

*A Feminist Critique of  
the Image of Woman in  
the Prose Works of Selected  
Xhosa Writers (1909 - 1980)*

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**A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Arts  
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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Promoter : Professor S.C Satyo  
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## *Declaration*

**I declare that this thesis is my own work, both in conception and creation.**

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# **A Feminist Critique of the Image of Woman in the Prose Works of Selected Xhosa Writers (1909 - 1980)**

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## **Summary**

The study examines, from a feminist point of view, the stereotypic image of woman in Xhosa prose fiction from pre-literate times to the era of written literature (1909 - 1980). Attaching feminist critical theory to conventional literary characterisation gives this pioneering study a human dimension that is bound to rejuvenate traditional critical appreciation and highlight the tremendous power of art to reflect or parallel real-life experiences. Consequently, the study transcends the confines of traditional literary criticism. It throws interdisciplinary light on the African feminist dilemma over the past 70 years while focusing on gender stereotyping as a characterisation technique.

Chapter 1 clearly demarcates the scope of study and the critical position adopted, while chapter 2 traces stereotypes back to Xhosa folk-tales. In this way, an interesting link or parallel in stereotyping between oral and written literature is highlighted.

It is worth pointing out that Chapter 3 is significant in that no women writers' works produced in the first and the second decades have survived. The male writers of the period describe women in strict stereotypic fashion, without fear of contradiction, from Woman as Eve to Woman as Witch, among other archetypal images.

The female stereotypic image in the third and the fourth decades, the role of the first two female novelists and the early seeds of female resistance to male domination, are discussed in Chapter 4 while Chapter 5 highlights the depiction of female characters by male and female prose writers in the Fifties, culminating in Mzamane's exposure of glaring anti-female social norms and practices.

In Chapter 6 the spotlight is cast on the woman of the Sixties and the rise of active resistance to male dominance.

Some contemporary women, as pointed out in Chapter 7, have crossed the Rubicon in diverse ways. They are assertive, independent, proactive and relentlessly opposed to male dominance.

Chapter 8 sums up the main points in relation to the Xhosa woman's attitude towards Western feminism: while many Xhosa women feel justifiably unhappy about male dominance, they refuse to let their frustrations affect their unity with men in the greater struggle against racism. Although the study concludes on an anti-climactic note for Western feminists, it focuses on this crucial and unique distinction between Western and black feminism.

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The women of the nineteenth century were treated in a manner not unlike that which is still the bitter experience of the Negro in many parts of the world. Traits that are mythically attributed to the Negro at the present time were for many generations saddled upon women, the second-class citizens of a patriarchal society. Women, it was alleged, had smaller brains than men, and less intelligence; they were more emotional and unstable; in a crisis you could always rely upon them to swoon or become otherwise helpless; they were weak and sickly creatures, they had little judgment and less sense; they could not be entrusted with the handling of money; and as for the world outside, they could be employed only at the most menial and routine of tasks.

Ashley Montagu

## Chapter 1

# Introduction

### 1.1 *Aim and motivation of study:*

Xhosa literature, being the first local vernacular literature to be written, has grown by leaps and bounds since the appearance of the first sizeable novel, in 1909. It, therefore, offers students and critics ample scope for analysing<sup>1</sup> the dynamics that accompany its evolution. Feminist criticism, with its focus on the relationship between men and women, and the role of societal norms, values and stereotypes in this relationship, can profitably be employed to throw fresh light on how women have been characterised in Xhosa literature.

The Xhosa nation has a paradoxical history of a deep-rooted patriarchal tradition, several devastating frontier wars of colonization, the 'inadvertent' onslaught of missionary influence on Xhosa cultural life,<sup>2</sup> the ravages of education and Westernization on the traditional social fabric, and, more recently, the impact of economic deprivation on the entire Xhosa nation. The latter has long been part of an equally unsympathetic capitalist system.

The abovementioned forces combined to make severe inroads on how the Xhosas perceived themselves and how they viewed, among other things, the role of women in this rapidly changing environment. This general disintegration of traditional life and values prompted earlier writers, such as W B Rubusana, to write books aimed at capturing the efficacious elements of the dying heritage, e.g. *Zemk'inkomo magwalandini* (1906). John Henderson Soga wrote the *South Eastern Bantu* (1930) and *AmaXosa: Life and Customs* (1931) with the same purpose in mind. Among the other earlier novelists, Mqhayi, in *Ityala lamawele* (1914), and Jordan, in his *Ingqumbo yeminyanya* (1940), deal with the same problem.

These factors are to be taken cognisance of if literature, as Josephine Donovan (in Benstock, 1987: 106) puts it, is not to be seen as 'a transcendent string of disembodied masterpieces that are disconnected from their specific historical locale'.

Undeniably, it is this socio-politico-cultural background that gives the Xhosa woman her peculiar stamp of authority or identity mark in the vast sea of "being a woman". In recognizing this fact, Catherine Stimpson's (in Benstock, 1987:3) warning that 'a danger in feminism, and in feminist criticism, is the false ahistorical overuniversalizing of woman', is heeded.

Another important comment about this issue is that made by Judith Newton (1981:124) who asserts that 'as feminist critics we speak of making our knowledge of history, choosing to see in it not a tale of individual and inevitable suffering, signifying nothing, but a story of struggle and relations of power.'

Women play an important role in Xhosa society and literature. This notwithstanding, negative stereotyping is a common feature of every society. The study aims at capturing this stereotypic image of Xhosa women and to establish whether the general image of women in Xhosa literature has changed with the advances made by women in the social, political and economic spheres.

Sheila Ruth (1980:18) defines stereotype and its negative effects as follows:

*Stereotype* is a concept related to role, yet distinct. Defined by one author as a "picture in our heads," stereotype is a composite image of traits and expectations pertaining to some group (such as teachers, police officers, Jews, hippies, or women) - an image that is persistent in the social mind though it is somehow off-center or inaccurate. Typically, the stereotype is an overgeneralization of characteristics that may or may not have been observed in fact. Often containing a kernel of truth that is partial and thus misleading, the stereotype need not be self-consistent, and it has a remarkable resistance to change by new information. . . .

This is confirmed by Vivian de Klerk (1989:5) who states that:

Stereotypes are abstractions, simplifying what otherwise might have overwhelmingly diverse meaning. The expectations stereotypes generate can have undesirable constraining effects on person-perception, and have behavioral consequences. Any pervasive, widely shared expectation about people in a social category inevitably exerts subtle pressure on its members to display behaviours, traits and attitudes consistent with it. Sex-role stereotypes are tenaciously held, well-defined concepts that prescribe how each sex ought to perform. Such sex-role stereotypes generate sex-role standards (i.e. expectations about how each sex ought to act) and the stereotypes and standards reinforce each other.

The full impact of these generalizations about women can only be appreciated by paying particular attention to the following comments by Ashley Montagu (1953:11):

The women of the nineteenth century were treated in a manner not unlike that which is still the bitter experience of the Negro in many parts of the world. Traits that are mythically attributed to the Negro at the present time were for many generations saddled upon women, the second-class citizens of a patriarchal society. Women, it was alleged, had smaller brains than men, and less intelligence; they were more emotional and unstable; in a crisis you could always rely upon them to swoon or become otherwise helpless; they were weak and sickly creatures, they had little judgment and less sense; they could not be entrusted with the handling of money; and as for the world outside, they could be employed only at the most menial and routine of tasks.

Among others, the following stereotypes are discussed and highlighted in this study: the Submissive Wife, the Great Mother, the Dominating Wife, Woman on a Pedestal, Woman as Sex Object, Woman Alone, the Liberated Woman (cf. Ferguson, 1977:14 ff), Woman as Hero, Woman as Witch and Woman as Eve. In addition, other images of women as they struggle for full equality and total liberation from male created and enforced social structures, will also be highlighted.

The link between literature and society has long been established. Literature reflects, albeit in mediated form, social values and norms, on the one side, and promotes these social values and norms, on the other. This process occurs because readers unconsciously identify with the characters depicted and, more often than not, adopt the projected norms as the 'correct' forms of behaviour. In this way, there is a link between literature and social behaviour.<sup>3</sup> That is why Kathleen Staudt (1976:63) contends that 'if literary artists affect the way people perceive their culture and ultimately the way they behave, it is instructive to analyze the manner with which artists deal with women whose status is undergoing substantial change.'

The study will, where applicable, also highlight speech stereotyping which Sekhukhune (1988:165), in his interesting study on sexism in Northern Sotho, explains as follows:

Most of these stereotypes which are, for the moment, exemplified by idiomatic and proverbial expressions relegate the social status of a woman to that of a nonentity. The sex role stereotypes of men have acquired aggressive qualities and command absolute power and authority while those of women demonstrate lack of assertiveness and certainty.

What has heightened my interest in this kind of study is that there are black academics who feel that the black woman's current subordinate role is a colonial social phenome-

non that was not as acute or blatant in pre-colonial times. They maintain that even the men who regard women as inferior are actually evincing a colonial Western mentality.

On the contrary, Denise Ackermann (1989:3), a staunch South African feminist liberation theologian, contends, quite vehemently, that:

In the first place, all women in South Africa are subjected to an undisguised exercise of patriarchal power..... The socio-cultural conditioning of the white males, and more particularly the Afrikaner, is rooted in a dualistic world view which rests comfortably on patriarchal structures. Men, who are strong, rational and aggressive, lead; women, the weak, emotional and passive, follow. Women's place is in the home. We hear these stereotypes ad nauseum. *Black male patriarchy existed long before whites arrived at the Cape and is built into much of black culture and tradition.* Indeed, in this respect we are all no different from the rest of the world. (My emphasis)

These assertions make it even more important to scrutinize the literature of the past seven decades in the light of feminist ideology to establish the extent of this inhibitive stereotyping and whether or not it shows signs of changing with the times, for better or for worse.

In support of the significance of such studies, Cloete, Botha and Malan (1985:108) point out how the text can reflect a particular era and its sociological or political nature. Among other things, they clearly indicate that characters' actions, the way they have been depicted by the writer, the circumstances in which the incidents take place, and the narrator's perspective, can produce evidence of not only a specific period, but also of a specific ideology. It is in the light of this view that it is hoped that this study will be able to throw light on how the patriarchal ideology of male dominance has affected the depiction of Xhosa women over the years.

As far as Xhosa literature is concerned, this is a pioneering study as no other in-depth study involving the feminist critical theory *per se* has been undertaken before. Ngcanga's M A thesis, although largely focusing on some of these concerns in Sesotho novels, uses conventional characterisation as its basic analytic tool. The reason for this lack of feminist oriented critical studies is that the feminist issues and concerns discussed in the study were, like in all traditional societies all over the world, dormant for a long time. This situation lasted until the cumulative effect of the socio-political forces and pressures brought to bear on the lives of the women in general, led this silent majority to start questioning the status quo.<sup>4</sup> The men were then forced to adopt vari-

ous defensive positions and strategies, one of which is to treat the whole feminist issue as a non-issue.

Secondly, because there was, among the critics of the day, no one with a feminist inclination, an erroneous impression may have been created that these feminist issues are insignificant or totally irrelevant. If this could be true, by any stretch of imagination, then the oppression of females would, by the same token, not matter too, as feminism was directly born of political oppression of females all over the world. That is why a study such as this always goes hand in glove with prevailing political circumstances. Actual politics gave birth to sexual politics, which, in turn, gave birth to textual politics, the main concern of the study.

A close look at the different types of Xhosa literature, oral and written, clearly indicates that the basis for these feminist issues and concerns has, in fact, always been there as there is overwhelming evidence that the woman has always been an underdog.<sup>5</sup>

The relationship between authors and both the social background from which they come and the dominant ideology of their time is further highlighted by Gardner (1988:132):

Literêre werke word nie misterieus geïnspireer nie, nog is hulle verklaarbaar slegs in terme van hulle outeurs se psigologie. Hulle is vorms van persepsie, besondere maniere om die wêreld waar te neem, en as sodanig het hulle 'n verhouding tot daardie dominante manier van die wêreld waar te neem wat die ideologie van 'n era is. Daardie ideologie op sy beurt, is die produk van die konkrete sosiale verhoudings wat die mens betree op 'n sekere tyd en plek; dit is die manier waarop daardie klasverhoudings ervaar, gelegitimeer en geperpetueer word....

Nomathamsanqa Tisani (1989:5), a staunch protagonist of the view that the subordination of women largely stems from colonial influence,<sup>6</sup> does at least concede that our current value system is very prejudicial to the status of women:

Our value system has been so affected that the term *ubufazi* (womanhood) and *umfazi* (woman) has come to have negative connotations. *Umfazi* has come to mean that creature that is subservient, submissive with very little or no ability to think vertically.

It is precisely this attitude, this "creature", that this study intends searching for in numerous female stereotypes of our literature. Having established beyond all doubt that this attitude towards women has, in fact, entered our social relations, the question of whether it is something new or old is not seen as particularly relevant to this study.

Tisani's is not merely a solitary voice crying out in the wilderness. (Thoko Ntshinga (1989:19), the celebrated actress, is equally concerned about male dominance and the role of black women in this country:

"Tbhinqa elimnyama eMzantsi-Afrika sesona sidalwa sicinezweyo nesona sisetyenziswa ngendlela engeyiyo. Kukho umahluko phakathi kwamabhinqa eli - masithi ukuzekelisa nawaseSwazini. KwelaseSwazini, umntu obhinqileyo unamalungelo ukudlula oweli.... Amanye amadoda aye alibone ibhinqa njengomashini wokuzala abantwana kube kuphelele apho. Amanye amadoda asijongela phantsi aye asinyanzela ukuba siwaphekele siwahlambele impahla yawo yokunxiba. Akucina endlwini njengekhoboka aye akakuhloneli njengomntu nanjengomntu onengqondo netalente. Mna andizimiselanga ukukwamkela oko. Onke amabhinqa amnyama kweli amelwe kukuba asukume alwele amalungelo awo nokuba ahlonelwe nokuba kananjalo anikwe imbeko. Isidima sebhinqa elimnyama akufuneki ukuba sitshatyalaliswe ngamasiko abaNyama amandulo nashiywe lixesha athabatha umntu wasetyhini njengomntwana omncinane".

("The black woman in South Africa is the most oppressed and abused creature. There is some difference between local women and, for example, women in Swaziland. In Swaziland, a woman has more rights than women in this country.... Some men view a woman as a procreation machine only. Others look down upon us and force us to cook for them and be their washer-women, that is all. They will confine us to the house like slaves and will not respect us as human beings or as intelligent and talented people. I am not prepared to accept this. All the black women in this country must rise and fight for their rights and demand that they be accorded the necessary respect. The dignity of the black woman should not be destroyed by the antiquated and outdated Black peoples' traditions that regard the black woman as a perpetual minor".)

Black women are beginning to question and to challenge these attitudes, albeit in a subtle and diplomatic way, as the study will show. They are bent on projecting a more balanced or positive image of womanhood as could be seen from Thoko Ntshinga's uncompromising stand and from the following comments by Nomathamsanqa Tisani (op. cit.) in this regard:

And yet we all know that black womanhood has elements that would benefit all of us if we gave them room for expression. I know of no people in the world with the resilience of the black woman who has survived the evils that would have otherwise crushed the spirits of many. Who else but a black woman would survive the migratory labour system and all its brutality? Who else could have survived the killings and detentions of husband and children? The pain of the one who remains at home keeping the hearth warm is greater than those who go out to fight.

This, and numerous other evidence, does not only point to the end of female docility and subservience, but it is also highly diagnostic and indicative of the presence of the feminist bug in the silent majority of African women, as questioning male authority lies at the heart of feminism. The women are no longer prepared to suffer silently.

The fact that in the black communities male-female relations are changing by the day is also confirmed by Ramphele and Boonzaier (1988:161):

It is also clear that women do not merely accept their subservient role passively. Faced with the circumstances within which they have to exist, women try to manipulate the system of male dominance to suit their own aims, developing strategies to circumvent some of the restrictions, or merely scoffing at those aspects about which they can do nothing.

Viewed in this light, it should, therefore, be interesting to see how the male and female writers of the past seven decades have, consciously or unconsciously, depicted the Xhosa woman in her rapidly changing environment. It should also be interesting to examine the literature of this period for any signs of female stereotyping that goes against the grain of feminist ideology or that, consciously or unconsciously, promotes the idea of equality.

The significance of character studies in literature is also aptly articulated by Ngcangca (1987:2):

Character studies in literature often depict the way people perceive their culture from time to time and as such, writers form images in response to their culture. They draw their material from the social history and as such their works reflect the social conditions prevailing in their times.

It should, therefore, be emphasised from the outset that, to be successful, a study such as this demands a maximum degree of 'realism' or verisimilitude. Consequently, an illusion of reality undergirds the analysis of the various characters, much in the same way as it does in Michael and Mollie Hardwick's deconstruction of the Sherlock Holmes stories.<sup>7</sup> This explains why, in some cases, certain characters will be referred to as though they were real human beings. Xhosa writers have an established tradition of largely portraying real-life experiences in their fiction. The only factor to be constantly borne in mind is that these being real-life experiences mediated through literature, they cannot be totally divorced from their make-believe world as literary conventions will always impose some limitations on the depiction of the characters and their life situations.

This is one of the points that Toril Moi (1985:43) makes about 'Images of Women Criticism'. While this type of criticism has, according to her, proved to be an extremely fertile branch of feminist criticism in America, in terms of the actual number of works it has generated, she (op. cit. :44), nevertheless, points out that:

As one reads on in *Images of Women in Fiction*, one quickly becomes aware of the fact that to study 'images of women' in fiction is equivalent to studying *false* images of

women in fiction written by both sexes. The 'image' of women in literature is invariably defined in opposition to the 'real person' whom literature somehow never quite manages to convey to the reader.

The term 'illusion' is used advisedly in relation to character portrayal in this study. Moi (op. cit. : 45) emphasizes that textual production is a 'highly complex, over-determined process with many different and conflicting literary and non-literary determinants' and that writing should not be 'seen as a more or less faithful reproduction of an external reality to which we all have equal and unbiased access'.

Although she is sceptical of extreme reflectionism and its insistence on authenticity, she (op. cit.) does concede that:

Literary works can and should of course be criticized for having selected and shaped their fictional universe according to *oppressive and objectionable ideological assumptions*, but that should not be confused with failing to be 'true to life' or with not presenting 'an authentic expression of real experience'. (My emphasis)

## 1.2 Scope of study:

As pointed out, the study examines the images of women as reflected in the works of selected writers from the earliest beginnings of Xhosa literature to the beginning of the Eighties. All available female authored works that fall within this period have been included in the discussion whereas only the works of a representative sample of male writers have been selected. The main criterion for selecting these particular male authors is purely expedience although they are generally regarded as some of the most successful authors. It should, however, be pointed out that a study such as this does not depend on literary excellence *per se* but on the success of the author as far as character portrayal is concerned. This aspect is measured both by what the writer says regarding a character and by what he deliberately omits to say.

That characters always serve a purpose in a work of art, and that this always goes hand in hand with some form of stereotyping even under normal conventional circumstances, is confirmed by Groenewald (1985 : 78) :

Whatever aim the author has in mind, the characters are always used with a certain end or purpose, they are stereotypes, such as the protagonist, antagonist, etc - a stereotype being a structural unit by which the author (a) outlines or defines the conflict or problem that he introduces, and (b) thereafter shapes the theme he has decided upon. These stereotypes are then allocated certain traits to give each of them a definite personality to discern it as an individual. The features to be assigned to a stereotype belong to definite categories, such as appearance, physical or psychological reactions to different stimuli, etc.,....

Writers have various purposes and motives in their use or depiction of characters. Fein (1987: 1) distinguishes between function and role by stating that 'role is a broader term while function suggests a deliberate intention on the part of the author to use characters portrayed for a given purpose.' Since these purposes could be many and varied, and since, as pointed out by Cohen (1973:37), 'literature portrays almost every conceivable human action, thought, attitude, emotion, situation or problem,' students of feminism, in particular, must develop an acute sensibility for the way in which an author depicts characters otherwise they may miss vital covert nuances in the books concerned. Focusing the spotlight on, and constantly questioning, the author's motive, is not only central but also imperative in a study that concerns itself with subjective and subtle issues such as stereotyping and human attitudes as revealed in characterisation.

