsa. Her aggression shows projection as she languishes under the yoke of oppression of being a widow. She is extremely restricted and dominated by the relatives of her late husband who regard themselves as overseers in her home. All of a sudden she finds herself useless. In addition, she is not recognized as the owner of her home and as a person who can take decisions on her own. She is compelled to marry her late husband's younger brother, according to Siswati culture. Her late husband's elders talk to her in a manner that shows exactly how women are portrayed by society.

It is significant to note that though Nikiwe is portrayed as cruel, she managed to stay with her in-laws. She endures the ill-treatment meted out to her. Hence Jafta (1978: 55) says a married woman is traditionally expected to endure whatever treatment is meted out to her by her in-laws. This is a value which she has to maintain in order to conform to her role.

### **Portrayal of Women as People who Have Nothing**

In indigenous society a woman is believed to possess nothing. Her task is to work for the family and own nothing. There is a belief that she is the subject of the whole family because the *lobola* paid for her comes from the entire family. She is expected to follow all the instructions given by the members of her new family.

Many writers portray women as embodiment of all the evil one can think of. It is therefore not surprising to find in Magagula (1994: 73) Nikiwe being depicted as someone who may not own anything. This is portrayed by the actions of her in-laws. They want to own everything belonging to their deceased son who was married to Nikiwe. Her in-laws believe a married woman owns nothing. As a result they want to possess everything.

The character Nikiwe in Magagula (1994), as a widow, emanates from the interaction between members of the household and the types of social pressures and plans worked out within the household. Mandela as cited by Satyo (1999: 9) explained:

*The household defines not only the living space of household members. It determines the areas (whether by agreement, custom or conflict) within which the individual makes decisions and participates in the household activities.*

Nikiwe showed her power of having rights as a married woman. Though there were misunderstandings in the family, she managed to live with them because in every marriage there problems.

Though traditional ways are applied, it shows that the constitution supersedes tradition. In the preceding one learns that there is a contrast between African culture and western culture. The way of doing things in the African culture is clear to everyone for one knows the African way of doing things. One can say the authors present the western way of doing things as against the African way.

### Portrayal of Women as Killers

There is a belief that women are killers in our society, but not men. This is heard in polygamous families because of jealousy. Kuper (1970: xix) said:

*In Swazi theory, the love of sisters overcomes the jealousy of co-wives. But Swazis are also well aware that in fact each wife whether independent or subordinate, related or unrelated is an individual competing for the same scarce resource—the favour of the man.*

The portrayal of women reveals the opinions of the writers. However, everyone knows that our prisons are full of males who have committed senseless killings. Siswati writers however, depict women as killers. This is evident in Sithebe (1993: 5) where LaGwazela is depicted as a senseless killer. She influences her friend LaTsela to kill her husband's second wife. LaTsela agrees to go along with her friend's plan. The quoted dialogue between these two women suggests that women are senseless killers:

*LaGwazela: Bulala lentfo lenguSitani. Ungcolile phela loyo mntfwana. Wena nje uma unganaki uya la phasi kucala. Futsi angeke atfumele utatentela yena matfupha.*

*LaTsela: (Etfuke) Usho njalo?*

*LaGwazela: Mine angitsi kusasa. Levus'umdlonga ngiyipha lokufanele. Ungibona nje mine nginabatsatfu phasi. Kute lebengingakwenta sisi.*

*(LaGwazela: Kill Sitani. That filthy child. If you don't protect yourself, you will be the first to die. She won't hire a killer, she will do it herself.*

*LaTsela: (frightened) you think so?*

*LaGwazela: I wouldn't waste time. I would kill my enemies. I have killed three people. I had no alternative, my sister).*

(Sithebe 1993: 5)

Mthembu and Msimang (1991: 126) depicted LaNdlovu as a killer. She wants to secretly kill her husband's second wife's child before she gives birth. She pretends to love LaMsibi. She makes a plan by pretending to be going to fetch water whilst going to fetch something from a witch to kill the child. The dialogue between LaNdlovu and Mdletje shows that LaNdlovu is truly a killer, hence it reads thus:

*Mdletje: Nginajubajece wemutsi, akudzabuli lufu nangisebentise wona.*

*LaNdlovu: Nankho-ke lofunwa ngimi. Ungasangibambeleli-ke babe. Njengoba ngilapha nje ngishiye imbita emfuleni.*

*(Mdletje: I have strong medicine; nothing can survive if I used it).*

*(LaNdlovu: That's what I want. Don't waste time. I have left my pots by the river.)*

(Mthembu and Msimang 1991: 126)

This shows that LaNdlovu is truly a killer. She does not care that she is part of the family. However, she pretends to be a good person.