### *1.3 Method of approach:*

The books under discussion will be analysed in terms of current feminist theory as circumscribed by the purpose of this study. Although greater emphasis will be laid on stereotypes and other symbolic images of women, this study will also reflect the plight of Xhosa women as a result of oppressive male-authored social norms and discriminatory practices.

In the narrower context, male dominance will form the basis of this study, while, in the broader context, perhaps by far the most hurtful, racism will also be discussed. Ramphela and Boonzaier (ibid:156) describe male dominance and its prevalence amongst Africans as follows:

There is a widespread ideology of male dominance amongst Africans which emphasizes the idea that women pass through the control of different men throughout their lives. It is a system of control that stretches from the cradle to the grave. The father's control operates up to the time of marriage, at which point it passes over to the husband. In cases of children born to single women, the mother's father and brothers assume control. Widowed women fall under the control of a designated brother-in-law who assumes the responsibility of his late brother, including in some cases, fathering children for him (Hunter, 1936:210). This system confers the status of perpetual minor on African women, and has been reinforced by legal provisions of successive white governments (Simons, 1968:281).

Comparison will also be drawn between female stereotypes as used by male writers, on the one hand, and female stereotypes as used by females, on the other. Since female authors could be seen to be correcting some of the male biases and to be projecting a more balanced view or image of women, all available female authored works have been included for consideration while a randomly selected sample of established

male works has been made. The other reason, of course, is that female authors are in the minority compared with all the men.

Division into decades is purely for convenience and to facilitate chronological comparison. Stereotypes certainly change with the times and concomitant circumstances. Each decade will, therefore, largely reflect contemporary thinking and tendencies in this regard.

It is hoped that this study, though coming so late in comparison to studies overseas, will, in a modest way, show the relationship between Xhosa literature and society and thereby contribute to the essential promotion of greater understanding between men and women. Hopefully, it will contribute towards closing the gap that feminist critics feel still exists, as pointed out by Driver (in Ryan and van Zyl, 1982 : 207) :

Much of the primary work seems to be completed, though some feminist critics, arguing that their colleagues have merely exchanged one Great Tradition for another, insist that the canon will only be complete when there are bibliographies and evaluations of the work of black, third-world and working-class women writers as well. (My emphasis)

The relevance of the stereotypical approach to such a study is confirmed by Florence Stratton (1988:145):

As Katherine Frank states in her useful discussion of Western feminist critical methodologies and their relevance to African fiction, the stereotypical approach has dominated feminist criticism of African fiction thus far. The aim of this type of analysis is to elicit the images of woman - girlfriend, mother, prostitute, and so forth - that a writer produces.

Regarding the role of the African feminist critic or writer, Rhonda Cobham (1988:233) articulately advocates conciliation of the Western and the African approaches and asserts that the African writer or critic shares a platform with both the progressive, albeit patriarchally oriented, political elements, and the traditionalists as he/she is 'constantly engaged in a "balancing act", taking what is of value from both mainstream feminist criticism and African literary criticism.' This is the attitude adopted in this study while, of course, one should also guard against finding oneself apologizing for inherently indefensible issues in feminist terms. In short, while the African perspective is vital for the understanding of the role of African women, it would be folly to use that perspective to justify the unjustifiable. That is why Cobham's phrase "what is of value" is of great importance in this regard although it can also lend the unwary critic into all sorts of subjective judgments.

## 1.4 Demarcation of critical theory.

Faced with a deluge of feminist critical theory and because feminist criticism consists in various modes and no less than four broad ideologies (Fouché, 1988:1), - liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism and socialist feminism - expedience compels me to demarcate the main feminist critical thrust employed in this study in order to achieve its intended objectives.

First and foremost, a fundamental question to answer is whether feminist criticism has contributed at all to the conventional literary canon, i.e. whether or not it has played any significant role in its redefinition.

In this regard, Elaine Showalter (in Benstock, *ibid*: 30) asserts unequivocally that:

... feminist criticism is obviously the most effective stimulant of the professional economy, since it has not only made it necessary to re-read the canon, but has opened up for critical exploitation the vast, almost inexhaustible raw materials of women's texts.

She (*op. cit.*: 3) emphasizes the relative broadness of the scope of feminist criticism by stating that it has a 'broad social and intellectual base' and is 'unusually wide in scope' as it is 'not limited or even partial to a single national literature, genre, or century...'

Broadly stated by Greene and Kahn (1985:1):<sup>8</sup>

Feminist literary criticism is one branch of interdisciplinary enquiry which takes gender as a fundamental organizing category of experience. This enquiry holds two related premises about gender. One is that the inequality of the sexes is neither a biological given nor a divine mandate, but a culture construct, and therefore a proper subject of study for any humanistic discipline. The second is that a male perspective, assumed to be 'universal', has dominated fields of knowledge, shaping their paradigms and methods.

Annette Kolodny (in Abel, 1982:159) reconciles the different analytical methodologies likely to be applied to any given text by pointing out that feminist literary criticism can be refined to suit specific needs. In its analysis of the image of Xhosa women characters from pre-literate times to the early eighties, this study will, *mutatis mutandis*, endeavour to use feminist criticism as a point of departure or as a yardstick while incorporating conventional literary criticism and black feminism.

It should be pointed out from the outset that while western feminist critical thought will, no doubt, serve a useful purpose in deciphering some of the more universal female myths, not everything found in the Xhosa context will fit into the western mould. This

means, therefore, that the Xhosa or African perspective will have to be kept in mind, as any theory should take cognisance of contextual dynamics. Fortunately, similar attempts have already been made with other African literatures, e.g by Bruner, Bryan, Jones and others.

It should also be stressed that stereotypes and myths are sometimes ambivalent depending on the role of the woman in a given moment. Myths play an important role in literature and in society.<sup>9</sup>

While there is obviously a lot of diversity as regards feminist critical theory and ideology, Greene and Kahn (ibid:2)<sup>10</sup> reduce feminism to one universal feature which will form the basis of this study:

Feminists do, however, find themselves confronting one universal - that whatever power or status may be accorded to women in a given culture, they are still, in comparison to men, devalued as 'the second sex'. Feminist scholars study diverse social constructions of femaleness and maleness in order to understand the universal phenomenon of male dominance.

It is, no doubt, imperative that a clear distinction be made from the outset between gender and sex as both terms will be used quite extensively in this study. Tuttle (1987: 123) defines gender and sex as follows:

Term for the socially imposed division between the sexes. Whereas *sex* refers to the biological anatomical differences between male and female, gender refers to the emotional and psychological attributes which a given culture expects to coincide with the physical maleness or femaleness.

My sole purpose in undertaking this task is similar to Mary Allen's (1976:180) who says:

My purpose here, of course, is not to make a conclusion about the nature of American women, which I am not qualified to do, but to show how I find them in our fiction.<sup>11</sup>

In my case, I wish not to make a conclusion about the nature of Xhosa women, which I am not qualified to do, but to show how I find them in *our* fiction.

Throughout this study, it is my honest intention to heed Mineke Schipper's (in Jones, Palmer and Jones, 1987:52) advice that:

The male critic of African literature must cultivate the habit of humility appropriate to his limited experience of the female world and purged of the superiority and arrogance which history so insidiously makes him heir to.

## 1.5 *Resumé*

In this introductory chapter, the aim, scope and method of approach of this study have been defined. Because the feminist critical theory is fairly wide, and because it is new

to Xhosa literary studies, it became necessary, not only to demarcate the scope of this study in detail, but also to give an in-depth exposition of its critical foundations. The purpose for doing so is two-fold. Firstly, it is to point the way to those who may be interested in conducting similar research in future, and, secondly, to clarify, in so far as I am able, some of the crucial issues for those who are not altogether familiar with this critical theory.

## Notes

1. See, for example, Sirayi (1989) where he applies the Propp/Pike/Dundes theory to the Xhosa novel, with interesting results. See also Kwetana (1987).
2. See also Saule (1989:53) for Mqhayi's comment on the destructive role of both the state and the church on African life and traditions, and also Mqhayi's *Inzuzo*, (1974:35), Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg.
3. See Amuta (1989:8 and 82).
4. A good example of this changing awareness was reported in a women's page article in the *Daily Dispatch* of 14 August 1989, p.4, under the caption, "Knocking on the door of sexism", by Lorna Schofield. According to the article, Transkei women have established an organisation said to aim at bringing the Xhosa women 'out of the kitchen' and helping them to 'shed the shackles of the traditional role of women in the society'. Childbearing, lobola, polygamy and wife-bashing are subject to close scrutiny. According to its convener/chairperson, Mrs Pule Tshangela, 'many issues had arisen over the past few months which called for the presence of a women's organisation to act as a pressure group'. This is a significant development because earlier women's organisations such as Zenzele and YWCA were predominantly self-help organisations whereas the newly formed and yet unnamed organisation assumes socio-political overtones.

See also Soga (s.a.:263) regarding the conventional view on lobola. Soga contends that: "In no country civilised or uncivilized is there any custom so powerful, I believe, to secure the status of the married woman, and to protect her from physical abuse."

It is also quite interesting to note Soga's (ibid:275) further comment in the light of the above developments: "Any attempt to destroy the lobola custom would be

most strenuously resisted by the women themselves, for they realise, as no others can, what it means to them in security of person and social status.”

5. See Kramarae (1985:464).
6. Cf. Katherine Frank (in Jones, Palmer and Jones, 1987:15) who states in this regard that ‘the new militancy of the new feminist novel in Africa, arises from the institutionalized sexism of contemporary African life, though there is endless debate among writers, critics, journalists, sociologists, and anthropologists over whether this entrenched patriarchal culture came with the white colonialists or is inherent in African society.’
7. See Catherine Belsey (1980:113).
8. See also Showalter (in Elizabeth Abel, 1982:12).
9. See Lefkowitz (in Cameron and Kuhrt, 1983:49).
10. See also Oakley (1986:335).
11. The fiction will primarily consist of novels and, to a much lesser extent, short stories. The terms novel and novelette, given that most Xhosa writings are of moderate length, will be used interchangeably throughout the study. Novelette, as used in the study therefore bears no perjorative connotation and refers only to length.

## Chapter 2

# The earlier images of female characters

### 2.0 Introduction

In this short preliminary chapter, the spotlight will be cast on the depiction of female characters in the folk-tales and, more cursorily, on the general interest in female characters in early Xhosa literary works. It is hoped that this short overview will serve to highlight the link in stereotyping between oral and written literature.

### 2.1 *The female character in the Xhosa folk-tale*

The following books will cursorily be considered in this section: *Ezinye iintsomi za-maXhosa* by W P T Ndibongo and E N Ntloko, *The Xhosa Ntsomi* by H Scheub, *Folk-tales from Mpondoland* by J V Cantrell.

The sole purpose for giving this overview of Xhosa narrative traditional literature is to establish whether this literature did not lay the foundations for the preponderant stereotyping found in written literature. The folk-tales were never meant to be overtly didactic but they, nevertheless, have some covert educative function, as is confirmed by Jones, Palmer and Jones (1987:36):

Of course, when one examines the recorded texts, one might wonder whether a myth or story doesn't serve particular interests in a given society.

This view is upheld by Scheub (1975:16) who attaches the following significance to the folk-tale:

Nor is the artist didactic. She does not moralize. This is not to say that the *ntsomi* productions do not include moral and philosophical comments, but, as with plot, these are revealed rather than stated. The performer concentrates on the aesthetic aspects of form sanctioned by the tradition, and the philosophical and moral considerations are strands in the tightly woven fabric of the narrative which are revealed only during the process of externalizing the *ntsomi* image. In fact, this deeply complex artistic tradition is the means whereby the wisdom of the past is communicated to the present, and the audience's emotional involvement in the work of art ensures the transmission of ancestral ideals.

This also ensures the transmission of cultural stereotypes.

Rhonda Cobham (ibid:232) cites Davies as identifying four goals for African feminist criticism one of which has a direct bearing on traditional literature:

These are the development of a literary canon of works by African women writers; the reexamination of stereotypical images of women in African literature; the elaboration of a feminist aesthetic in the work of African women writers; and the examination of the role and presentation of women in African traditional literature.

Having enumerated these goals, she singles out the last goal as being particularly relevant to a study such as this and points to the futility of trying to examine feminism in African literature without paying attention to this goal. Cf. Cobham (op. cit.):

I found Davies's fourth category or goal for an African feminist literary criticism the most interesting and the least clearly defined: the reevaluation or uncovering of women's functions and image within traditional African literature. This concern serves to remind us, as literary critics trained within a modern critical context that is limited for the most part to documents written in modern European languages, that dynamic oral traditions exist within most African societies, to which African women have had access for centuries. Without some understanding of such traditions, our attempts as critics to establish aesthetic categories for or lines of literary continuity between the works of African women writers and their historical antecedents become at best futile guessing games.

It is in the light of these sentiments that this study first addresses itself to the image of the woman in the Xhosa folk-tale before selectively examining Xhosa prose.

The relationship between the folk-tale tradition and the emergence of the novel has been confirmed by several scholars such as George Kahari,<sup>1</sup> C T Msimang<sup>2</sup> and S C Satyo<sup>3</sup> with regard to Shona, Zulu and Xhosa, respectively.

Themes  
Storytelling reveals some features of great interest to feminist scholars. While it is, as such, aimed at a broad spectrum of listeners or audience, a close study of certain characters in the stories shows a definite bias towards female characters. The storytellers, normally old women entrusted with moulding the characters of the younger generation of both sexes, at the crucial formative years of their lives, always seem to stress exemplary conduct and self-sacrifice in the case of girls, more than in the case of boys.

Whereas young boys never find themselves in situations where they have to lick dirt from old women's eyes to enable them to marry the girls of their choice, young girls, sometimes, have to go through this acid test before marrying the men of their dreams. Although the general message 'respect your elders' seems to apply across the board, when contextualized for the purposes of a given story, it is always the young girl who

stands to lose an eligible marriage partner if she fails to display certain basic attributes such as kindness, humility and self-sacrifice.

Though some feminist critics may discern male chauvinist tendencies in this disparate treatment, it has its advantages in that it equips the young girls in order to face the trials of life with equanimity, and to appreciate that one has to stoop to conquer.

It was considered important, in traditional society, for girls to be subjected to this 'training' in survival strategies as they were the future custodians of the revered social values. In this way, the storytellers drove the point home that whereas males depend on brute force to achieve the more difficult objectives, females use tact and self-sacrifice. In so doing, they attain the same goals at no personal risk to life, honour and integrity. This, especially in the eyes of the young listeners, put the women on a par with men, if not on a plain slightly higher, as the storytellers invariably valued brains more than brawn.

As the study will reveal, this is the most powerful strategy of contemporary women. They know exactly how to enter any combat as publicly acclaimed underdogs and end up unacclaimed victors, without having fired a single bullet, and still retaining the goodwill of their adversaries.

The question as to what the purpose of the 'primitive' female storytellers was for telling stories that sometimes showed the denigration of women is a vexing one. A conclusive answer does not seem to be anywhere in sight as pointed out by Ruth Finnegan (1984: 376-377):

In studying the oral literature of any particular people, we want to know, for instance, about the views of the people themselves (or sometimes more significantly, about the views of different groups among them) concerning the purpose and functions of their narrations ... Of course, even then we need to remember that, as in the case of written literature, there can be no final definition of the purpose and use of oral literature.

She (op.cit.) concludes by pointing out that:

Amid all the theorizing about the possible functions of stories there is one point which, it seems, is too often overlooked. This is the likelihood that within a culture stories are likely to have many functions. They will probably vary with the content and tone....

It is quite possible that the storytellers wished to educate women in certain patterns of behaviour such as self-sacrifice. Judging from what Knappert (1977:98) says about their astute sophistication in the narration of animal stories, the view that they expressed their disguised disgust at this treatment does not seem to be far fetched. He says:

The object of the fable remained though, i.e. to show by example the lessons one may find in the relationships between human beings in society. It was not so much the naïveté of the 'primitive' story teller which caused him to interpret human minds and social conditions into the lives of the animals, as rather astute sophistication of the same story teller who taught the young generation by these means to say things in an indirect manner, to speak about problems without directly offending anyone.

It is, therefore, inconceivable that these storytellers could use this powerful weapon when narrating animal stories and not use it at all when it came to folk-tales and legends which fall under the same genre as the fable. Given that cultural norms are orally transmitted, one cannot doubt that the predominantly female performers had a purpose for the subtle but constant reference to the ill-treatment or victimization of women. The issue becomes even more crucial when seen against the following remark by Vila-kazi (1945:191):

The sympathy of the story usually is with the under-dog, who often comes out top in the struggle between force and wits.

As can be seen from the following comments by Malcolm, as cited by Satyo (1977:98), folk-tales are intended to have a salutary regulatory effect on society:

They are told for the purpose of enforcing or, at any rate, supporting some point of family discipline or tribal custom. They uphold conduct that is for the good of society and the welfare of the community.

Viewed in this light, it is, therefore, contended that by highlighting such antisocial behaviour as the victimization of women as well as male dominance in general, these folk-tales appeal, albeit very subtly and unobtrusively, to the collective conscience of the nation's custodians of justice and the natural rule of law to reassess their attitudes towards women, as confirmed by Pallo Jordan (in Jordan, 1973 : xi):

The ethos of traditional society was enshrined in an oral legal, religious, and literary tradition through which the community transmitted from generation to generation its customs, values, and norms. The poet and the storyteller stood at the centre of this tradition, as the community's chroniclers, entertainers and collective conscience.

In this way, women evince some subtle but sustained reaction to their plight. One cannot imagine the women performers condoning, conniving at, or consciously promoting such denigration, let alone presenting it to their offspring as something perfect-

ly legitimate. This element of protest in the folk-tale is also mentioned by Junod (s.a.:82):

Many of the tales are "a protest of spiritual against material force; possibly they may contain a warning to those in power from those who suffer."

This may account for men's ultimate withdrawal from active performance and women's total take over.

Neethling (1979:246) explains that the woman's greater role in this regard stems from her role as educator and instructor of the children:

Aangesien die didaktiewe funksie van *iintsomi* baie sterk na vore kom, is dit dus logies om te verwag dat opvoeding d.m.v hierdie medium ook aan die vrou oorgelaat word, en die man bemoei hom nie daarmee nie. Dit is interessant om daarop te let dat *iintsomi* wat deur jonger garde vertel is, almal deur jong meisies gelewer is. Die seuns se belangstelling lê waarskynlik elders, veral gedurende die dag.

Even though he (op. cit.) attributes men's withdrawal to other reasons, he is in accord with my own view that the underlying cause of men's loss of interest should be sought in the nature of certain *iintsomi*:

Die negatiewe houding van sommige mans teenoor die Xhosa *intsomi* tradisie, kan waarskynlik verklaar word uit die besondere tipe *intsomi* wat moontlik hiervoor die skuld moet dra.

In short, both of us ascribe subjective considerations for men's gradual withdrawal from *iintsomi* performances. He feels that men could not take the *iintsomi* because they appeared to be insignificant. I contend, deducing from the subject-matter and the nature of the folk-tales, that men chickened out because they realised that, consciously or unconsciously, women used the *iintsomi* to draw attention to certain social inequities.

A close study of the three collections of Xhosa folk-tales reveals that, invariably, women are destined for marriage and childbearing. They are always contingent on someone else, either as wives, sex-objects or as mothers. The woman's place is in the home where she has to do household chores such as cooking, washing and many other menial tasks. As is the case in real-life situations, barrenness is reviled<sup>4</sup> in the Xhosa folk-tale as childless women suffer untold misery. Women's lives are characterised by jealousy, passion, passivity, victimization by men or other folk-tale creatures such as ogres and cannibals. In most of these cases, women are depicted as docile and helpless with the exception of a few women who manage to outwit their adversaries or even to kill them. Sometimes women are helped by their magic transformational powers to escape from male domination. Others assume negative attributes normally

associated with men and become giants and ogres and thereby contradict the stereotype that women are always submissive and docile. This power to counteract male dominance points to the fact that women cannot be subjugated for ever. Real life and literature confirm this notion.