### Portrayal of Women as Pretenders

In the Siswati tradition polygamy is common, whereby a man is expected to have two or more wives. If a man feels he wants another wife he marries her. Kuper (1970: xii) said:

*Swazis say polygamy is the nature of man; a woman fulfils herself through children.*

The women in a polygamy marriage pretend as though they have no problem with it. The following discussion reveals the true feeling of these. It shows that the women actually are hurting. In the drama by Sithebe (1993) LaTsela is depicted as a pretender. She says she will pretend to love Sitani in order to kill her. This is revealed in the following extract:

*LaTsela: Kulungile. Ngitawutama Gwazela. (akhululume asinate embikwesibuko yedvwa). KuBulunga ngitawuvele ngitsi nje: "cha babe bengetfukile..." kuSitani-ke ngitsi: "ungitjelile Bulunga ngawe sisi Sitani, khululeka..." cha shengatsi itawusebenta lentfo yaLaGwazela.*

*(LaTsela: it is fine I'll try Gwazela. (She smiles before the mirror and talk alone). To Bulunga I will say: "No dad I was surprised..." to Sitani I will say: "Bulunga told me about you sister Sitani be free..." no, this thing will work).*

(Sithebe 1993: 5)

In Mthembu and Msimang (1991: 119) LaShongwe is depicted as a pretender. She pretends to her mother in-law that she is happy in the polygamy set-up. The conversation between LaNgozo and LaShongwe goes as follows:

*LaNgozo: Impela bakhoti bami bakukhulisa kahle. Akuvumi kutsi umuntfu acabange lufu loluhle uma entela singani sendvodza njengoba wentile wena.*

*LaShongwe: Yemake, mine ngisuke ngiman-gale kutsi ngabe wone ngani logane indvodza yakho ngobe loyo muntfu usuke atowuphaka-*

*misa wena lakukhandzile usale uba sezingeni lelisetulu. Mine ngiyaye ngimangale lapho sekunentondvo nekubulalana esikhundleni sekutsi kube nekutsandzana nekubambisana esitsenjini.*

*(LaNgozo: Your parents have raised you well. It is rare for a person to think positive about her husband's second wife, as you have done).*

*(LaShongwe: Mom, I don't know what wrong with being your husband's second wife because that's a way to uplift you as first wife. I don't understand the hatred and killing, instead of being loving and caring in the polygamous marriage).*

(Mthembu and Msimang 1991: 119)

In this regard LaTsela pretends as if she is not bothered by what is happening, whereas she knows she wants to kill Sitani. She hides her true feelings about Sitani. The same thing applies to LaShongwe. She pretends to be a loving co-wife. She also pretends as if nothing has happened when she talks to her mother in-law. The poisoning brings us to the point where Jafta (1978: 56) said:

*Co-wives are always jealous of one another although tradition does not permit them to show signs of it. Such attitudes are discouraged in African society.*

Though culture discourages jealousy among co-wives, it exists. However, the jealousy shown is directed at females. There are women in real life who are in a polygamous marriage, who live a good life. In this regard, we find women who pretend to love their husbands' second wives whereas this is not the case.

### Portrayal of Women as Thieves

If we take a closer look at our society, we find that it is mainly males who are responsible for theft. However, in Siswati literatures we find women being portrayed as thieves. We find Mthembu and Msimang (1991: 95) depicting LaMabizela as a thief. She is an old woman, honoured the home owner. She steals food whilst everyone else is at work. Nobody suspected that she was the thief. She collapses when Mandla and the police catch her red-handed. The following extract reveals this.

*LaMabizela: (ekhute) Hhawu yehheni naku ngafa bo! (ashayeke phansi).*

*Mandla: Kantsi nguwe logangako make? Buka-ke ndvuna bengisola lomunye nje umuntfu.*

*(LaMabizela: (surprised) Oh! I wish I could die. (She collapses).*

*(Mandla: So you are a stealing mom? Headman, I thought it was another person. LaMabizela is quiet).*

(Mthembu and Msimang 1991: 95)

In this incident LaMabizela is caught red handed. She was regarded as a respected elder of the home. This shows the extent of the negative portrayal of woman.

### Portrayal of Women as Witches

In the Swazi nation there is a belief that many women are witches. Before a woman gets married she is advised not to answer back when her in-laws call her names, even a witch. In support of the statement above, Kuper (1970: xvii) stated that:

*A bride, before she leaves her natal home, is counselled by her parents on how to ensure the trials of wifedom. Her mother, weeping instructs her to comport herself humility and restraint though she be insulted and even accused of witchcraft.*

In many dramas most people who are portrayed as witches are women. Mthembu and Msimang (1991: 67) depicted Chitsekile as a witch who had a baboon that grazed in other people's fields at night. The community consults a *sangoma* or diviner, to find out who the owner of the baboon was. Chitsekile was found guilty. The dialogue between Chitsekile and *sangoma* suggested that she (Chitsekile) is a witch.

### Portrayal of Women as Objects

It is noted that in most African homes a woman is treated badly by her husband. Also, women are not expected to answer back because they can beat them up. They can also be beaten up for no apparent reason. Mthembu and Msimang (1991: 55) depicted LaGama as an object. This becomes apparent when LaGama asks a simple question to her husband, only to get a rude response from him. Her husband beats her up and commands her to cook for him. The dialogue between LaGama and Mkopoyi shows how women are really treated.

Mthembu and Msimang (1988: 62) depicted Chitsekile as a mere object. Her husband Lobhunyela promises to beat her up with a knobkerrie. Thus, he does not regard her as a human being. One can conclude that women are treated or depicted as objects in the two paragraphs above. Their husbands do not recognize them as humans. Mkopoyi beats up his wife and commands her to cook for him. He does not care whether she is hurt or not, as long as he gets his food. On the other hand, Lobhunyela promises to beat up his wife. He does not consider her as a living being. He commands her to attend a meeting by force and does not want any views from her.

### Portrayal of Women as Jobless

In most societies women are believed to have no job opportunities. This belief possibly stems from the belief that the woman's place is in the kitchen and women are there to do household chores. This portrayal of women by writers shows that they have no job opportunities. This is evident in Sifundza (1997: 1) where LaHlatjwako is depicted as unemployed. This becomes clear when LaHlatjwako tells her husband to go and look for a job because she earns too little from being a vendor, to support the family. Her husband tells her it is her job to maintain the family. This is shown in the dialogue, where LaHlatjwako talks to her husband, Mahlalela.

In their argument LaHlatjwako is depicted as an uneducated woman who earns a living from selling in the market. The job she is doing shows how insignificant women are portrayed. Mahlalela pretends as if LaHlatjwako is the one who must maintain the home and that she came to the Mahlalela family to do so.

In the very same drama, Gladys is depicted as a sheeben queen. She earns a living by selling beer. This is observed where Gladys talks in the following manner:

*Gladys: Angikwetsembe-ke Mahlalela ngikunike lotjwala bami. Wanganginiki lemali yami angati sitawentanani.*

*(Gladys: Let me trust you Mhlalela and give you my beer. If you don't give me my money I don't know what will happen).*

(Sifundza 1997: 3)

This shows that women are portrayed as jobless, because most writers do not give them higher positions.

### Portrayal of Women as Unfaithful

Women are also portrayed as unfaithful by writers. This is evident in Magagula (1990: 61) who depicted women as unfaithful and loose. This is shown when Mphikeleli asks Tentile about a letter she wrote to him. She had written Hleta instead of Mphikeleli, which means she had addressed it to a wrong person. This portrays her as being unfaithful to her boyfriend. Mphikeleli's speech shows that Tentile is an unfaithful woman who is also a bad woman:

*Mphikeleli: YeTentile! Ufuna ngikwenteni kantsi vele? Sengiwakabani kantsi mine. Yini encwadzini yami ungibite ngaboHleta. (kukhale imphama).*

*(Mphikeleli: Tentile! What do you want? What is my surname? Why do you call me Hleta in a letter addressed to me? (He beats her up)*  
(Magagula 1990: 61)

Mthembu and Msimang (1991: 65) depict women as unfaithful and loose. Gungubele is depicted as having an extra marital affair. Her husband is Mlonyeni and she has an extra marital affair with Nyonende. Mlonyeni finds out about his affair. The following dialogue between Mlonyeni and Gungubele shows that Gungubele is unfaithful to her husband:

*Mlonyeni: Yini yona le?*

*Gungubele: Si-si-sikhwama. Sa-sa-saNyomonde.*

*Mlonyeni: (aphindze ngemphama) Sifunani lakuwe? (amphindze.) sifunani? Seniganene naye nhhi?*

*(Mlonyeni: What is this?)*

*Gungubele: It is a-a-a bag. For-for-for Nyonende.*

*Mlonyeni: (he hits her) Why do you have it? (he hits her again) why? Are you in love with him?)*

(Mthembu and Msimang 1991: 65)

As a result of this altercation, Gungubele loses her marriage. This shows that women are unfaithful. It also shows they are not reliable in a marriage.