Ngcangca (ibid: 10) confirms some of the above-mentioned assertions as follows:

Various images of women are depicted in folktales, showing duty consciousness, a virtue every household head would prize and be proud of. Jealousy is a vice whose folly should be avoided since custom has room for polygamy. Conservatism, which encourages adherence to and preservation of accepted norms, forms one of the dominant images depicted in folktales. Virtues contributory to good behaviour and successful marriage are always praised. Vices which result in social conflict are decried.

It should be pointed out that the storytellers do not limit themselves to stark reality only. Their imaginations go beyond the dictates of conventional role categories. It is remarkable to note that in the folk-tale "A barren woman gives birth and baboons come to a marriage celebration", the storyteller could imagine babies born in anthills by the use of certain herbs, a situation that is fairly analogous to our modern test tube babies. This creativity on the part of the oral storytellers is significant if one bears in mind that most of our prose writers seem to limit their scope to reflecting only contemporary reality. When questioned as to why they never depict women as certain characters, for example as astronauts and pilots, they always explain that they reflect life as it is and not as they imagine it. That is why there is always a direct correlation between the Xhosa literary characters and people in real life.

## 2.2 *Early interest in female main characters*

When one looks at the bibliography of Xhosa literature, it is interesting to note the number of earlier literary works that deal with female main characters, e.g:

|      |               |                               |             |
|------|---------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
| 1913 | Kakaza, L     | <i>Intyatyambo yomzi</i>      | (novelette) |
| 1914 | ————          | <i>UThandiwe wakwaGcaleka</i> | (novel)     |
| 1918 | Guma, E S     | <i>UNomalizo</i>              | (novelette) |
| 1922 | Sinxo, G B    | <i>UNomsa</i>                 | (novel)     |
| 1923 | Mlotywa, S    | <i>UNozipho</i>               | (novel)     |
| 1923 | Jolobe, J J R | <i>UZagula</i>                | (novel)     |
| 1924 | Waters, M W   | <i>UNongqawuse</i>            | (drama)     |
| 1931 | Ndawo, H M    | <i>UNolishwa</i>              | (novel)     |

|      |               |                                   |             |
|------|---------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| 1933 | Sinxo, G B    | <i>Umzali wolahleko</i>           | (novel)     |
| 1934 | Swaartbooi, V | <i>UMandisa</i>                   | (novel)     |
| 1937 | Ndawo, H M    | <i>UNomathamsanqa noSigebenga</i> | (novella)   |
| 1938 | Jolobe, J J R | <i>UThuthula</i>                  | (long poem) |

Five of the above-mentioned works are out of print and although one finds references to them in existing works,<sup>5</sup> they are currently unobtainable even in the South African Library:

*Intyatyambo yomzi* by Kakaza,  
*UThandiwe wakwaGcaleka* also by Kakaza,  
*UNomalizo* by Guma,  
*UNozipho* by Mlotywa and  
*UNongqawuse* by Waters.

Four of the twelve works were written by women authors :

*Intyatyambo yomzi*,  
*UThandiwe wakwaGcaleka*,  
*UNongqawuse* and  
*UMandisa*.

Only the latter is still currently in circulation.

It is difficult to postulate reasons for the interest in women main characters in the early beginnings of Xhosa literature. This literature starts with the image of the woman as a flower which decorates every homestead and ends with the stereotype of woman as Eve. In the poem by Jolobe, Thuthula is depicted as the bone of contention between two blood relatives, Ngqika and Ndlambe, who ended up as bitter enemies because of her. Nongqawuse, the girl behind the notorious national tragedy of the Xhosa nation in 1857, also represents woman as man's downfall. In the minds of some Xhosas, Nongqawuse, rightly or wrongly, is only surpassed by the Biblical Eve as man's downfall.<sup>6</sup>

The women's names in these early works are highly symbolic. In *Intyatyambo yomzi* the woman is seen as a flower, Thandiwe in *UThandiwe wakwaGcaleka* signifies love, Nomalizo and Nozipho signify gifts, Nomsa symbolizes passion, Nolishwa signifies

bad luck, Mandisa refers to one who brings pleasure to the home, while Nomathamsanqa symbolizes good luck as against Nolishwa's bad luck by the same author. In the allegorical novelette, *UNomathamsanqa noSigebenga*, the woman symbolizes humanity with all its weaknesses and credulity whereas the male character, Sigebenga, represents the forces of darkness and evil that lead mankind astray.

The positive images<sup>7</sup> shown above reflect societal expectations and stereotypes while the negative ones reflect public censure for aberrant behaviour.

It also appears that the rationale behind these names could be in the fact that the perceived frailty of the woman is used to engender empathy from the readers. A flower, as suggested in Kakaza's novelette, is not only something beautiful and delicate, but it is also a symbol of love and freshness. We always identify with those people we love (Thandiwe), those who have been bestowed on us as gifts from above (Nozipho), those who have come to make our lives happy (Mandisa), and those who, by their presence, are a blessing to us (Nomathamsanqa). Sex-role standards and expectations are clearly discernible in these names. As aptly stated by Sirayi (1989:184), the readers expect each character to be an 'incarnation of these behavioural traits throughout. ...'

### 2.3 *Resumé*

Before highlighting the early interest in female main characters, the chapter included a brief summary of the main stereotypes or archetypal thematic concerns found in more than fifty Xhosa folk-tales. The emergent images of female characters in Xhosa folk-tales cover a wide, ambivalent spectrum and correspond very closely with those found in real life.

### *Notes*

1. Kahari (1986).
2. Msimang (1983).
3. Satyo (1977).
4. See Mbiti (1975:133) for a deeper view on the significance of marriage in African society and why society rejects those who fail to participate in it or those who

ness is perhaps the worst affliction (even crime) a couple can endure (or commit), and it is almost always attributed to the woman.'

5. Bennie (1933), vol. 7 No. 1 also mentions some of them.
6. Of course, as also pointed out by Peires (1989), there is a tradition that Sir George Grey was behind all this, but no supporting evidence could be found.
7. Compare these images with that of an earlier Xhosa woman as depicted by Thomas Pringle (1835:15) during one of his visits to Dr van der Kemp at Bethelsdorp, in 1820. The story is reproduced here because the book is *Africana* and not easily available :

While tea was preparing, and before the twilight had yet closed in, my host was called out to speak to another stranger. This was a Caffer woman, accompanied by a little girl of eight or ten years of age, and having an infant strapped on her back, above her mantle of tanned bullock's hide. She had come from the *drostdy*, or district town, of Uitenhage, under the custody of a black constable, who stated that she was one of a number of Caffer females who had been made prisoners by order of the Commandant on the frontier for crossing the line of prescribed demarcation without permission, and that they were now to be given out in servitude among the white inhabitants of this district. The woman before us, he added, was to be forwarded by the missionary, under the charge of one of his people, to the residence of a certain colonist, about twenty miles to the westward. Such were the orders of the *landdrost*, or district magistrate.

While the constable was delivering his message, the Caffer woman looked at him and at us with keen and intelligent glances; and though she very imperfectly understood his language, she appeared fully to comprehend its import. When he had finished, she stepped forward, drew up her figure to its full height, extended her right arm, and commenced a speech in her native tongue - the Amakosa (sic) dialect. Though I did not understand a single word she uttered, I have seldom been more struck with surprise and admiration. The language, to which she appeared to give full and forcible intonation, was highly musical and sonorous; her gestures were natural, graceful, and impressive, and her large dark eyes and handsome bronze countenance were full of eloquent expression. Sometimes she pointed back towards her own country, and then to her children. Sometimes she raised her tones aloud, and shook her clenched hand, as if she denounced our injustice, and threatened us with the vengeance of her tribe. Then again she would melt into tears, as if imploring clemency, and mourning for her helpless little ones. Some of the villagers who had gathered round, being whole or half Caffers, understood her speech, and interpreted its substance in Dutch to the missionary; but he could do nothing to alter her destination, and could only return kind words to console her. For my own part I was not a little struck by the scene, and could not help beginning to suspect that my European countrymen, who thus made captives of harmless women and children, were in reality greater barbarians than the savage natives of Caffraria.

## Chapter 3

# The image of the female in the first twenty years of written prose fiction: 1909-1929.

### 3.0 Introduction

The following novels will be considered in this chapter:

*Uhambo lukaGqobhoka* (1909) by H M Ndawo,

*Ityala lamawele* (1914) by S E K Mqhayi,

*UNomsa* (1922) by G B Sinxo,

*UZagula* (1923) by J J R Jolobe,

*Umfundisi waseMthuwasi* (1927) by G B Sinxo,

*UDon Jadu* (1929) by S E K Mqhayi.

These are some of the first novels to be written in Xhosa. *Uhambo lukaGqobhoka*, the first full length Xhosa novel, is modelled along the same lines as John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* which was translated into Xhosa by Tiyo Soga<sup>1</sup> in 1867, long before the advent of the first Xhosa literary works. It is an allegorical novel. All these books are 'evergreens' which have withstood the test of time for several decades. No female writers' works of this early period have survived.

The ensuing discussions and analyses will make better sense if viewed against the backdrop of black women's dilemma as exemplified by Charlotte Bruner (1976:24) who highlights several concerns that manifest themselves in African literature. In this incisive commentary on issues she sees as limitations to African women in general, she

refers to 'the sharing of a husband by wives in a polygamous marriage, the plight of rejection if barren, subservience to elders,' and to many other concerns that could be regarded as relegating women to an inferior position compared to men. These concerns revolve round role-categorization in African society and the force of standard expectations on women's lives.

### 3.1 Ndawo : *Uhambo lukaGqobhoka* (1909).

Only one female character, Nozizwe, is depicted in detail in the whole book. Like all the female characters in the book, her role is a minor and passive one. It must be pointed out from the outset that although male writers have depicted women characters in their works, these characters are in most cases flat characters. This, of course, should not be regarded as a criticism, as the writers sometimes also portrayed male characters in this way.

In some cases, women characters are merely caricatures or stereotypes that are used as vehicles for the writers' objectives. This problem is not peculiar to Xhosa writers only. Jones, Palmer and Jones (ibid:2) show quite clearly that women of all races and womanhood itself have not been fairly treated by African male writers in their works. These writers describe the 'jaundiced' treatment of issues that deeply concern women. These, they point out, are polygamy, childbearing, motherhood, and the subordination of the female to the male. Of interest in their argument, is the view that male authors resort to stereotyping merely because they are either unable or unwilling to present woman in her totality.

Using the direct method of characterisation, Ndawo, like so many of his contemporaries, concentrates on the woman's physical looks. This is how he describes Nozizwe:

Le ntombi ibinje ukwakiwa kwayo: Ibisukile kanobom egadeni yada yanga iphuthuma iingxibhakazi ezizizo. Intloko ibiligaqana elibumbekileyo, iinwele bezisikeke kakuhle ukuthabathela phambi kweendlebe ziz'ezo zithi za ziya kongamela ibunzi zibuye ziroxe zilishiye lithe qheke olwempunzi; zingezizo iingqaqasana ezi sikholisa ukuzibona kubaThwa, zona zazishiyene ubuso buphandle bulilanga, impumlo nomlomo bezingumbono, ubungedluli ungakhange utyebise iliso lakho. Amehlo abelingene emhlophe elingene ebiza. Ithambo layo lalifanelekile, elunyaweni kude kuse entloko. (pp 23-24)

(This girl's physical build was as follows: She was quite tall to the point of being almost as tall as the tallest girls. Her head was a well-rounded ball, her hair nicely cut from just before the ears and it stretched up to the forehead where it tapered off

once again, leaving some protruding from the rest of the hairline just above the forehead; it was not the stunted type of hair we normally associate with the San, it was of varying length and density, leaving the face exposed like the sun, the nose and the mouth were a wonderful sight, you wouldn't pass her without giving her an admiring look. Her eyes were proportionate to her structure, they were white and very attractive. Her structure was flawless from her foot to her head.)

The descriptive device employed in this type of character portrayal seems to be typical of the African way of handling characters if one considers its abundant use in praise poetry and in storytelling. Besides, the overemphasis of physical looks also has its counterpart in English literature. As pointed out by Jones, Palmer and Jones (ibid:41), African writers, even when using French as their medium, devote a lot of attention to the looks of the white woman. The features of the body that seem to receive the greatest attention are the skin, the colour of the eyes, and the hair, besides such additional features as the hair-style and make-up.

Unlike most of his contemporaries, Ndawo deliberately refrains from giving us a glimpse of Nozizwe's general conduct. He merely emphasizes her beauty to such an extent that it becomes elevated, if not denigrated, to being an object or end in itself. Viewed in this light, beauty becomes a commodity that can be used for good or bad purposes. To missionary writers such as Ndawo, beauty without good character, as we shall see later in the discussion, is a curse. Ndawo's tone in the following paragraph reveals some apprehension about Nozizwe's hypnotic beauty:

Kwakuye kuthi ndakumcinga nokuba ndiphi ndibonakale ndiphelelwa ngamandla, ndize emva koko ndingazazi apho ndikhona. Ukumkhumbula kwam ebusuku okanye emini bekufana nokuthi tha kwelanga kwezo ndulana zimi ngaselwandle, kuthi nokuba akakho phambi kwam kodwa ndisoloko ndiphandliwe yimitha eshushu yothando. (p. 24)

(Whenever I thought of her, no matter where, I used to become weak and subsequently lose consciousness. Remembering her at night or during the day was like the reappearance of sunshine behind those hillocks alongside the coastline, and even if she was not there in front of me, I would always be blinded by those hot rays of love.)

Two factors have combined here to make Nozizwe's beauty suspect or possibly just a skin-deep deception device. The first is the author's reticence regarding her character. The second factor concerns her devastating influence over Gqobhoka. He is virtually a prisoner of this woman despite the fact that the author deliberately refrains from declaring the couple boyfriend and girlfriend. According to him, they were just friends. The effect of missionary influence is clearly discernible here. It would be wrong in that situational context for Ndawo to depict the two as lovers in view of the fact that they

did not end up marrying each other. Consequently, despite all our suspicions and the intimate love, Ndawo has to declare:

Sasiqhelene kambe nalo mntwana, ezidlula zonke iinzwakazi ebezikwelo . . . (ibid)

(This girl and I were great friends and her beauty surpassed that of all the girls in the neighbourhood . . .)

Nozizwe's almost mythical beauty, coupled with lack of evidence regarding her character, gives rise to the scepticism and apprehension normally aroused by river elves in Xhosa mythology. Feminine mythical creatures are said to be endowed with devastating beauty and have the capacity to lead man astray. Everything in the book points to Nozizwe as an enchantress and a potential danger to this innocent looking young man.

It is only in the book's denouement that Nozizwe is revealed as being symbolic of one of the deadliest sins that a young man could commit. On his way Gqobhoka had come across a baby who cried to be picked up but whom he did not pick up. This is how the baby is later described to him by Khanyo, the allegorical character who symbolises Christ in the book, when Gqobhoka arrives in heaven:

Ola sana lwalusendleleni yam yayingelulo usana ngenkqu, yilaa ntombi uNozizwe endandiyiqhelile eMhlangeni, ndatyapha ukunyamezela ukuba ndingalubeleki olo sana lwaluya kundenzela inkathazo ndiye kugaxeleka nalo ndilubelekile kumasango akomkhulu. (p. 89)

(That baby I came across on my way was not really a baby, it was that girl I was acquainted with at Mhlangeni, it was good that I ignored it and not pick it up and carry it on my back as it would land me in trouble if I came with it in heaven.)

The image of the baby who is later realized as something else is an old motif in folktales. Ndawo has, therefore, adapted a traditional image to suit a modern creative purpose, working from the known to the unknown. This is a credit to him as the literal and the metaphorical images are neatly blended. The literal image, Nozizwe, who has been drawn in outline only, and the metaphorical image, the baby, merge to form one composite whole.

Gqobhoka's rather strange attitude as he prepares to leave his home for good, can best be explained as an attempt on his part to steer clear of a woman who has the potential to lead him into temptation or into the sin of sexual promiscuity. This issue becomes clear if one remembers that the book is an allegorical novel modelled along the lines of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Secondly, it appeared at the height of missionary influence which was accompanied by tremendous abhorrence for sexual promiscuity. Extra-

marital relations were condemned in the strongest possible terms. That is why Gqobhoka, despite his exuberant declamations, avoids contact with Nozizwe before he leaves his home. Instead, he sends his younger brother to break the sad news that he (Gqobhoka) is leaving his home for good:

Phakathi kwezo nyembezi ndavuma ingoma yombuliso ndingathandi ukuba ndibuye ndimbambe ngesandla. (p. 26)

(Amidst those tears I sang a farewell song not wishing to touch her by hand again.)

It cannot be doubted that the woman has been depicted as responsible for the fall of man in this context. This is confirmed, later in the book, when two co-pilgrims are sent to hell because they succumbed to the sin of sexual promiscuity:

Wathi abo bantu ndababonayo ngathi babebahlanu kwakungenjalo babebathathu, loo ndoda yayiphambili yayibeleke isono singumfazi isimo saso, kulandela kwa umfazi ebeleke kwa isono siyindoda isimo saso, inzwakazi leyo yayisemva yayizihambela ingathwele hlazo. (p. 89)

(He said the people I saw who appeared to be five were not five but were actually three people, the man in front was carrying sin on his back in the form of a woman, he was followed by a woman who was also carrying sin in the form of a man, the beautiful woman following alone at the end was free of all disgrace.)

It is interesting to note that the practice of carrying children on the back is typical of African custom in general. Consequently, this can also be seen in African sculpture which largely reflects African culture. This image indirectly symbolises the ambivalence of the image of the woman. In one context she is the Great Mother who nurtures, and in the other, she is man's downfall. Ndawo's couching these images in his own people's culture makes them more readily acceptable and therefore enhances their significance. The image of the woman who walks into heaven untainted by the sin of sexual promiscuity warrants some comment. The immediate significance of this sentiment is that women are not necessarily evil, and that they do not have to depend on men to obtain salvation but the woman who allows herself to be abused by men is not only a threat to them, but also to her own destiny.

Two other characters in the story, Nontsizi and Ntsizi are archetypes of the perfect married couple as evidenced by their hospitality towards Gqobhoka:

Abantu balo mzi yayingabantu abalungileyo nabasimilo sihle. Indoda nenkosikazi babengathumani manzi mayelana nobubele. (p. 80)

(The people of this homestead were good people with impeccable characters. Both the man and his wife were equally kind and generous.)

In this allegorical novel, virtue, good conduct and generosity are held in high esteem. Every ideal home should cherish them. The woman in such an environment is depicted as the Great Mother who sacrifices everything she has for the benefit and good of the other person.

Throughout the ages, the woman has fulfilled an ambivalent role as saint or devil as clearly pointed out by Cornillon (1973:28):

Rather, woman has traditionally been seen as either saint or devil : on the one hand the Virgin Mary, freed from woman's tainted sexuality, who brings man to God; on the other Eve, the mother of the human race and the source of all human woe.

### 3.2 Mqhayi : *Ityala lamawele* (1914).

In this classical novel, the theme of Xhosa civil justice excludes direct participation by females. Like the church in western civilisation, Xhosa civil justice allows males only to handle certain issues. Females feature only as witnesses or complainants.

The female stereotype as the Great Giver of life manifests itself clearly in this novel, otherwise the woman only features as subordinate throughout the novel. Teyase, Yiliwe and Singiswa are archetypes of traditional midwives - a role set aside for mature women whose moral and social standing make them eminently suitable for this sensitive profession.

No sooner have the three midwives testified than the court orders them to remove themselves from the court-yard as it is a men's only domain:

Kuthiwe ke abafazi bangakhe bakhwelele. (p. 8)

(The women were asked to leave the court.)

If there is one aspect of Xhosa society that this case of the twins reveals, then it is the societal strata. These strata are organised according to the roles of the participants. The more prominent a participant's role is, the nearer he is to the centre. The more peripheral one's role is, the further one is from the centre. But the inter-dependence of these participants does not appear to be undermined by the stratification. While all the women seem to act on the periphery throughout the duration of the civil case, it is clear that the role of the midwives is a vital one in the story. They manage to throw some light on the vexing question of which of the male twins is the senior:

Zithe ngoku iindlebe zamadoda zanga ziyavuleka. Kuvakele sekuyindumasi kaloku phakathi kwamadoda, kuqondakala ukuba amanye athi okunene nguWele omkhulu, amanye athi loo nto yengqithi ayithethi lutho. (p. 10)

(At least the men's ears appeared to have been opened. A loud murmur was heard among the men with some obviously saying that it is Wele who is senior and others saying that traditional finger amputation means nothing.)

Comments made by the sisters of the rival twins show that they are not altogether ignorant regarding such disputes. Two of them favour Wele rather than Babini:

Zaye iintombi zikaVuyisile nazo zenze eyazo inzwinini; enkulu (ephambi kwamawele) nenci zililisela ngoWele, umntu ogcine abantu basekhay'apha, nonesandla ezintombini nakwiindwendwe, nokhathalele nempahla yalo mzi ehambayo. Zithi uBabini yinkxentsi yelizwe eli lonke, into esisukela sikude isisusa, ibe seyithwele isidabane sayo nesidanga ukuya kwelo zwe. (p. 14)

(And Vuyisile's daughters were making their own noise; the elder one (immediate senior to the twins) and the youngest vehemently supported Wele, the one who showed some concern for the welfare of the people of this homestead; he is generous to its daughters and to strangers and looks after its livestock. They say Babini roams about and attends dancing sprees all over the country, even far away functions he will attend wearing his best traditional wear - *isidanga* and *isidabane*.)

The view is vehemently countered by the third sister who favours Babini, the other twin:

Eyinkulu nje uyinkulu; nokuba seyinguMajeke, akayi kuda aqethule sigwebo sikaLucangwana. Nangaphaya koko maninzi amahili-hili aziinkulu kumawawo. Unani lo umnta'kayise uhamba enkqangiswa, ewelelwa imilambo enamagama? (p. 15)

(He is the elder twin and nothing will change that; even Majeke cannot topple Lucangwana's verdict. Besides, there are many home deserters who are eldest sons in their respective homes. Why should her father's child be taken to task and why should men have to go far and wide in connection with him?)

These arguments are all raised outside court but are vital to the issue. The two sets of female characters reflect the divergent streams of opinion on this intricate issue in Xhosa traditional law of succession. Needless to say that both views come up for serious consideration during the deliberations although the final verdict upholds the views of the first group. It is also quite significant that the author prefers to depict the women giving evidence directly in court, instead of using either soliloquy or dialogue outside court as a means of reflecting their opinions on the issue.

The formal evidence given in court, and the informal evidence given by the parties' sisters outside court point to what can be termed in African society formal participants and informal participants. The strategic location of these parties, one at point A and the

other at point B, is not peculiar to a court case only. This phenomenon permeates all African ceremonies.<sup>2</sup>

The comments of the two sets of sisters speaks volumes for women's understanding of legal problems. From the verdict, it is obvious that they are not far off the mark except for legal technicalities which could not be anticipated by laypersons. Despite their specialised knowledge as midwives, the women are, however, not accorded the necessary authority to take part in the actual deliberations.

The usual stereotype of the female as the Great Mother and the custodian of national traditions is borne out by the following injunction by Mxhuma Matyeni:

Nawe, nkazana kaLawule, kuthiwe thince kwenjiwenje nje, kuze kukhutshwa wena phakathi kwezikhova, ukuba namhla ube ngumnikazikhaya, kwanjengokwangaphambili. Maze kuphanjikelwe ekhay'apha, kungabi sendle. Uze umgcine umntwana kaNyaba, umfundise ubufazi, umxelele ukuba ubufazi kukulolong'iimbelwana angazaziyo . . . . (p. 38)

(You too, Lawule's daughter, this congregation of people has come to welcome you back to the fold after your bereavement, so that today you can once more play your role as the mother of this homestead as before. People must be able to come to this house when they are in need, it must not be a deserted home. Please look after Nyaba's child, teach her womanhood and tell her that womanhood means looking after and caring for even those unknown strangers. . . .)

As can be seen from the above extract, older women are expected to guide younger women into responsible womanhood. The emphasis is on caring for others by establishing homes that will give succour and solace to all those who need help. In this way, the process of socialization is carried from girlhood to womanhood and to senior womanhood.

### 3.3 Sinxo: *UNomsa* (1922)

Sinxo is not only a pioneering writer of both the novel and short stories, but he has also made his mark as a keen portrayer of character. In this novel, the female character is portrayed in her traditional archetypal role with beauty and deportment rating high in her social values as can be seen from how Sinxo describes Nomsa's mother:

Inkosikazi yakhe yayiyintombi yasebaThenjini, inzwakazi enkulu, eenwele zimnyama ngathi bubusuku, emehlo mahle antama uthando olungaphakathi, emazinyo amhlophe amenze kunge angasoloko ehleka, enxibe ngokufanelekileyo; ingengawo makhazi-khazi, kodwa isinxibo esimfaneleyo, esizolileyo njengesomyeni wakhe. (p. 1)

(His wife was from the Thembu tribe, a very beautiful woman, with hair as black as the night, with eyes that reveal repressed love, with white teeth that make one wish she should laugh for ever; she was always properly dressed, her clothes were not of bright

coloured material but clothes that suited her stature and were as dignified as her husband's.)

There are striking similarities between this image and that of a typical Victorian heroine as described by Cornillon (ibid:31) as being more than pretty, with a face that shows animation, intelligence and character. As pointed out before, attention was invariably focused on her blue or grey eyes that 'always sparkle, twinkle or shine' and subtly reveal 'love she wants to hide, anger she tries to overcome, and merriment she should suppress.'

All reference to this woman is based on the husband as the yardstick and norm. First of all, she is so an so's wife, so and so's daughter and even her dress can only be proper if it does not detract from her husband's dignity. Her presence is essential as long as it is unobtrusive. Katherine Frank (in Jones et al, ibid:14) explains that such women characters are, by and large, defined by their relations to men. They are not defined as persons in their own right but always in terms that imply contingency on someone else, either as 'someone's daughter, or wife, or mother.' Perhaps the most striking image conjured up by such women is that of 'shadowy figures who hover on the fringes of the plot, suckling infants, cooking, plaiting their hair.'

Mrs Ntobeko's character is contrasted with her husband's. His friends are hers too and his enemies are also her enemies but as a mother she has a special responsibility to show generosity to those who need help:

Le nkosikazi ibiwufanele lo mzi. Ibingumhlobo omkhulu ezihlotyeni, utshaba oloyikekayo njengomyeni wakhe ezintshabeni, indlezane ngobubele. (p. 1)

(This woman was just the right person for this homestead. She was a friend to friends, a great enemy like her husband to enemies, and a very generous person.)

While Mrs Ntobeko is referred to as though she is merely Mr Ntobeko's appendage, he, on the other hand, is referred to in much loftier terms. He is the son of Ntobeko who was a prominent and well to do Gqunukhwebe counsellor. Xhosa genealogy takes the father's side as the more important line as far as succession and inheritance are concerned. Such accolades as being the son of a counsellor or other prominent figures add to this honour.

A new type of woman is introduced in *UNomsa*. By local standards, Nomsa was seen as an educated young lady as she was a teacher by profession. The writer presents us

with the whole spectrum of an educated woman's life. This is certainly a dramatic break from the traditional woman's image as depicted in earlier works.

Beauty, joyfulness and intelligence characterize Nomsa as can be seen from the following comments by Sinxo:

Ithe yakufika ekhaya wehla UNomsa, ezele luvuyo, etyebile, emhle, engathi akakhange agule, ebuza iwaka lemibuzo ngaye wonke umntu, nangayo yonke into, engalindeli nampendulo. (p. 2)

(When it [the cart] reached home Nomsa alighted, full of joy, fat, beautiful, as though she had not been ill, asking thousands of questions about everyone and about everything, not even pausing for a reply.)

Physical looks are generally only second to good character. Certain features of the body seem to enjoy special attention in both Xhosa and English literature:

. . . uNomsa, inzwakazi enkulu - kuba umvundla wawuzeke indlela, ngezo nwele zimnyama zinde, ngaloo mehlo anombizane athi. "ndithande," ngaloo menyo amhlophe kanina - (p. 2)

(. . . Nomsa the beautiful one - she resembled her mother with regard to her long black hair, those attractive eyes, those white teeth of her mother - )

Women in the story perform normal duties assigned to them in traditional society. Nomsa has to toe the line. She helps with ploughing, washing, reaping and various other household chores.

Mrs Sindile's seemingly innocent joke that had her son not left home long ago, he would marry Nomsa, is part of the subtle socialization process. Every girl is conscientised right from early girlhood that her destiny is marriage. She soon has to learn that she cannot pass a certain age without becoming someone's girlfriend and subsequently his wife.

Nomsa's indignation at the treatment she receives from a white station master reveals Sinxo's feeling that white men should treat black women with respect. The following extract clearly underlines his concern for racial bias:

Wathi nqa uNomsa, kuba esikolweni wayebona amadodana kusithiwa makathule iminqwazi xa agqitha kubeLungukazi kuba bengamanenekazi, bathethe ngokucocekileyo nangembeko, bangaze bayeke ukulinceda inenekazi xa lifuna uncedo. Hayi yona le ngcathawuli yenene enkangelekweni yathi gu bucala kuko konke oko; . . . . (p.5)

(Nomsa was amazed, because at school she used to hear that young men should take off their hats when they pass White women because they are ladies, that they should speak decently and courteously to them, and that they should always help a lady when she needs help. But this so-called gentleman ignored all those; . . . )

Nomsa has been stranded at the station and the White station master is arrogant and unhelpful. She cannot hide her indignation when, on the following morning, the same man is seen walking past with a White lady whom he treats with respect. It is noteworthy that this racial incident in the book occurs in isolation. There are no similar incidents in the rest of the story, nor is Nomsa's apparent sensitivity to racial oppression exposed in greater detail. It would be worth investigating the reasons for this but, unfortunately, it falls outside the scope of the present study.

Sinxo goes all out to portray Nongendi and Mrs Adams as peculiar characters. Mrs Adams is religious and kind but loquacious and very fond of gossip. While Sinxo depicts Nongendi as very beautiful, his silence about her character raises suspicions about her.

Mrs Adams is so obsessed with seeing her daughter married that she cuts a picture of an absurd and ridiculous mother:

... Mrs Adams abe nomnqweno omkhulu wokuba intombi yakhe, uNongendi, itshate naye lo mfana. Wayesithi xa azayo lo mfana amngxolise kakhulu uNongendi ukuba uthe wanxiba kakubi, emana ukumkhumbuza ukuba eli lixesha lokuba atshate. (p. 8)

(Mrs Adams [had] a fervent wish that her daughter, Nongendi, should marry this young man. Whenever the young man came, she would rebuke Nongendi if she was not properly dressed, and reminded her that it was time for her to get married.)

The two rival girls, Nomsa and Nongendi, represent two conflicting stereotypes in the book. Nomsa, as her name indicates, plays the role of the Great Mother who is the saviour of man whereas Nongendi represents evil that leads to man's downfall.

While Nomsa saves Themba from the disastrous effects of liquor and while she is a paragon of virtue throughout the book, Nongendi manifests all the attributes normally associated with bad women - jealousy and treachery. Nongendi's first antisocial act is manifested when she proposes love to Themba, something unthinkable in Xhosa society. Her initial image as an angel changes suddenly when she realises that her advances have failed. She threatens to harm both Nomsa and Themba. William Congreve, cited by Coetzee (1978:393), neatly summarizes woman's wrath at being rejected:

Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,  
Nor hell a fury, like a woman scorned.

Nongendi's sudden transformation from 'angel' to 'devil' has its parallel in the Biblical story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Cf. Coetzee's (op. cit.) exposition of this woman's wrath in his critical appraisal of Vondel's *Jozef in Egipte*:

As dit dan duidelik is dat sy verloor het, sal sy sorg dat hy vernietig word. Die "liefde" slaan oor in haat want Jozef het haar liefde verwerp, haar verneder, en dit sal sy nie duld nie.

Sinxo's authorial comment confirms the stereotype of the woman as potentially dangerous:

Wamthiya kakhulu uNomsa, awayecinga okokuba ushiyiselwe nguye. Eyona nto imbi yinto yokokuba okukhona ikhathazekileyo intombi, ngakumbi kwezobukhwele, ithi icinge nzulu ibe yingozi enkulu. Ke uNongendi wayengahlukanga kuhlobo lwakhe. (p. 19)

(She hated Nomsa very much, suspecting that she was the cause of her not being wanted by Themba. What is bad is that the more a girl is worried, especially because of jealousy, she thinks deeply and becomes very dangerous. Nongendi was not different from her kind.)

That Nongendi is dangerous is proved beyond doubt when Nongendi, in a frenzy, kills Velesazi, thinking that he is Themba. While the two women have been depicted as belligerents in an amorous war, Themba, whose ego has been badly dented in the story, receives a boost when he is later portrayed as a soldier fighting a more honourable war against his country's enemies, a cause that is so important that even his marriage to Nomsa, his saviour and the idealized perfect woman, had to wait until the war was over. Sinxo seems to suggest that however weak and fallible men can be, the role they have to play in society is more important than that played by women. Nomsa saved the life of one man only but Themba went to war to save the lives of thousands of people.

### 3.4 Jolobe: *UZagula* (1923)

Jolobe is one of the doyens of Xhosa literature. He was not only highly qualified academically but he was also a renowned minister of religion. His writings are characterised by finesse and depth of thought. In the above-mentioned novel he has succeeded in depicting woman as martyr defined as follows by Cornillon (ibid:46):

The woman who bears the stigmatic title of Evil without deserving it can be a victim or martyr. She may be the trusting wife of a secret marriage which has left her with an unexplained child, or she may be the victim of gossip or lies.

Zagula, the main character in the story, is regarded as a witch despite her pleas of innocence. Secondly, she is an archetype of most mothers-in-law as she is not on good terms with her daughter-in-law and equally estranged from her son, Ndwenga. Her

daughter-in-law, only referred to as Ndwenga's wife in the story, strongly believes that Zagula is bewitching her.

Gossip always happens in a fixed archetypal context in Xhosa literature. Convenient contexts are, among others, when women go to fetch water or firewood, or when they are busy washing clothes or hoeing in the fields.

Marriage becomes unbearable for Zagula's daughter, Nonkungu, who has to obey several traditional norms while Phike, her husband, is free to do as he pleases:

Aziphelanga iinyanga ezintandathu emva koku uNonkungu onwabile akuba semzini wakhe. Ndaweni yokuzilumla ezimbuthweni zolutsha umyeni wakhe uye engena nzulu. Ngenye imini uze ekhaya apha exhakwe ngamantombazana amabini. (p.57)

(Nonkungu's happiness after marriage hardly lasted for six months. Instead of withdrawing from youth activities, her husband got more and more involved in them. One day he came home in the company of two girls.)

Although this is aberrant behaviour that cannot be regarded as being typical of all black men, it is certainly unfair treatment towards women. Nonkungu's great sense of tolerance is typical of the black women in general. Society expects them to exercise patience in this regard while men can sometimes do as they please. Taboos and social norms seem to be one-sided or partisan when it comes to certain actions. Cf. Pratt (1981:47):

Not only are women rendered secondary in their relationships to men, but they must also watch their lovers engage in the very mutuality and authenticity that they are denied.

Jolobe finally vindicates Zagula when her daughter-in-law, Ndwenga's wife, confesses that she had deliberately spread lies about her in order to besmirch her character. The extensive treatment this theme has received from Jolobe points to his concern for the plight of women who are accused of being witches and for the disastrous effects of superstition among his people.

### **3.5 Sinxo: *Umfundisi waseMthuwasi* (1927)**

Sinxo presents us with two main female characters in this novel - Yalezwa and Thenjiwe. Their supportive roles serve to prove that behind every successful man there is a woman or two.

Thenjiwe adequately fulfills the role of the Great Mother largely as a result of her mother's teachings regarding womanhood. This is how she sees her role as a pillar of strength to her husband:

“Sithandwa, wawunezinto zakho, kodwa wazishiya ezo zinto ngenxa kaKrestu nangenxa yohlanga; ucinga ukuba mna andinakho na ukushiya ukonwaba ndihambe ndithwalisane umthwalo nendoda enjalo? Thami, ndiya kuba ngumncedi wakho, ndiya kuba ngumfundisikazi. Ndiya kuhlamba iikhola zakho zingagqoli, ndidaye imithika yakho ibe mnyama, ingabonakali ubudala, ndikuphekele olo khokwana siya kuphila lulo.” (p. 34)

(“Darling, [she says to her husband] you were well off, but you left everything you had for the sake of Christ and for the sake of the nation; do you think I cannot leave all the happiness behind and become such a man's right hand? Thami, I will be your helper, I will be the minister's wife. I will wash your collars so that they may not lose colour, I will dye your gowns black, no one will realize that they are old, I will cook you the little food we will live on.”)

While some critics may see Thenjiwe as an epitome of submission, there are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from her role as revealed in the above passage. Firstly, Thenjiwe could be seen to be accepting her role as a woman without question. This can be seen from the kinds of roles she promises to fulfil in her marriage with Thami:

- (a) *ndiya kuba ngumncedi wakho*. She will be his helper,
- (b) *ndiya kuba ngumfundisikazi*. She will be the minister's wife,
- (c) *ndiya kuhlamba iikhola zakho*. She will clean his dog-collars,
- (d) *ndidaye imithika yakho*. She will dye his gowns,
- (e) *ndikuphekele*. She will cook for him.

A closer look at the whole text reveals other insights about Thenjiwe's commitment to their marriage. She wants everything to be done perfectly and, above all, purposefully, hence she uses the following words, especially in emphasizing her woman's role:

- (a) She will not only clean the dog-collars but will so clean them *that they should not lose colour*,
- (b) She will dye his gowns *so that they should retain their black colour and not appear worn-out*.
- (c) She will cook the *meagre meals* that will be their sustenance.

There is something symbolic about the purposes behind her different activities. In (a) and (b), whatever she does, will be done to perfection. In (c), when it comes to meals, they will be meagre and it will need temperance in order to enjoy them. This commitment has a double role. It should be understood to have two significances: one literal and the other figurative. The literal one refers to the literal meaning of her expressed intentions and the figurative one underlies that a priest's calling requires perfection, sacrifice and temperance. This ties up, significantly, with the role assignment that we remarked upon under 3.2. In other words, women set the stage by deliberating the pros and cons of an issue, then men interpret their intentions and, possibly, implement their objectives.

One can also see that this woman realises how circumstances beyond her husband's control have literally castrated him. After the onslaught of colonialism and the drastic changes in the economic lives of the blacks, men, as we shall see later, became helpless and destitute. The ministers of religion were worse off as they had to live on disgracefully meagre stipends, hence this woman's commitment, and hence the attitude of the black woman ever since. While this could easily be confused with what Ferguson (1977:37) calls the 'feminine mystique' which she defines as 'the willingness of a woman to lose her own identity' and which she regards as something that 'constitutes the primary attribute of the submissive wife stereotype,' an understanding of the circumstances that lead to this situation could clarify the black woman's stance.

The salience of the issues raised in the above interpretation is underlined by the following words which Thenjiwe uses in addressing Thami, her husband, directly:

"Ewe, Thami, amandla omfazi makhulu kakhulu. Onke la madoda enza izinto ezinkulu ezweni abakho ngomfazi, ondliwa ngabafazi, athi akutshata ancediswe ngabafazi." (ibid)

("Yes, Thami, the woman has great power. All the men who perform great deeds in the country are born of woman, they are cared for by women, and when they marry, they are helped by women.")

In this last passage, Thenjiwe is even more explicit about what she thinks is the role of a woman participant in a relationship with a man.