### DISCUSSION

The following dramas are related to culture and they present feminists views:

- ♦ Lilungelo Lakhe by Magagula (1994)
- ♦ Tentile by Magagula (1990)
- ♦ Umjingi Udliwa Yinhlitiyo by Nsibande (1988)

- ♦ Ahlantela Labangenamabhodvo by Sifundza (1997)
- ♦ Enshungunshungwini by Sithebe (1993)

In the drama entitled, *Lilungelo Lakhe*, Nikiwe was confronted with the cultural practice of *kungenwa*, where the brother of the deceased takes over the wife of his brother. She has decided that she will not be part of the custom, where a female is dominated by a male or in-laws. This treatment sows seeds of hatred and violence in Nikiwe's grieving heart and later they begin to germinate. She refuses to marry Mgobo who is the younger brother to her deceased husband, Khanya. She tells them she will marry the one she loves if and when she feels the need to marry. Nikiwe says the following:

*Nikiwe: Njengobe ngisho nje yemake, sidzingo sitawuviwa ngimi bese ngiyatibonela kutsi ngenta njani.*

*(Nikiwe: As I said mom, if I feel the need to remarry I'll see what to do).*

(Magagula 1994: 52)

This shows that Nikiwe is totally against the custom of *kungenwa*, and prefers for a person to choose the one she loves. This goes on until Nikiwe reports her resentment of *kungenwa* to the court to secure herself.

In the Swazi culture a widow does not have any share in the wealth of deceased husband? This also applies to Nikiwe; her in-laws wanted to claim everything, only to find that there was a will which the couple had prepared. The will clearly state that after the death of one party; the remaining party will inherit everything. Hence, everything belonged to Nikiwe. This shows that though culture seems to suppress women, there are some instances where its power is superseded by western laws. The court helps to secure the rights of a person; hence Carter (1997: 22) suggested that:

*The concept of rights is not only used to cover specific legal rights granted to women, important though these are, but also to cover the general rights to social, economic and political equality. It is impossible to divorce these rights from the position of women within society and prevailing social attitudes, from the organization of the general distribution of power.*

In the drama entitled, *Tentile*, Tentile was confronted by the practice of *kwendziswa*, where the parents choose a husband for their daughter and force her to marry without any protest. Tentile decides not to follow the custom of

*kwendziswa*, and instead chooses her own partner. She decides to elope and gets a job far away from her home. She gets pregnant out of wedlock. The elders in the family household need to be respected in order to get blessings from the ancestors. Failure to do that brings misfortunes. This is a belief in the African tradition, often if one does not follow tradition, misfortunes ensue. In the end Tentile did not get married and she died in shame. To the reader's mind, the fact that she did not obey her parents in the beginning, reminds the reader that it is true that failure to conform to cultural demands brings misfortunes.

In this drama Magagula tried to portray the custom of *kwendziswa* in a good light, by making Tentile appear like a bad person in the end. One may suggest that it is good for a girl to choose a partner she loves, so that she will not blame anyone if she encounters problems. The domination of men over women is not good because it makes females seem inferior.

In the drama entitled *Umjingi udlwiwa yinhlitiyo*, Sebentile is confronted with the practice of *kwendziswa*. Sebentile has made the decision to disobey the custom. She obeyed her parents and pretended to listen to them because her father threatened her. Instead, she decides to continue with the boyfriend she had chosen for herself. Her parents make all preparations for the husband they had chosen for their daughter, but in the end Sebentile marries the husband of her choice.

In this situation culture and patriarch did not dictate to Sebentile what to do because she refused to marry Mshiyeni, who was chosen by her parents. She did not encounter any problems because she married the one she loved and there was no misfortune. Though the writer tried to stress the significance of culture, it seems as if he failed, because in a democratic country one chooses the person one loves.

## CONCLUSION

The paper highlighted the discrepancies and odds embedded in stereotypes, language and sexist language. It revealed that the use of language and reality need to be thoroughly looked at. An analysis of the depiction was made to establish the extent of the portrayal of women in Siswati plays. A review of texts was done to find out how culture or patriarch controls women. The preceding discussion has shown how women are portrayed in many Siswati dramas.



### RECOMMENDATIONS

Future research needs to review the cultures of the nation that are discriminatory and harmful to certain people. The status of women in society needs to be upheld and their role be acknowledged in a positive manner. There are many issues that need attention in the whole society about the effects of sexist language, naming stereotypes and semantic derogation in social interaction.

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