While Sinxo assigns only a supportive role to the woman, he seems to be conscious of the woman's ability to lead. Woman's leadership qualities are clearly manifested in the following statement by Thenjiwe:

“Umama wayesithi xa asiyalayo, ‘Le nto umfazi ifana nentloko kaloliwe endodeni; ewe uyinto yena yaphaya ezimbizeni, umnyama yimisizi, kodwa njengentloko kaloliwe nguye ofunqule indoda njengentloko itsala amakhaleji.’ ” (p. 84)

(“Mother used to say when admonishing us ‘A woman is like a locomotive to her husband; yes, her place is in the kitchen with the pots where she becomes black like the pots she must clean, but, like the locomotive, she is the one who lifts up the man as a locomotive pulling its carriages.’”)

Male authors such as Sinxo and others cannot imagine women actively leading men but can only visualize them as power behind the throne of every leading man. Though their role, on the surface, may appear to be supportive only, it is, in fact, very influential. Women are generally regarded as pillars of strength in many households.

Yalezwa is a typical example of such power behind Blankethe. Blankethe appears ridiculously dim-witted, ugly, tattered and backward. Only Sinxo and patriarchal providence could ever match such a man with Yalezwa, a qualified nurse. Yalezwa, throughout the story, remains just another woman whose responsibility it is to work behind the scenes for the upliftment of her husband and her red-blanketed mother-in-law. The whole story seems to be an apology for educated women. This becomes obvious when Yalezwa’s mother-in-law showers her with the following praises for not shirking her traditional responsibility towards her in spite of her relatively high academic education:

“Ndandingayazi into eyenziwa nguBlankethe; . . . ndandicinga ukuba undizela nomLungukazi oya kufika acekise kwiqabakazi elinje ngokuba ndandinjalo; . . . Nto eyabangela ukuba ndigqobhoke bububele bukaNomaneji, ngokusuka afikele kuloo mabhayi am ayesithi qhu ngucumse! . . . Wasuka lo mntwana wafika walola la machitywa eli xhegwazana, lingenamenyo; ndifung’imiJadu! . . . ” (p. 67)

(“I didn’t know what Blankethe was doing; . . . I thought he brought me a White woman who would abhor a red-blanketed woman like me; . . . What made me change my views was Nomaneji’s kindness, by washing those blankets which were full of red ochre! . . . This child prepared my red ochre for me, she sat by the grindstone and ground cereal for this old toothless woman, I swear by the imiJadu! . . . ”)

While Thenjiwe and Yalezwa keep to their traditional roles as women, this does not diminish their contribution in the consummation of their relationship with their male partners. They use all their influence within the ambit of their prescribed roles.

### 3.6 Mqhayi: *UDon Jadu* (1929)

Mqhayi, in the Utopia presented in his novel *UDon Jadu*, does not visualize women stepping out of their traditional supportive role either. Even in civil and political matters women only appear as wives or supporters and not as leaders or initiators.

Throughout his works, Mqhayi shows great sensitivity for the conventional social stratification among the Xhosas. To him, the survival of the whole Xhosa nation depends on the following hierarchical order of national discipline or ritual:

Abantwana beve onina, onina beve oyise; oyise beve iinkosi; iinkosi zive kuThixo. (p. 82)

(Children should obey their mothers; the mothers should obey the fathers; the fathers should obey the chiefs; the chiefs should obey God.)

Mqhayi sees the woman's social responsibility as revolving round the home and keeping a check on the chastity of young girls:

Kungumsebenzi omkhulu wabafazi bekhokelwe ngumfazi womfundisi noweMantyi yesiThili, ukugcina nokuqeqesha amantombazana kwasebuncinaneni, kude kuse ekwendeni. EmaXhoseni kukho isiko lokuThomba kwentombi yakuba ifike kwixabiso elithile lobudala. Eli siko aliyi kuphelelwa ncam lixesha, kodwa umkaManeli nomkaMantyi weSithili ngumcimbi oyekelwe kubo lowo. Isiko apha elithandwa kunene ngamaXhosa loku 'hlolwa' kwentombi, - aliyi kuba nathuba, ngaphandle kwentombi ethile ekuthe kwakho ukuthandabuzeka kwesimilo sayo; nayo loo nto iqondwe ligqirakazi. (p. 83)

(It is the women's great duty, led by the district magistrate's wife, to look after and to train young girls from an early age up to marriage. The Xhosas have a custom which is normally done for girls to initiate them into young womanhood at a certain age. This custom will not be abandoned altogether, but the minister's wife and the district magistrate's wife will be responsible for that. The other very popular Xhosa custom of 'inspecting' the virginity of young girls will not be practised any more except when there is some doubt about a girl's behaviour; that will be the responsibility of a female doctor.)

The blending of western and traditional African ideals can be clearly discerned in the above passage where reference is made to the role of the district magistrate's wife who, until quite recently in rural areas, has always been, like her husband, white. It is obvious, therefore, that this training of young girls was beginning to tilt towards the West. That is why, as can be seen from the passage, certain other practices or customs had to be abandoned.

Mqhayi is constantly aware of women's power and influence when it comes to voting and other supportive roles. That is why women in this book rally around men giving

them moral support whenever they need help. The roles of men and women in this coexistence are complementary although structurally distinct.

### 3.7 *Resumé*

This chapter has revealed most of the conventional male stereotypes regarding women. If the above examination has revealed anything, it is that it is dangerous to view stereotyping of women by men from a narrow or prejudiced vantage point. It appears to be more rewarding to evaluate this stereotyping against the background of the worldview of the Xhosas. Excerpts from S E K Mqhayi and G B Sinxo have clearly indicated the dialectical relationships between male stereotypes regarding women, on the one side, and the Xhosa worldview, on the other.

In most cases, women appear as flat characters with no attempt on the part of the male authors to give a balanced view of the women characters concerned. As is often the case with characters in general in Xhosa novels, moreso the earlier ones, some women characters are mere caricatures designed to suit the writers' particular purpose.

The force of social norms to which women are subjected from an early age, has also been highlighted in this chapter. While it is certainly the case that women in this period have, sometimes, been depicted as objects of beauty about whom men should be extremely wary, the important role women play in Xhosa society has also been highlighted.

Virtue, good conduct, generosity and subservience in women are important attributes in a male dominated society and everything contrary to them is ruthlessly dealt with. In short, women are not only contingent on others but social norms also demand that they exercise whatever power they have behind the scenes only, regardless of their education or social status.

In order to realize these broad objectives, men's and women's roles are clearly defined and the lines of demarcation are brought to their attention from early childhood. Jolobe deserves to be singled out for his attempt to present a victimised woman in a positive light and show that some of the stereotypes such as 'woman as witch' are senseless and baseless.

Taiwo points out that these early male writers did not deliberately or wilfully try to give a distorted view of women. According to him, they tried, inherent male prejudices and biases notwithstanding, to reflect the woman's role as they perceived it. In this regard, I cannot but disagree with Taiwo (1984:11) who says:

However, it may be helpful to stress at this point that because male writers were early in the field they have projected an image of the woman which female writers have found rather distasteful. It is not always that male writers have been biased; they have merely presented the female social situation as it is. This is why for the most part a woman occupies a position of inferiority since the writer is anxious to be faithful to the realities of the world he portrays.

The limitations of Taiwo's interpretation of the position of male writers have been exposed in the above analysis, especially with regard to Xhosa novels. One cannot perceive anything as if one is free of cultural or social patterns of perception. Our whole way of seeing is given us, and it isn't "inherent" or innate. The implication, therefore, that women are, in fact, witches and that they are to blame for man's downfall cannot be accepted. "The realities of the world" to which Taiwo refers (*supra*) are stereotypes that have been conjured up by males themselves and propagated in the books for public consumption.

It is contended in this study that much of what is there in a patriarchal society is what is there in men's minds about women. This view is also echoed by McNelly as cited by Driver (in Ryan and van Zyl, 1982:206):

Female archetypes were seen as projections of the male psyche (McNelly, 1975) . . . .

Although Jane Miller (1986:3) refers to men in *Women Writing About Men*, the same idea manifests itself as follows:

. . . I have wanted to show that men are to be found in women's novels as they are to be found in women's heads and histories: equivocally.

In short, literature reproduces 'life' in the sense that it gives us the signs by which we read the world.

## Notes

1. His son, J H Soga, translated the second part in 1926 and it was published by Sheldon Press, London.
2. During a wedding ceremony, the men sit next to the cattle-kraal and women next to the hut, some distance away from the kraal. The groups are kept in close link by

a messenger whose duty it is to convey messages and 'delicacies' to and from the two groups, e.g. meat, liquor etc. Because of the close proximity of the one group to the other, each group can enjoy the other group's music. The effects of the physical separation are therefore minimised.

## Chapter 4

# The prose fiction of the third and fourth decades and the role of the first two female novelists: 1930-1949.

### 4.0 Introduction.

The following six novels will be considered in this chapter:

*UNolishwa* (1931) by H M Ndawo,

*UMzali wolahleko* (1933) by G B Sinxo,

*UMandisa* (1934) by V N M Swartbooi,

*UJujuju* (1939) by Z Z T Futshane,

*Ingqumbo yeminyanya* (1940) by A C Jordan,

*Mhla ngenqaba* (1949) by Z Z T Futshane.

An interesting feature of this period is the emergence of two female writers, viz V N M Swartbooi, in 1934 and Z Z T Futshane in 1939. This chapter examines the position taken by these two pioneering female writers in the depiction of women. This is done against the background of the powerful myths and stereotypes reflected in male writings. These male biases and stereotypes come out very clearly in the following observations by Vilakazi (1945:46) in the same period:

Very little has been said about the share of women in old literature of the Nguni people. This may be due to the general attitude towards women who are believed to play no active part in Nguni society. It is true, as in all nations on earth, "women, generally speaking, do not belong to the nobility, of genius and invention; romance

and reason; morality, idealism, mysticism and revelation. They emphatically are not supermen. A professor once said to me (I do not know if it was an original observation): 'My best students are always women. But my best student is always a man'".

Vilakazi attributes the statement in the last sentence quoted to Sarah Gertrude Millin and, judging from his comments later on in the thesis, he does not endorse these prejudiced male stereotypes. He goes all out to show the important role played by women in Nguni society.

#### 4.1 Ndawo: *UNolishwa* (1931)

Ndawo's didacticism is typical of the writers of the missionary era of whom he is one. Morality and retribution, essential elements in didactic literature, underscore this novel from beginning to end.

Nolishwa, the main character, lives up to her name which means the mother of bad luck. Unlike Nomsa in Sinxo's novel entitled as such, Nolishwa is a different character altogether. She is bold, wayward and sometimes very uncompromising. She breaks social norms by fighting, punching elderly women such as Nompfi, biting her teacher's ear, having premarital relations with men, murdering and stealing, besides many other aberrations.

The tragedy regarding Nolishwa is that her mother, whose duty it is to guide and discipline her, connives at this waywardness. Nolishwa's erratic behaviour sets her against the whole society. Each and every action of hers solicits great agitation and opposition from the community. Her worst criticism is brought about by her relentless efforts to gain erotic freedom, a problem for patriarchy which Pratt (ibid: 24) explains as follows:

When women heroes do seek erotic freedom, which we define simply as the right to make love when and with whom they wish, they meet all the opposition of the patriarchy.

As could be expected, it is only her mother who does not see anything wrong or abnormal in Nolishwa's behaviour:

"Ngokwenene, lo mntwana undifuze tu ngokwenda, elusana olungakanana. Nam ngeentsuku zam ndandimhle, bafazi; amasoka ayegilana ngenxa yam, endincokolisa engandiphi thuba." (p.43)

("Really, this child has taken after me as far as marrying at an early age is concerned. I was also very attractive in my days, dear women; young suitors were crazy about me and haunted me.")

Solakhe, Nolishwa's father, dies a heartbroken man as he blames his wife for their daughter's waywardness. It is typical of men to expect their wives to mould their daughters' characters to ensure that they marry easily when they came of age.<sup>1</sup>

Because Nolishwa is a non-conformist, Ndawo deliberately depicts her as a contemptible character on whom all the bad luck must be showered by way of retribution.<sup>2</sup> Misfortune dogs her so much that in the end she almost suffers the greatest humiliation of all - unwittingly marrying her own son whom she had tried to murder by throwing him near the banks of a flooded river.

Nolishwa's salvation only comes when she not only repents, but also marries in accordance with popular female stereotyping. This is fate she cannot or dare not escape no matter how free she may be in spirit and outlook.

Ndawo has modelled the story of *UNolishwa* along the lines of the Biblical story of the Prodigal Son. It is, therefore, interesting to note that in his adaptation of the prodigal son model, the parent becomes a woman, instead of the man as in the original story; the child becomes a girl, instead of a son in the original story. This clearly shows the shift in emphasis from the men as custodians of the societal values, to women as the future torchbearers of society. For this reason, therefore, the change of sexes has been found noteworthy as it ties up with the earlier observation about the dominance of female main characters in the earlier Xhosa novels.

The popularity of the theme of the prodigal mother is used as a convenient strategy to underscore the important role of the mother in family life as well as society in general. The route preferred is that of a mother abdicating her role as a custodian of the mores of society in so far as they particularly affect young women.<sup>3</sup>

A close examination of this theme shows that there is probably no intention on the part of the authors to reproduce the theme of the prodigal son for its own sake. Rather, it is the model that has been adopted and then adapted for a specific purpose. This strategy seems to have been fairly popular as we shall see later in paragraph 4.2.

## 4.2 Sinxo: *Umzali wolahleko* (1933)

In *Umzali wolahleko* (the prodigal parent), a book that appeared two years after Ndawo's *UNolishwa*, the theme of the prodigal mother is used by another novelist, namely Sinxo. The only noticeable adaptation is that the prodigal mother misguides her son rather than her daughter, as was the case in Ndawo's *UNolishwa*.

The expectations of society from a 'good mother' are highlighted by the disparate details given about Nojaji on the one hand, and her husband, Menzile, on the other. Whereas in the case of Menzile, detailed information is given about his genealogy and clan-names which play an important role in Xhosa culture,<sup>4</sup> scant details are given about Nojaji's lineage. This is a deliberate attempt by the author to link Menzile to his roots and culture and present Nojaji as a person who has been cut off from her roots.

This contrast in their treatment comes out very clearly in the following passage:

UMenzile ngumfo osukileyo egadeni; isiduko sakhe nguMpinga. Uzalwa nguMqadi kaBulani kaGinyizembe lowa wayeligorha elibalulekileyo kwisizwe samaGqunukhwebe. UGinyizembe yena wayezalwa nguThethani, umfo owayesaziwa kakhulu ngobuciko nangobulumko bakhe. (p. 1)

(Menzile was a tall man; his clan-name was Mpinga. He was born of Mqadi the son of Bulani the son of Ginyizembe who was a great Gqunukhwebe warrior. Ginyizembe was born of Thethani, a man who was well-known for his oratory and wisdom.)

Contrast this with Nojaji's rather scrappy and scanty genealogy:

Inkosikazi kaMenzile nguNojaji, intombi kaZwinye, umVala isiduko. (ibid)

(Menzile's wife is Nojaji, Zwinye's daughter, a member of the Vala clan.)

The legacy of Nojaji's prodigal motherhood can already be seen from Ndopho's bad behaviour. Ndopho, for instance, refuses to do his duties in the home. Some of the things he refuses to do are those that all children, irrespective of sex, are expected to do. For instance, he refuses to collect fresh cowdung because he regards this work as work that is exclusively meant for girls. This horrifies his conservative grandmother, who expresses her indignation as follows:

"Hi, Ndopho kukho msebenzi-nduna namsebenzi-mazi ngoku?" (p. 3)

("Ndopho, is there male-work and female-work now?")

Although Sinxo cherished the idea of discarding role-modelling as far as children are concerned, he referred to it in connection with one incident only in Ndopho's life.

Gakhulu, the old lady, symbolizes female integrity as typified by her orientation and corrective role, her role as protector and comforter as well as the custodian of social values. Her constant use of the 'hlonipha' language conjures up the tone and image of a real Mother Africa who is totally loyal to her traditional role.

Gakhulu, like the old woman in the folk-tale, is a jealous guardian of the dignity and respect that accompanies womanhood in Xhosa society. The writer has presented the issue in a very clever way because two women are involved in the exposition of the issue. Had he used a male character in the place of granny Gakhulu, perhaps different conclusions could have been drawn. The advantage of using a female character, namely granny Gakhulu, is that she is able to instruct by word of mouth as well as by example. A male character in granny's position would only have been able to instruct Nojaji by word of mouth. It would have been unfitting, and perhaps impossible, for him to use the 'hlonipha' language. In this sense, his performance would have been interpreted as male dominance. Using Gakhulu has, therefore, been a convenient strategy on the part of the author to avoid an unfortunate distortion.

Nojaji symbolizes the rude<sup>5</sup> unsympathetic and dominating wife whom stereotyping normally associates with second marriages. In her we see the signs of degeneration in women who are otherwise traditionally expected to be loyal, dignified and exemplary. Viewed in this light, Nojaji is deliberately portrayed as a social deviant.<sup>6</sup>

This degeneration in female character is further evident in MaMfene, MaDlamini and MamJwarha, the shebeen queens. They are bold and shrewd townswomen. Although frowned upon by Christians because of their so-called destructive activities, they actually form a nucleus of a fairly independent group of women albeit sometimes within the confines of marriage.

#### 4.3 Swaartbooi: *UMandisa* (1934).

This novelette has withstood the test of time since its publication in the early thirties, unlike other female works which ended up in oblivion. As pointed out earlier on, these latter titles only appear in bibliographies and in other research materials such as theses and articles.<sup>7</sup>

The story revolves round MamCirha and her daughter-in-law, MamNzothwa. MamCirha is an idealized African woman who goes all out to run the home and introduce her daughter-in-law to true womanhood which is characterized by hospitality and generosity. In this context, the woman's place is seen to be in the home where she is expected to exercise these virtues:

Lo mzi ubuthandwa ziindwendwe, ezibe zisithi, maxa zifikileyo zilale nengatshiyo yona inkabi le yegusha emazinyo asibhozo . . . Iindwendwe zabahambi bezisuke zinge ziwuve ngevumba loo mzi, nasebusuku kuviwe ngokukhonkotha kwezinja, kubonwe sekusithi khalakatha abahambi abavela nakude; aba babelungiselelwa ngobubele. (p. 9)

(This homestead was always frequented by visitors who used to be welcomed by having a full grown wether slaughtered for them . . . Strangers appeared to sniff out this homestead like hunting dogs and in the night one could hear the dogs barking at them as they arrived unexpectedly even from far away places; all would be welcomed and treated very kindly.)

Staying at home or domesticity for women in this context is of paramount importance. It is like performing a national service. Cott (1977:64) explains this feature of women's lives in very graphic terms:

The central convention of domesticity was the contrast between the home and the world. Home was an "oasis in the desert," a "sanctuary" where "sympathy, honor, virtue are assembled," where disinterested love is ready to sacrifice everything at the altar of affection."

Swaartbooï makes it clear in the book that role acting and socialization start very early in children's lives. Every girl plays with dolls, cleans and prepares the doll-house as can be seen from the following excerpt:

Nanko ebaleka eggotsile ukuya konopopi bakhe; kaloku wayakhelwe indlwana yabo efekethiswa ngomnye wabaninawa bakayise. Ibityatyekwa isindwe le ndlu, njengezindlu zonke. Le nzwakazi yafundela apha kuyo ukusinda nokutyabeka. (p. 12)

(She runs to her dolls; one of her paternal uncles affectionately built her a doll-house. The doll-house was smeared with mud and fresh cowdung like all houses. This young girl learnt from it how to smear a house with fresh cowdung and mud.)

In this way, society predetermines what role girls must play. Every child learns these gender-linked roles from infancy and they are reinforced as she goes through the various stages of her life. This leaves those affected with no choice in the end. They must just toe the line as pointed out by Pratt (ibid:36):

In the woman's novel of development (exclusive of the science fiction genre), however, the hero does not *choose* a life to one side of society after conscious deliberation on the subject; rather, she is radically alienated by gender-role norms *from the outset*.

Swaartbooi illustrates this socialization process by depicting young girls simulating a wedding. This is subtle acculturation that the young girls learn from the groups that are their immediate seniors. The main objective of these subtle but determined processes is to mould them for motherhood. Swaartbooi clearly describes how this is done in the following passage:

Ngoku uMandisa ubesel'eyintwazana ethunywayo esel'ikwazi nokutshayela, nokukha amanzi ngebhekile emlinganayo. Amanzi awakhileyo wayewasa kuninakhulu, abesithi ke yena abulele, adomboze, ubone nomzukulwana selezele luncumo lodwa ebusweni, akuva ebongwa. (p. 13)

(Mandisa has reached the age of a little girl who can be sent on little errands and who can sweep the floor and fetch some water with a bucket that is suitable for her size. She normally takes the water to her grandmother who showers her with praises until the child's face is all smiles.)

It strikes one that among all the roles of a young girl that are enumerated above, the strong relationship between the grandmother and the granddaughter is also underlined.

Like her female contemporaries, Swaartbooi feels obliged to explain in detail how Mandisa does all the necessary household chores done by all other women even though she is a lady teacher:

Uitshalakazi lowa uwenza wonke umsebenzi wakowabo, waye ekhuthela okwenene. Ungambona ngoMgqibelo ebhinqe emifutshane esebenza. Uzisinda azigqibe zonke ezaa zindlu zakowabo ngexeshana elingephi, noko zingakaya ukuba ninzi kwazo; angqushe, akhe namanzi, apheke nokupheka, ahlambe impahla, ayolule yakoma, akhe eve ukuphumla unina. (p. 14)

(The lady teacher does all the work at her home diligently. You could see her very busy on Saturdays. She smears all the houses with fresh cowdung despite the fact that they are so many; she stamps mealies, fetches water, and cooks too, washes clothes and iron them when they are dry, giving her mother some time to rest.)

With this apologetic attitude or stance, Swaartbooi not only confirms some of the established female stereotypes but she also allays all fears that educated girls could create adjustment problems in society. She gives them a clearance certificate which they need badly considering the suspicions of the community regarding them. This message is important to the lady teachers too as they have to constantly remember their roots and not become pseudo European ladies.<sup>8</sup>

Swaartbooi's greatest contribution to the female cause is certainly her total silence in the book about boyfriend and husband. She avoids making Mandisa contingent on any man and, instead, Mandisa ends up battling hard to educate her brothers and sisters rather than battling to look after a husband. At least, she is one woman who can be

said to have a destiny of her own. Swartbooï's portrayal of Mandisa could certainly gratify Mary Allen's (ibid:2) yearning for a non-contingent woman:

In my early reading of fiction I recall few great ladies, but whenever a likely woman appeared, I cheered her on and hoped she might be more than someone's sweetheart. It never happened.

#### 4.4 Futshane: *UJujuju* (1939).

This is the second female author's novel to survive from this decade. The book was published in 1939 and some years later, another novelette, *Mhla ngenqaba*, was added to it to make *UJujuju noMhla ngenqaba*. My discussion of the novelettes as separate entities is purely for chronological convenience. The second novelette is discussed under 4.6.

Futshane's greatest contribution to the woman question is her investigation of the woman as martyr. Her account of Nowayiti's plight and deep frustration emanating from being falsely accused of witchcraft is both moving and interesting. Polygamy also plays a role in the story as the rivalry between the two women stems from being married to one man. The fact that the second wife, Nosayini, flees the common home points to Futshane's abhorrence of this institution. She would rather see such homes crumble than see women suffer untold hardships because of the practice, hence its rejection by the writers of the missionary era such as Futshane. Futshane's stance and attitude towards polygamy is, therefore, a reflection of the spirit of the times. It would, no doubt, please the missionary sponsors to have a Xhosa story that reinforced their teachings about the unacceptability of polygamous marriages.

#### 4.5 Jordan: *Ingqumbo yeminyanya* (1940).

N.B

This novel is one of the most celebrated novels in Xhosa. Professor Jordan won acclaim when this novel appeared in 1940. One of the reasons for this is that he writes with a keen sense of feeling for tradition, culture and custom. The woman's role in the novel is presented against two types of backgrounds, one traditional, and the other, modern. This is probably meant to capture the spirit of transition from the one culture to the other.

Against the background of traditional life, women are depicted as home-bound and performing their normal household chores:

Ahlala ke amadoda ee nqwadalala, eqhumisa iinqawa, kwada ngelikade kwavela umfazi ethwele igaba namahlahlana eenkuni. (p. 4)

(The men sat there smoking their pipes until a woman appeared carrying a hoe and some brushwood.)

Hospitality and kindness to visitors form the basis of every household where the man plays the key role while his wife plays a subordinate but complementary role:

Wabuya wesuka wakrweca umfazi, baya kutshona endlwini, baphuma nelala lotywala. Umfazi wafika walibeka phambi koDabula, wahlala bucala. Yafika indoda yabeka mazwi mabini-mathathu ilandula, yathi yakuba isuse ubuthi, yalibeka ilala phambi koDabula. (p. 5)

(He signalled his wife into the house and later emerged with a beer can full of Xhosa beer. The woman placed the beer in front of Dabula, and went to sit aside. Her husband came forward and said a few customary words, he took a sip from the beer to remove any possible poison and placed the beer can in front of Dabula.)

While the preparation of beer is the woman's prerogative, her role ends as soon as the beer reaches the person to be entertained. Only the husband can say some few words<sup>9</sup> to a stranger in connection with such pleasures as drink and meat. This, as it is with many similarly subtle actions on the part of men, helps to reinforce man's superiority over woman.

While men walk across the Thina River without having to show outward reverence for the river, women are compelled to show overtly that they respect the river and the 'inkwakhwa', the totem snake of the amaMpondomise:

Njengokuba abafazi bakhona belihlonipha iThina bengazifinyezi izikhaka xa baliwelayo ngenxa yooyisezala abalele kulo, nenkwakhwa bayayihlonipha. (p. 9)

(As the wives of this house show reverence to the Thina River by not pulling up their dresses when they cross it as a sign of respect to their fathers-in-law who lie buried in it, they also respect the 'inkwakhwa' totem snake.)

The treatment of the relationship between Thembeke and Zwelinzima on the one hand, and between Nomvuyo and Mphuthumi on the other, shows a shift away from the traditional scenario. These relationships reveal that the two women involved are emancipated from traditional constraints.

Boyfriend and girlfriend relations form the core of this novel as the two main protagonists, Zwelinzima and Mphuthumi are paired with Thembeke and Nomvuyo, respectively. This relationship runs through the whole story.

Thembeke is depicted as a 'free woman' who cannot be forced to marry Mthunzini with whom she was never in love:

Wonke umntu eMjika wayecinga ukuba uThembeka uya kwendela kuloo mfana, ngenxa yokuba ooyise bebengamaqabane amadala, kunjalo nje uyise kaThembeka eyithakazelela le nto. Koko uThembeka wayengafuni kuva nto ngayo, esithi akamthembi konke uMthunzini. (p. 22)

(Everyone at Mjika thought that Thembeka would marry this young man because their fathers were old friends, and Thembeka's father was in favour of this idea. But Thembeka rejected it outright, saying that she could not trust Mthunzini.)

In this way, Thembeka can be said to be a truly 'free woman'. No amount of persuasion by Mthunzini can sway her from her decision. Mthunzini tries in vain to induce her parents to put pressure to bear on her to accept his proposal but their response is negative:

Koko wothuswa kukuba abazali bakaThembeka bathi abanakho ukwenza into enjalo xa uThembeka engahambiyo nayo. (p. 25)

(But he was dismayed when Thembeka's parents said that they could not do that if Thembeka was not in favour of doing so.)

This is a significant occurrence, especially because Thembeka's parents give her freedom of choice in a matter that concerns a revered custom. It is interesting to note that sixteenth century women experienced the same predicament: Cf. Pratt (ibid:41):

In sixteenth-century England decisions about marriage were made by family and kinship groups; in this system, marriage, at both the top and bottom of the social scale, was 'primarily a contract between two families for the exchange of concrete benefits, not so much for the married couples as for the parents and kin.' As early as 1660 a move towards accepting 'personal affection, companionship and friendship' as marital motives, along with allowing the prospective couple a final veto of parental choices, became popular.

We have already noted that women in this novel are depicted in various roles. Thembeka, despite her modern outlook, follows strict stereotypic rules of conduct like all other Xhosa girls:

NgokwesiNtu intombi akufanelekile ukuba isukele phezulu xa ibizwa sisithandwa sayo ngokungathi yoyika ukuba siza kuyiphuncuka. Kufuneka izibonakalise ukuba nayo iyintombi kaBani, ayifakanga ntloko kuso. (p. 42)

(According to Xhosa culture, a girl should not hurry excitedly when called by her lover as if she is afraid that she will lose him. She should show that she is So-and So's daughter too; she is not crazy about him.)

Contrary to popular stereotype, Thembeka is intelligent and she is of great assistance to Mphuthumi regarding the crucial issue of Zwelinzima's chieftainship. What is ironical, however, is that Mphuthumi should rely on her because, as he puts it, she 'has a man's brain':

UMphuthumi ke wayengazanga ayeke ukuthabatha amacebo kuThembeka kuba wayeqonde kwaseLovedale ukuba "unobuchopho bendoda". (p. 61)

(Mphuthumi never stopped taking advice from Thembeke because he had realized as far back as at Lovedale that she has a "man's brain".)

It was quite remarkable when I read in the *Daily Dispatch* of the 26th of July 1989, on p.18, under the caption "The muted voice of women in politics", the following comment regarding Mrs Helen Suzman, the doyen of South African politics:

Suzman, for seven years the only woman in parliament, said she was treated with traditional male courtesy by male colleagues and "never gave a damn" about occasional comments about a woman's place being in the home.

"I was seen as a tough old boot. Once a male M P told me I had a man's brain. He meant it as a compliment. Little did he know his was the last brain I would care to have," she said.

The rationale behind Mrs Suzman's reaction can best be understood in the light of the following comment by Hester Eisenstein (1988:39):

The moment of truth, in consciousness-raising, came at the point where the "exceptional woman" understood that to be told, "You think like a man" was to be told, "You are not a 'real' woman," and (simultaneously), "Real women are inferior to men".

If Thembeke, in the above-mentioned passage is intelligent, then she is intelligent in her own right. Mphuthumi's statement, therefore, can but be seen as reflecting the encroachment of male superiority complex even in language use. When a language such as English would show such nuances lexically, Xhosa would use an idiomatic expression such as 'unobuchopho bendoda' (she has a man's brain).

Thembeke's behaviour is contrasted with that of Gcinizibele's wife whom Jordan deliberately portrays as one who is not affected by the fermenting political wrangle between Zwelinzima and Dingindawo. She is just happy to see men from her original home, regardless of the purpose of their mission at their Great Place. Political differences notwithstanding, she retains her hospitality as the mother of the nation:

IBhelekazi umkakhe wayezele yimincili kuba wayeqala ukubona abantu bomzi wakhe.  
Yabhinqela phezulu intokazi yaqukeza yaququzela. (p. 102)

(His wife, the lady from the amaBhele clan, was full of joy because it was the first time she saw people from her original married home. She therefore diligently and actively went about with her preparations to cater for the visitors.)

As could be expected, she acts on the periphery and is not in any way involved in the issue. She has so internalized her subordinate role that she accepts without question that she is weaker than her husband:

Tyhini! Uya kuthini, Jola, ukusuka ube nkenenkene, ufane nam ndingumfazi?  
Akuyaz'ukuba uyindoda?" (p. 103)

("How can you, Jola, be so weak and resort to tears like me, a woman? Don't you know that you are a man?")

It is stereotypical of all mothers to want to see their daughters married at all costs. It is equally typical of them to possess manipulative power over husbands on such affairs:

UKhalipha wacetyiswa ngamawabo ukuba makayale inkosi xa kubonakala nje ukuba umntwana wakhe akafunwa sisizwe, kuba mhlawumbi umntwana wabo uya kufumana ahlelwe yingozi ebikude naye. Umka-Khalipha wayengafuni nokuyiva loo nto. Wathi mayivunywe inkosi; aba bantu bakuloKhalipha bayaxoka, benziwa ngumona . . . . (p. 140)

(Khalipha was advised by kinsmen to reject the Chief's request to marry his daughter seeing that the nation opposed the marriage, because his daughter may land in calamity which could have been avoided. Khalipha's wife was adamant and she insisted that the Chief's request be accepted; saying that Khalipha's kinsmen were merely telling lies because they were jealous . . . .)

Thembeke qualifies as a 'free woman' as defined by Little (1980b:134):

By a free woman is meant one who flouts or disregards conventional beliefs concerning the proper role and position of the female sex. One of the most common of these beliefs is that it is wrong for a woman on her own to take a major decision. This is a male prerogative. It is also wrong to undertake roles, including occupational ones, traditionally ascribed to the male sex. Perhaps the most common belief of all is that a woman's place is in the home and that it is her duty to marry and have children. ✓

She is, however, regarded as being insensitive because her general conduct goes against all conventional expectations. She not only flouts all rules of conduct regarding married women, but she also shows contempt for the traditions and norms of the amaMpondomise, hence the need for her retribution. Qangule (1974:94) touches on this, but refrains from taking a conclusive stand on the issue:

The inflexible dedication of Zwelinzima and Thembeke might be interpreted by some critics as stubbornness or arrogance. It is difficult to endorse or to reject such opinion. What is clear, however, is that they are motivated by their concern for their fellow humans.

Be that as it may, one would have expected Thembeke to behave more or less as a Xhosa girl who is not totally foreign to the situational context she finds herself in. Taiwo (ibid:2) sketches a black girl's upbringing in such a way that it becomes strange to see an African girl becoming hysterical when confronted by such circumstances as experienced by Thembeke:

In most parts of Africa the whole of a girl's life is one long preparation for the useful role she is expected to play in society . . . . When she is betrothed to a man his relations expect her to conform to certain traditions and norms of the family. Everybody takes an interest in how she sits, speaks, laughs, acts and reacts to situations.

Considering the full-scale socialization process we have noted in previous discussions, seen in the light of these comments by Taiwo, one finds it difficult to comprehend

Thembeke's overall attitude towards certain aspects of Xhosa culture. Her missionary education and upbringing cannot but be blamed for divorcing her from her own culture to such an extent that she becomes a total foreigner to her own people. Of course, the motivation for her behaviour is not difficult to find. Thembeke is a fugitive from Xhosa culture. She is driven into this state by a gross sense of 'alienation' as she represents black people with an identity crisis, who refuse to be identified with black culture and who want to become pseudo-whites.<sup>10</sup>

Because of her obstinacy and her failure to come to terms with her new role as the mother of the nation, she finally ends up projecting the image of Eve. Her independence and her non-conformist attitude directly lead to Zwelinzima's downfall. Her opposition to and contempt for every vestige of traditional life or belief<sup>11</sup> is a serious indictment on someone chosen to be a leader of a nation.

#### 4.6 Futshane: *Mhla ngenqaba* (1949)

This novelette is about the ups and downs of Mhlangenqaba, a male main character. Female characters, as could be expected, play a minor but significant role in the story. This is how Futshane depicts MaGaba's role in the story:

Inkosikazi yakhe uMaGaba ubelithamba lomfazi, umXhosakazi wenene, into ethi nokuthetha oku kwembala inge akukho nto iyisukelayo. Abantwana babo babesixhenxe - amakhwenkwe emathathu iintombi zine. (p. 17)

(His wife, MaGaba, was a very humble woman, a true Xhosa woman, one who took her time when talking. They had seven children - three boys and four girls.)

Humility, dignity and the ability to bear as many children as possible<sup>12</sup> are all highly rated attributes in womanhood. Compassion, as evidenced by Nobantu's assistance and succour to the escaped convict, Mhlangenqaba, is another popular female stereotype.

Nobantu's compassion is contrasted with Nozimanga's treachery. The latter befriends Mhlangenqaba simply to turn him over to the police later. This is certainly the epitome of the Biblical Delilah, hence Futshane's indignant tone:

Waba ke uyabanjwa uMhlangenqaba loo mini eziswe kuloo mnatha yintombi ayithandileyo, ebihleli isisipili kuye naxa aleleyo - uNozimanga. (p. 47)

(Mhlangenqaba was then arrested on that very day, betrayed by a girl he loved, a girl whose image shone like a mirror in his sleep - Nozimanga.)

The two characters' names<sup>13</sup> are important in that Nobantu signifies one who is the mother of people whereas Nozimanga is one who is the mother of all unseemly things.

As could be expected, this novelette also ends with marriage after depicting some superhuman guidance Mhlangenqaba constantly receives from his late mother.

Female writers such as Futshane find it easy to write about male characters and life. As opposed to men who rarely give a total picture of a female character and whose female heroes are subjected to all conceivable male biases, female authors seem to have a deeper understanding of male characters and the problems confronting them. This view is confirmed by Miller (1979:11) who says in this regard:

Another important result is that subordinates often know more about the dominants than they know about themselves. If a large part of your fate depends on accommodating to and pleasing the dominants, you concentrate on them.

Despite this apparent concentration on the dominant group's image, Futshane's characters show, in contradistinction, that women are, after all, far from being men's pawns. Nobantu rejects Stwayi's marriage proposal for the man of her own choice, Mhlangenqaba, and Nozimanga easily outwits the same man and turns him over to the police.

In didactic literature such as this, all wrongdoers suffer retribution at the end as a sign of public censure and as a sign of the author's (apparent) obedience to social dictates. Since Nozimanga does not suffer in any way, one cannot but infer that Futshane had, as suggested by Miller (op. cit.:10) other motives for creating such a character than to show that women are in fact treacherous:

It is not surprising then that a subordinate group resorts to disguised and indirect ways of acting and reacting. While these actions are designed to accommodate and please the dominant group, they often, in fact, contain hidden defiance and 'put ons'.

This makes it imperative to see female writings and women's depiction of certain situations in their totality so as to avoid making hasty and erroneous conclusions. That, admittedly, may be one of the problems of 'image of women criticism'. It is also of great importance to bear in mind that the early women writers did not radically try to depart from the contemporary male approach to writing. They, at least, had to establish themselves first within the conventional mould before embarking on their own strategies of self-expression. This view is in support of Mews (1969:1) who expresses the point as follows:

In a period when the tradition of the novel was largely masculine, women writers who tried their prentice hands at writing fiction had either to write as men wrote (if they could) or to write as women with a woman's different awareness of life; by doing the latter they gradually worked out their own tradition.

## 4.7 Resumé

Women in these decades are depicted in such a way that it becomes patently clear that if they do not submit to male dominance, they are, without doubt or exception, doomed. This is evidenced in *UNolishwa*, *Umzali wolahleko* and *Ingqumbo yeminyanya*. Considering the time or period in which the latter powerful work appeared, this message must have sobered many a woman's mind and influenced the lives of many. Female writers such as Swaartbooi, who seem to confirm without reservation male biases about women, see it as their duty to remind women of the stark realities of their situational context, hence their apologetic approach to the woman question. Despite this, they succeed in allowing their own ideas about women, especially their so-called dependence on men, to filter through. In some cases, women writers write with tongue in the cheek, pretending to be submissive to men when in fact, on closer scrutiny, it becomes clear that they have a hidden message they are trying to transmit to their readers.

## Notes

1. Mothers are entrusted with the responsibility to bear children and to bring them up to become, in the case of girls, future mothers, hence, e.g. the roles of Mrs Adams in *UNomsa*, and Solakhe's wife in *UNolishwa* and many such marriage enthusiasts.
2. Mbiti (1975:210) also confirms that misfortune is regarded as punishment and restitution for misbehaviour.
3. Cf. the role of women in *Umzali wolahleko* and *Intombi yolahleko*.
4. See Mbiti (ibid:105).
5. This character has her counterpart in the Xhosa folk-tale - the rude, unsympathetic woman who suffers retribution in the end.
6. See also Satyo (1977:77) regarding Sinxo's motives with such characters.
7. See Vilakazi (1945:312); Herdeck (1973:175) and Bennie (1933, vol 7 No. 1).
8. Cf. Thembeke's fate in 4.5.
9. African custom demands that the head of the household himself should say a few words to a visitor before the latter partakes of liquor or meat in the case of a ritual.

10. See Tisani (1989:4).
11. Mbiti (ibid:83) throws light on the significance of ancestral spirits in African society.
12. Mbiti (op. cit. :133) points out that procreation restores man's lost gift of immortality.
13. See also Satyo (1977:49) and Mbiti (op.cit. :118).

## Chapter 5

# The depiction of female characters by male and female prose writers: 1950-1959.

### 5.0 Introduction

The following novels will be considered in this chapter:

*Kufundwa ngamava* (1951) by M Dana,

*UNtabaziyaduma* (1952) by L Tsotsi,

*Intombi yolahleko* (1953) by E F Gwashu,

*Inzala kaMlungisi* (1954) by W K Tamsanqa,

*Khe kukhiwe iidiliya* (1958) by D M Lupuwana,

*Izinto zodidi* (1959) G I M Mzamane.

Minazana Dana and Liziwe Tsotsi are the two female novelists of this period. Both produced novelettes that have made some mark on the Xhosa literary scene, continuing on the road paved by Swartbooi, Futshane and other female writers in the previous decades.

### 5.1 Dana: *Kufundwa ngamava*: (1951)

Minazana Dana produced both poetry and a novelette. In the book under discussion she confirms most if not all the stereotypic views on women. This inadvertent confirmation of popular stereotypes or myths about women by other women is not difficult to comprehend. Van Vuuren (1938:12) explains this phenomenon as follows:

When persons are told so often - by the media, by teachers, by writers - that these are their group characteristics, the persons tend to live up to the descriptions, to what is expected of them . . . So if men - and men control business, advertising, education, the courts, the churches - say that women are sex objects, dangerous, unintelligent, etc., then women will tend to view themselves as sex objects, dangerous, unintelligent, etc. and will try to act accordingly . . . .

Feminine gossip when the women are collecting firewood or when they are on their way to or from the fountain or river, carrying buckets full of water on their heads, is a common archetypal pattern in both literature and society:

Ezi ntokazi zimbini, umntu nomsakwabo zabhunga namaqabanekazi azo amabini angMaMqoco noMaDlamini ukuba zikhe ziye kuthenza kwihlathi laseMngqungu ngaminazana ithile. Bakufika apho, banambitha le nto yezi ncwadi zibhalwa nguZweni eyaqalwa nguMaMqoco ngokuthi, "He wethu ndiva kusithiwa unyana wakho uyabuya nje emfazweni ingaba yinyaniso na loo nto?" (p. 6)

(These two ladies, a woman and her younger sister, agreed one day with their two female friends, MaMqoco and MaDlamini that they should go and collect firewood at the Mngqungu forest. When they arrived there, they discussed in detail the letters that Zweni had written, a discussion that was introduced by MaMqoco who said, "Friend, I have been informed that your son is due to come back from the war, is that true?")

Dana develops this discussion into a full plot by the women. They plot to have Nzingo Sinxotwe, the principal of the local school, dismissed from his post in order to make way for Zweni who is due back from active service.

In an authorial comment, she gives an interesting glimpse of women's shrewdness when they have to introduce delicate subjects or issues to their husbands:

Unqabile umntu obhinqileyo! Yini ukuba umkaTyani ayikhuphe kakuhle kangaka le nto ange yinto nje ayive emoyeni kanti ebeyithetha nabahlobokazi bakhe emini? Ubuchopho bomntu obhinqileyo ngathi budalwe banamagolonxa okugcina ingqondo nje eyodwa yokuthetha iqhinga ngamaxeshu athile, kuba akasayi kuphazama ngomlomo wakhe osel'uhleli unobuciko bokuphendula nowona mbuzo ube ungalindeleka; atsho obuzayo anele. (p. 10)

(A woman is a very unfathomable character. See how tactfully Tyani's wife puts the matter before her husband as if it is just a rumour whereas it is actually something she had discussed that very same day with her friends! The brain of a woman seems to have special compartments in which to store some cunning device to be used at certain times, because she will make no mistake with her mouth which is always packed with crafty oratory used in replying even to the most unexpected question to the complete satisfaction of the one who is asking.)

Shrewdness and tactfulness are some of the most popular female stereotypes among the writers. Besides, MaDlamini is depicted as a fairly dominant woman. Dana's tone in the following quotation is certainly one of disapproval for such an attitude in women:

. . . Kambe uTyani lo ngathi ungala madoda afakwa iyokothwane ngabafazi, iyeza apha abakholelwa kulo abakwaNtu ekubeni lelokwenza indoda ukuba imthobele umfazi, yenze yonke imiyalelo yakhe. (p. 10)

(. . . In fact, Tyani was just like the type of man said to have been given a dose of "iyokothwane", medicine that women are said to give to their husbands to make them docile and do whatever they want them to do.)

In the following statement it is clear that Dana abhors henpecked men and women who dominate their husbands:

UTyani lo wayesoloko eyivuma into ethethwa ngumfazi wakhe nokuba akanasizathu sakwenje njalo; evuma nje kuba kusitsho umfazi. (ibid)

(Tyani always agreed with everything said by his wife even when he had no reason to do so; he would agree just because his wife had said it.)

Dana states her attitude and standpoint very clearly and unequivocally in the following authorial comment:

Ewe, intle iyabukeka yaye ifanelekile into yokuba umnini nomnikazi-mzi bavisisane bahlale ngomanyano lwabathandanayo, bacebisane ngezintoyinto ezilunge nabo, ingasiyiyo into yokuba athi umnini-mzi nokuba icebo liphambukile elithethwa ngumnikazi-mzi alamkele elibona ukuba liya ekweyeleni. (ibid)

(Of course, it is indeed right that a married couple should live in harmony and unity as people who love each other, advising each other on various issues affecting them, not the tendency by some heads of families to accept without question any advice by their wives even when such advice will clearly lead to destruction.)

Her contention that the woman is only the left hand to the husband and should therefore not seek to usurp his powers once more demonstrates the tremendous force of acculturation:

Umfazi lo ke usisandla sasekhohlo endodeni yakhe, ekungafunekiyo ke ukuba kuyekelwe kuye ngokugqibeleleyo esisona sandla sibuthathaka, kuba wosuka umzi ungahlumi kudilike nolo dongana beluse luqaliwe. (ibid)

(The woman is the left hand to her husband; matters should therefore not be left to her completely as she is the weaker hand; the household will not prosper and the foundations that had been laid will crumble.)

This attitude by a woman is not at all surprising, considering that women internalize a subservient role from childhood. This overwhelming power of internalization is articulately expressed by Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974:1):

We have become increasingly aware of sexual inequities in economic, social and political institutions and are seeking ways to fight them. A first step in that direction involves the recognition that in learning to be women in our society, we have accepted, and even internalized, what is too often a derogatory and constraining image of ourselves.

Dana shows that, in most cases, men can be easily manipulated by their wives while giving them the impression that the men themselves initiated the desired action. This can be seen from the way MaDlamini coaxes Ndlangisa to a complete frenzy whereas in the beginning he was loath to listen to her complaint. MaDlamini plays so much on

his feelings that he becomes, in the end, one of the protagonists of the women's anti-Nzingo campaign. This certainly shows the effectiveness of women in mobilizing forces against issues that threaten or concern them.

In another authorial comment, Dana labels women as hypocritical:

Sii! Usisimanga umntu obhinqileyo, abe wadalwa ubuchopho obungqondo isebenza ngokusisimanga! Uyazi okokuba umkaNceyana ebonakala ehlupheka nje ufile luvuyo ngaphakathi, kuba eqonda ukuba umqa wabo wembizo yabo yasehlathini ujiyile; umqa welaa bhunga labo noMaMqoco lokuba uNzingo emke esikolweni saseSulenkama! UNzingo yena wemka engamlibali umfazi ovelana naye! (p. 39)

(Gosh! A woman is really a strange creature and she is endowed with a brain that works very strangely! Do you know that though Nceyana's wife appears to be so sorry, she is extremely happy in her heart because she realizes that their secret talks held at the forest have borne fruit; she and MaMqoco and others wanted Nzingo away from the Sulenkama school! Nzingo genuinely believed that she felt sorry for him!)

Total commitment to parental control in the choice of a life partner seems to be Dana's ideal in the following paragraph:

"Mna ndingumntu oxhomekeke ekukholiseni abazali bam. Ndithi nokuba into ndiyayithanda ndizicenge ndiyiyeke ukuba abayithandi. Kukwangokunjalo ke naxa beyithanda; ndiyazizama ndiyithande ngokomnqweno wabo. Xa nditshoyo ke ndithetha ukuthi ezam izigqibo ndedwa azincedi lutho, kuba zixhomekeke kwezabo; . . ." (p. 57)

("I am dependent on always striving to please my parents. Even if I like something, I rather persuade myself to abandon it if they do not like it. The same applies if they like it; I persuade myself to like it in accordance with their wishes. What I mean is that my decisions alone are useless because I am dependent on theirs; . . .")

Nomthandazo's view in the above quotation epitomises the view of all those women, including Dana, who have resigned themselves to implicit subordination to parental control, the bone of contention in matrimonial affairs over the past decades.

Dana further depicts the woman as untrustworthy when it comes to love and marriage. Nomthandazo is easily persuaded by the sweet tongued Vulindlela Maphekula to abandon Zweni, her fiancé and marry him instead at the local magistrate's office. Note how Dana characterises her in the following quotation:

Kwesi sithuba yazibonakalisa imvelo yobubhinqa kuNomthandazo, yokuv'amantyontyelo. Yasuka yasithela yonke ingqondo yokoyika abazali ngenxa yamazwi omfo wakwaTshutsha. (p. 75)

(At this juncture, the woman instinct of being easily persuaded away from one's resolve manifested itself in Nomthandazo. Her fear for her parents melted like snow because of the sweet tongued man of the Tshutsha clan.)

Only the timely intervention of Nontanyana prevents her from marrying Vulindlela, a well known crook masquerading under the guise of being a perfect gentleman.

As could be expected, the book ends with the well known archetypal ending of all Victorian novels - marriage. In such novels women play a contingent role which Jacquelyn Hall (in Russianoff, 1981:230) defines as follows:

Furthermore, this stereotype is compounded by society's assignment of, shall we say, a *contingent* role for women. A woman often has an identity that is contingent on someone else. For example: I am *their* mother, I am *his* wife, I am *his* secretary, I am *her* maid. In other words, I exist because I have a relationship to someone else who is real!

The powerful force of socialization and acculturation is clearly demonstrated in Dana's novel. Her writing is an absolute acknowledgement of all popular female stereotypes. Even the very fact that Nomthandazo is an educated woman does not at all help to create an image of a woman that is ostensibly different from the conventional one.

## 5.2 Tsotsi: *UNtabaziyaduma* (1952)

Liziwe Tsotsi was Minazana Dana's female contemporary. It should, therefore, be interesting to compare and contrast their views on the role and image of women. A more conservative view of the role of women than Dana's has yet to emerge.

Tsotsi gives us a good example of a feminized hero in the beginning of this novel:

Yena ubengena mkhetho emsebenzini apha, athi "Mna ndiyinkwenkwe, andinakho ukwenza umsebenzi wentombazana;" njengoko abanye babesitsho. Wayesila umbona, aye kukha amanzi, apheke, encedisa unina, aze aye nasempahleni, alime encedisa uyise. (p. 6)

(He did not discriminate as far as work was concerned and never said, "I am a boy, therefore I cannot perform girls' duties," as others used to say. He used to grind maize, fetch water, cook, helping his mother, and go to herd their stock, plough, helping his father.)

In feminist terms and outlook, this is not only progressive thinking on the part of the author but it is also highly interesting considering the way role-categorisation was enforced, especially with regard to adults, in those days. It cannot be doubted that if boys<sup>1</sup> were to grow with these views and role they could be ideal husbands in their adult lives.

This ideal is crystalized by Christine Qunta<sup>2</sup> (1987:16) who comments as follows:

If men in the popular movements are party to resolutions about alleviating the oppression of women, they cannot then avoid the inconvenience of sharing or collectivizing domestic chores and child-rearing, the practical side of giving the

women more time to catch up with the experience and level of awareness that men have had the opportunity to acquire.

Qunta's stance is not at variance with androgyny which Tuttle (1987:19) explains as 'a world in which sex-roles are not rigidly defined' and which Pratt (1981:57) also explains as 'the absorption of positive qualities of "masculinity" and "femininity" into the total personality.' According to the latter (ibid:88) the androgynous self refers to the self beyond male and female roles. Men are, of course, sceptical of androgyny as they fear that it could harm the current social fabric.

Tsotsi confirms the age old stereotype that women will leave no stone unturned in their efforts to see their daughters married. Thozama's mother influences her to defy social norms and propose love to Mhlangenqaba.<sup>3</sup>

One can see from Thozama's shyness that she is aware that society eschews women who propose love to men. While women's liberationists regard such women as 'free women', social norms regard them as social deviants. It is taboo for girls to propose love to boys. Even Tsotsi's general tone in the book is one of disapproval for such behaviour.

Tsotsi changes the conventional setting always associated with gossip by women - the way to or from the river, the fountain or the forest to the house where this takes place over a cup of coffee. MaMfene's taking four cups of coffee is a sure indication that she is in the best mood for gossip. Of course women do not only engage in gossip when they get together. They exchange ideas about other concerns in life. Chatting to one another in this way has some therapeutic value as pointed out by Russianoff (ibid:21):

Often women believe men when they say "all women's talk is silly gossip." In reality, women listen to each other's feelings, exchange of information, and assuage each other's isolation and loneliness . . . They can ventilate their frustration, while laughing with each other about their problems. Learning to have good female friendships can be one of the greatest therapeutic resources available to women.

Tsotsi highlights the plight of women in those days when their parents refused to educate daughters for various reasons:

Ngezo mini abantu abaninzi babecinga ukuba ukufundisa intombazana yinkcitha-mali, kuba babengayazi injongo emfundweni. Babekholelwa ekubeni kwanele ukuba intombazana iyakwazi ukubhala igama layo nokubhala incwadi. Imfundo babesithi iyalibazisa bangendi msinyane. Enye into, kube kusithi ke ukuba ide yagqiba ukufunda, suke ikhawuleze yende ingayibuyisanga imali yabazali. (p. 26)

(In those days most people thought that it was a waste of money to educate girls because they did not realize the purpose of educating children. They believed that it was enough if a girl could just write her name and was able to write a letter. They said that education delayed girls from marrying. Secondly, girls hardly finished studying before someone wanted to marry them even before they could work and repay their parents' expenses.)

It is interesting to note that this reluctance to educate girls is not peculiar to Xhosas only. Cott (ibid:101) points out that it was prevalent in seventeenth century New England:

Seventeenth-century New Englanders paid slight attention to the education of women. Since women's intellect was considered inferior to men's, extensive learning for women was considered inappropriate, at worst dangerous.

Tsotsi is only too aware of her people's scepticism in this regard. The following paragraph can therefore be regarded as a justification and an apology while at the same time she indirectly appeals for the emancipation of the girls:

Ukufunda kwalo mntwana kwaba yinkululeko nokusulwa kweenyembezi kubazali bakhe. Abazange bazidele ngokumfundisa kwabo ebunzimeni. Uyise waqala ngokuthenga iinkomo nezixhobo zokulima, walandelisa ngeegusha namahashe. (p. 35)

(The fact that this child had acquired her education was of great benefit and relief to her parents. They never regretted having educated her in those difficult times. Her father, because of the help from his daughter, could later buy some heads of cattle and ploughing implements, as well as sheep and horses.)

She shows in the reversal of the following form of address that she is concerned about the role and the position of women in the Xhosa social fabric:

"Mgcini-sihlalo, manenekazi nani manene ." (p. 43)

("Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen . . .")

instead of "Mgcini-sihlalo, manene nani manenekazi. . ." ("Mr Chairman, gentlemen and ladies . . .") which is the traditional form of address in Xhosa. It is true that the influence of English is also responsible for this change, but it cannot be denied that this is also due to a change in outlook.

She touches on a crucial issue regarding role categories and sport when she says:

Kodwa wamangaliswa kukuba bathi abantwana bengamantombazana, ize imidlalo yabo ibe yeyamakhwenkwe endaweni yokuba babe bedlala ngeembiza, bepheka, besinda, bengqusha, besikha namanzi, njalo njalo. (p. 59)

(But she was surprised that girls played boys' games instead of playing with pots, cooking, smearing the floors with fresh cowdung, stamping maize, fetching water, etc.)

Tsotsi is drawing our attention to changing patterns in the lives of the people. The roles in the above extract have been exchanged. Bearing in mind that she has also

depicted boys doing both boys' and girls' work, it is obvious that she is not in favour of role-categorisation. A similar observation regarding the changing patterns in role categories appeared in the local newspaper, the *Daily Dispatch*, on 29 December 1987 (p.9):

"In terms of who does what - both as little boys and girls and big men and women - things are changing but it is a slow process."

Although this novel deals with a male main character, it inevitably ends with a woman, Hombakazi, playing the role of helpless girlfriend and later submissive wife.

It is interesting to note that although boyfriends and girlfriends feature prominently in the early didactic novels, this is extremely superficial love that neatly avoids intimate relations including innocent hugging and kissing. An analogous situation is mentioned by Maly-Schlater (1969:72) regarding Victorian novels:

Practically all Victorian novels are love stories, yet all of them are lacking in vital love scenes. The taboos of the time : the things which are not done, the things which are better left alone, the things which are not discussed, in other words, physical fact made them impossible. The natural could only be hinted at as it was deemed indelicate. The lovers, that is the nice lovers in the nice books seemed to have been young people without bodies.

The reason for this rigidity and frigidity is quite obvious - books were severely scrutinized by the missionary press so that all intimate love scenes could be expurgated.<sup>4</sup> This trend continued right into the sixties when, among others, Jongilanga's novel, *Ukuqhawuka kwembeleko*, was kept off the school prescription list because it allegedly contained an obscene passage. Some years later, this decision was rescinded as it was felt that the passage was not obscene, after all. The same applied to Mqhayi's *Inzuzo*. The original version could not be used in schools as it allegedly contained obscene material. It had to be revised and edited. It should be pointed out that although Jongilanga's novel falls outside the missionary period, virtually all the book screeners of the time were products of missionary education.

A final point to make about Tsotsi's novel is that, as in others that have been authored by women, girls invariably learn and qualify as lady teachers. Despite this achievement, these lady teachers never try to rise above the level of the other girls who are less qualified or even unqualified in their societies. They remain subservient, docile, naive and will do all the household chores done by girls. In this way, the writers not only act apologetically but also strive to retain the elite group of girls within the fold of girlhood. They are not different, they are the same as the rest, the authors seem to say.

It seems as if, educated or not, girls, as pointed out by van Vuuren (ibid:9) remain non-persons:

This secondary/primary role of woman leaves her a non-person. Bearing and raising children, cooking and serving meals, cleaning, washing and ironing, having sexual relations, does not give her much opportunity to be, or to feel that she is, a person. She has little opportunity for development or for self-expression. She, and all other women are to be the same.

One can, however, sense in Tsotsi's writing some subtle agitation for the liberation of women from the constraints of role categorisation. Viewed in this light, it would not be far fetched if it could be assumed that her apparent acceptance of some of the stereotypes is only a smokescreen to hide her abhorrence for male domination.

### 5.3 Gwashu: *Intombi yolahleko* (1953)

Among other things, Gwashu's books reveal his deep love for the Xhosa culture. He is a man who is proud of his roots although he himself spent a large part of his life in the city.

Parental scepticism regarding the education of girls<sup>5</sup> was a burning concern in his days, hence the opening paragraph of this novel:

"Nojenti, noko andiboni ukuba bubulumko ukufundisa umntwana oyintombazana ade agabadele kwibanga lesine emfundweni." (p. 1)

("Nojenti, I don't think it is wise to allow a girl to go beyond standard four at school.")

As usual, the reason for this reluctance is based on the fact that a girl will get married before compensating her parents for the expenses incurred in educating her.

Nojenti is an enlightened person. She is opposed to this foolishness of depriving girls of educational opportunities. Typical of all women, however, she has indoctrinated Nolizwe, her daughter, from an early age that the ultimate and inevitable goal for every girl is marriage:

"Yena umama ukuba bekusiya ngaye, ebefuna ukuba ndifunde ndibe yititshalakazi, ize kuthi namhla ndendayo, xa ndimkhulu, nditshatwe yititshala okanye ngumfundisi." (p. 6)

("Mother wishes, if things could go her way, that I should learn and become a lady teacher, so that when I get married, when I have become of age, I could marry a teacher or a minister of religion.")

It is needless to say that with this rationale behind sending girls to school, one cannot help frowning at using education to increase the marriage value of one's daughters. At any rate, it is preferable to be sent to school on such questionable grounds than not to be sent to school at all. At least her fate was better than Nomadinga's whose parents

did not see the need to educate her at all. The church steward to whom the problem is reported by Nojenti echoes Gwashu's feelings on the issue:

"Awu! uxela into embana noko, Nkosikazi, kuba isebudengeni loo nto yokuba engenakho ukumfundisa umntwan' oyintombazana . Ukumfundisa kambe ke, akwenzelwa kuzuza nto ngeziquhamo zemfundo yakhe. Kwenzelwa kwa yena ukuze abe nokuziphilela lula ngemfundo yakhe xa sel' eziphandela ngokwakhe." (p. 8)

("Oh! You are telling me sad news, Madam, because it is foolish to say that he cannot educate a girl. Educating her is not aimed at gaining from the fruits of her education. It is merely done for her benefit, so that she can be self-sufficient and able to fend for herself.")

Gwashu, no doubt, counters the distorted reasons for refusing to educate girls or for educating them with sinister motives in mind. The image of young girls heavily ensnared by distorted parental myths prevented thousands of girls from equipping themselves for competitive employment in the economic structures of the land. They had to be content with inferior education which led them to a generally inferior role in life.

Male dominance, as pointed out by Gwashu, is normally so overriding that women hardly hold a higher status than children. This comes out very clearly in Nolizwe's frustration:

"Loo nto ithethwa ngutata akukho namnye unokudlula kuyo. Nomama ngokwakhe, usuke ange ungomnye wethu bantwana. Akazange abe nazwi lilelakhe kutata, njengoku kwethu bantwana, naye wenza ngokwemiyalelo yekhitha." (p. 15)

("Father's word is final. Even mother ends up looking like one of the children, us. She never has her word with daddy, just like us children, she has to obey daddy's instructions.")

One cannot but sense Gwashu's disapproval of this treatment of women by men. Woman's helplessness, on the other hand, is clearly demonstrated by Nolizwe's portrayal of her mother who must be content with being treated like a child.

Stereotypically of all women, Nojenti and her daughter do all the household chores. Nojenti has to apprentice Nolizwe in this art so that she may be able to handle it with the necessary expertise in her own life which will hardly differ from her mother's, regardless of her level of education.

As could be expected, Nojenti takes the initiative and borrows money from the church steward. She does not call upon her husband to discuss the issue with the man but, contrary to tradition, she invites the man to come and discuss the issue with her. When

her husband wants to know the purpose of the man's visit, she loses her temper and tells him that it has nothing to do with him and she disparages him for his backwardness in front of the embarrassed church man.

Gwashu's reaction to this, and his views about the status of women, filters through when he says:

Akuba liathalala umfo emzini wakhe, eyinto engaziwa nokuba sisiciko sayiphi na imbiza ekhay'apha, nangakumbi ke xa umfazi angu-"Novelakhe", kuya kulibaleka okokuba yena mfazi usisiqu ekumile le ntloko ingulo mfo kuso. (p. 20)

(When a man becomes useless in his house, hardly respected by his own family, more so if his wife is the "dominating type", people will lose sight of the fact that she is merely the body on which the head who is the man is attached.)

Gwashu does not shy away from the fact that where each of the couple wants to be the head, there is bound to be conflict and that the weakened position of a man gives rise to family problems as he can no longer command respect.<sup>6</sup>

Mzimasi, Nojenti's husband, has to declare his authority over her in no uncertain terms:

"Ndim umninimzi apha kulo mzi kabawo," uqokele watsho, "ndim onokubuza nawuphi na umhambi imvelaphi . . ." (p. 21)

("I am the head of this household here," he continued, "I am the only one who can ask any stranger the purpose of visiting us...")

When Nojenti ignores all this and behaves in a rather belittling manner, the inevitable happens - she gets a blow on the head, the husband taking the traditional liberty to discipline her.

It is quite obvious from Nojenti's suffering that she is presented as a martyr who will bear the brunt of having to struggle to educate her children with little or no support from the husband. Even so, she is expected to respect her husband.

Woman's contingency on men<sup>7</sup> is once more emphasized when, as could be expected, Nolizwe accepts her first boyfriend amidst doubts and confusion in her mind about the wisdom of doing so. This contingent role is carried to its logical end when she is forced to marry into a "red blanketed" family against her wishes. This rather arrogant exercise of parental control meets with unexpected opposition from Nolizwe.<sup>8</sup>

In her despair, she does something contrary to traditional norms by proposing marriage to her boyfriend so that she can avoid marrying her parents' choice. This is great hu-

miliation for her and the cunning boyfriend does not fail to take advantage of her plight as he has his eyes on her substantial investments.

Gwashu is the only writer so far who depicts marriage as a fantasy that most girls cannot avoid dreaming of. This is how Nomadinga visualizes her dreamworld home with Lungile:

Walibona ephupheni ikhaya labo lisendulini eluhlaza lirhaqwe bubuyokoyoko beentyatyambo ezimhlophe. Kwakuphithizela amahotyazana neenkuku ezimhlophe ebaleni phambi koxande oluqatywe mhlophe. Naabo abadlezana beenkuku belandelwa ngamantshontsho amhlotshana, naango amaxhwane eegusha namatakane eembuzi eloba-dloba (sic) enkundleni enencha eluhlaza. Phantsi komthi omkhulu womnchunube naako kudlala intwanazana inxibe ilokhwana emhlotshana, idlalisa ngoonopopi, iteketa ithetha noonopopi bayo itsho ngaloo mehlo makhulu ngathi ngakayise. (p. 72)

(She saw in her dream their house on a green hillock surrounded by a luxurious growth of white flowers. Pigeons and white fowls were moving up and down in the open space in front of the four cornered hut which was also painted white. She saw hens that had just hatched some eggs, followed by little white chickens, she also saw the lambs and young goats frolicking happily in the green courtyard. Under a big willow tree she saw a young girl in a white little dress playing with her dolls, lisping as she talks to her dolls with big eyes that resemble her father's.)

After this fantasy, Nomadinga refuses an unusually generous gesture by Lungile who wants to help her carry a bundle of firewood. Lungile has to use all his persuasive power before she allows him to carry the bundle of wood for some distance. She quickly carries the firewood herself as it is considered taboo for men to carry firewood.

The close ties between Nolizwe and her mother, Nojenti, enable the latter to exercise tremendous influence on the former. She encourages her to marry Fikile and to elope with him to a far-away place where they could live together in peace.

Lack of education did not jeopardise a girl's chances to marry as can be seen from the following quotation:

"...Phaya emaNgxongweni asinto kuxatyiswe yona impakamo. Le ntombi yasekhay' apha icelwa kusaziwa ukuba ayifundanga kuya phi. Into ekuthandwe yona kuyo kukuziphatha kakuhle, ukululama nembeko." (p. 90)

("...At the amaNgxongo family, being of high social standing is not the main thing. They ask for this girl's hand in marriage well aware of the fact that she is not highly educated. What is appreciated in her is her good behaviour, her humility and her politeness.")

As could be expected, retribution could not but befall the deviant Nolizwe. No sooner has she and her boyfriend arrived in Port Elizabeth than cracks begin to appear in their

unblessed marriage. Fikile, who is persuaded by his friend, Jo, to dump Nolizwe, suddenly adopts a hostile attitude towards her and in a conspiracy with another woman, Dina, and Jo, they literally dump Nolizwe in a dense forest hoping that she will be devoured by wild animals or killed by poisonous snakes.

It is common knowledge that girls such as Nomhle, whom Fikile marries after getting rid of Nolizwe, are archetypes of the hardened town girl who can rob and kill under the guise of being perfect ladies. The place of such women is not in the kitchen, not in the stuffy overcrowded classroom or in the hospital ward, but in the hurly-burly of township crime. Without batting an eyelid, Nomhle robs Fikile of all his money and escapes in his car to Johannesburg.

In typical folk-tale fashion of disobedience, trial, retribution and restoration, Nolizwe returns home to marry the man chosen for her by her parents many years ago.<sup>9</sup>

This has serious implications for woman's independence as it seems to imply that parental choice is a guarantee for happy marriage whereas personal choice is a recipe for divorce or doom. As Gwashu is an avowed traditionalist, one is not surprised at his stance that seems to favour male dominance. Even the women he has depicted as independent are, in fact, social deviants.

#### 5.4 Tamsanqa: *Inzala kaMlungisi* (1954)

Witness Tamsanqa is one of our prolific Xhosa writers. He has cut himself a niche as a novelist, a dramatist and an essayist of undoubted merit. He is particularly well known for his popular drama, *Buzani kubawo*, which deals with the thorny issue of parental choice of marriage partner for their children.

In this novel, the male partner is, as usual, still the dominant partner. The pattern changes slightly when Mlungisi remarries after the death of his first wife. Thereafter he adopts a more androgynous approach to marriage and domestic work:

Nje ngokuba uMlungisi wayengumntu ogadalala nje kumfazi wakhe wokuqala, kulo yaphela yonke loo nto, wenza izinto awayengazenzi ngaphambili, wakha amanzi ngeenkabi, watheza nokutheza. Ilali yayikubukele konke oku kuqhubekayo, wonke umntu esithi uMlungisi utsalwa ngemilebe ngulo mfazi . . . (p. 53)

(Although Mlungisi was strict to his first wife, with this one all that had vanished and he did things he never did before, he fetched water using oxen and collected firewood too. The whole community watched all the developments with great interest, everybody saying that Mlungisi is henpecked . . .)

While Mlungisi's androgynous attitude raises eyebrows among other men, women accuse his second wife of having used magic medicine to make him do all those things.<sup>10</sup> In this way Tamsanqa shows us how even women are not ready for a change in role categories, failing which, the force of habit and social norms is too great for them.

As could be expected, the novel ends with marriage after carefully avoiding extra-marital relations in the course of the story.

To sum up, Tamsanqa's women characters play a subordinate role. MamTshawe is a typical paragon of virtue whereas MaDlamini is the embodiment of gross insensitivity. Her domination ends abruptly when Mlungisi regains the upperhand and his manliness; he takes the liberty of giving her a good hiding whenever he feels like it. In traditional society that was not a cardinal sin as men believed that women needed to be disciplined occasionally. This victimisation of women could hardly be controlled by traditional and family courts. Only the advent of police and magistrates' courts put an end to this practice although isolated cases will always be found.

### 5.5 Lupuwana: *Khe kukhiwe iidiliya* (1958)

Lupuwana is a teacher as well as a minister of religion. Although he has not written many books, his ability as a writer is certainly above average.

Nomadinga is an angel-like girl who refuses to have anything to do with a boyfriend throughout the story. Inevitably, in the end she finally succumbs to marriage and marries a widower. She is clever enough to induce her husband to assist her with the education of her younger sister. This is significant in the sense that it shows, on the one hand, that marriage does not mean that one's responsibilities towards one's family suddenly end on its consummation. On the other, it points to the usual stereotype of woman as a perpetual dependant.

Unlike other professionals as depicted by earlier writers, Nomadinga is not at all apologetic about her status and role as a nurse. She does not have to perform menial domestic tasks to prove that she is still a woman.

In this novel we certainly come a hair's breadth away from a potentially independent woman were it not for the fact that she also succumbs at the end. Her husband's un-

timely death restores her independence and instead of mourning and grieving, this woman carries on with life as if nothing has happened. The moral behind this is clear: educated women will not be at all stranded if, for some reason or other, they find themselves without husbands.

Throughout Nomadinga's life, her greatest contribution is to serve others' needs. Even Mjwarha, her husband, had married her because as a widower he needed someone to look after him. In this regard, women play a very significant role although, as pointed out by Miller (ibid:64) in another connection, few people appreciate this sacrifice:

In our culture 'serving others' is for losers, it is low-level stuff. Yet serving others is a basic principle around which women's lives are organized; it is far from such for men. In fact, there are psychoanalytic data to suggest that man's lives are psychologically organized *against* such a principle, that there is a potent dynamic at work forcing men away from such a goal.

Nomadinga's virginity until she meets Mr Right is a symbol of purity and excellence as confirmed by Jardine (1983:176):

Virginity is the acme of female virtue. It is to femaleness what valour is to maleness.

The value of this virginity is crystalized even more in contrast to and in comparison with her best friend's, Bukelwa. The two girls grow up together leading extraordinarily puritan lives. They both reject and shun all love proposals and they part as miniature angels into the world.

Unfortunately Bukelwa changes and ends up as a wanton girl who undergoes an abortion. Because she can be truly regarded as Nomadinga's foil, her fall, in typical folk-tale fashion, therefore, highlights Nomadinga's virtuous living and the dividends derived from it. In this way, the importance of virginity has been highlighted and the impression created that this is for the good of the woman while it is no secret that men insist on virginity to ensure that their heirs are legitimate offsprings.

It is obvious that, while Lupuwana cherishes female independence and self-esteem, he is opposed to promiscuity. It is, indeed, typical of men to insist on strict virginity as far as women are concerned while the same rule does not seem to apply so rigidly to men. Philanderers are 'play boys' while women who do the same are labelled with all conceivable derogatory epithets. While Bukelwa is stigmatized for undergoing an abortion, no mention is made of the male perpetrator of the sin - the man who impregnated her.

## 5.6 Mzamane: *Izinto zodidi* (1959) ✓

Professor Mzamane was one of the most highly qualified Xhosa writers following on the footsteps of eminent men such as Jordan and others. The book is one of the best efforts at depicting women struggling to free themselves from man's oppressive domination. Cf. Jafta's (1982:59) comments on its theme:

... the theme is about the liberation of women from their traditional role of subservience. He [Mzamane] regards the traditional role of women as a drawback and emphasizes the intellect as an important attribute to human beings irrespective of sex. The women characters exercise their leadership potential to the betterment of everybody. The women's liberation which took the world by storm in the early seventies was predicted by Mzamane in the early sixties. He introduces this change in a pragmatic way in that the Xhosa women do not scorn their traditional role as married women. Their first obligation is to their marriage and the in-laws, but the fact that they are women does not prejudice any changes which they bring as community leaders.

It should, however, be pointed out that the women's liberation movement of the sixties was a culmination of many other female pressure groups which operated as early as the turn of the previous century.<sup>11</sup> Although it took a form that certainly showed intensified effort on the part of the women, it was not something altogether new. The possibility, therefore, of Mzamane's being aware of the earlier women's struggles cannot be excluded.

The first thing that comes to Mzamane's attention in the book is migratory labour<sup>12</sup> with all its ill-effects on family life. Newly-wed MaKhwetshube protests at this disruptive system whereas older women seem to have accepted it as just one of those things that women have to endure.

The ravages of changing economic and social life can be clearly seen in the following statement by MaNgcengane's husband:

Ilizwe liguqukile; kuyalanjwa, kuyafiwa; ndithi mna ungabona isimanga imizi iphethwe ngabafazi, kuba naloo mbinana isekhoyo iyaphangela koomaRhawuti nokomaThekwini, maMonti, njalo njalo. (p. 8)

(The country has changed; there is widespread famine, people are dying in large numbers; something strange is happening - women are now running the homes because the few men who are still there work far away from home in places such as Johannesburg, Durban, East London, etc.)

When Solomzi marries a woman from town, her in-laws initially entertain fears about whether she, as an educated urban woman, would be like the girls they are used to in the rural areas:

"Sibe namanwele saxhalaba, kuba lo mntu singamazi, saye sisoyika, kuba nendawo avela kuyo negama elikhulu eliyidolophu kwazigigaba zingangotyani. Kuthe kanti

noko sifane soyika, umntwana womntu uza kusibonisa ukuba idolophu ayimngenanga entloko, yaye nangaphezulu koko ungumntwana womntu unengqeqesho akazidli, akaziphakamisanga, kanti kunjalonje unobuqhothololwana bemfundo kuba ngathi uyiphumelele iJ.C.” (p. 19)

(“We were sceptical and anxious because we did not know this person and we had some fears because of her origins and the big name of the town from which she comes, a place where there are usually many bad incidents. Our fears were proved to be unfounded, the child showed us that she has not been spoiled by town life, and that she comes from a respectable home, she is well mannered and not puffed up although she has some education as it appears she passed J.C.”)

This scepticism and fear, reinforcing various stereotypes regarding women from urban areas, apply to all professional women who, it is feared, may have been changed for the worse by education or by their professions.

It is obvious from the above quotation that individualism has no place in stereotyping. As pointed out earlier by Van Vuuren, women are expected to be the same. Any deviation from that is suspect. Stereotyping, with its tendency to generalise, indirectly enforces this pseudo-uniformity. That is why earlier authors strove to show that their educated women characters are not different from their uneducated counterparts as far as work, conduct and responsibility are concerned.

Typical of modern women, MaKhwetshube cannot stand the trauma of enforced separation from her husband. She absconds from her married home to join her husband in Johannesburg. Life in Johannesburg changes radically from what she knew back home. She is introduced to high level social functions, night clubs and crime.

One of the characters in the book, the Master of Ceremonies, uses the following form of address<sup>13</sup> which, to my mind, reflects male superiority:

“Manene namanenekazi, nindive kakuhle anditsho ukuthi manenekazi namanene, kuba sisithethe sasemzini eso . . .” (p. 91)

(“Gentlemen and ladies, mind you I did not say ladies and gentlemen as that is a foreign custom . . .”)

The woman as the Delilah stereotype is once again manifested when Deyi’s enemies use a girl to lure him out of a social function. Only the stern and timely intervention of MaKhwetshube saves Deyi from being brutally murdered by some of his own gang members.

The woman's status as a perpetual minor leads to the deep frustration of another female character in the book, MamNzotho, after the death of her husband. She cannot receive her due benefits without the assistance of a senior male member of the family. MamNzotho brilliantly challenges this but to no avail as the law is unbending in this respect. Her indignation and disgust come out clearly in the following quotation:

Lasuka lamkhohla uMamNzotho watsho waphelwa ngamathemba, akayazi nento amakayenze xa kusuka kubonakale nje ukuba kanti umfazi ngokwesiko labaNtsundu yinkomo ephumpulwe iimpondo ngolu hlobo. Uthe ezicingela eyedwa wafikelela kwinto yokuba makube umfazi ngokwesiNtu akazelwe nto konke na, xa kunokuthi ezekiwe enegunya, enamelungelo onke obufazi, kuthi kanti kukho izinto angenakuzifikelela ngenxa yokuba engumfazi. (p. 104)

(MamNzotho was perplexed and lost all hope, she did not know what to do as it appeared that a woman according to African custom is a beast shorn of its horns like this. As she sat there in deep thought, she asked herself whether it meant anything to be a married woman if, after being married and given due authority and having all the rights as a woman, there could still be certain things she could not reach just because she was a woman.)

Mzamane projects the woman's image very positively when he highlights her ability to share whatever she has with her children:

"... Ukuba unabantwana, ukho ke wena, ekwazini kwakho, khona ezimbalini umfazi owakhe watya into akayahlula-hlula eyabela abantwana bakhe?" (p. 106)

("... If she has any children, is there, as far as you know, any woman who ever ate anything alone and not share it with her children?")

He takes a decisive stand against subjugating women to men and champions the right of all women to inherit their husbands' estates without supervision by male members of their married homes:

"Lilonke lithiwa ndim, kulungile ukuba ilifa lakho liwele ngasemfazini lonke, ngakumbi ukuba uzele, kuba yena unesakhono nangaphezu kwakho ebantwaneni bakho, nokuba seleda wendela kwenye indoda ngokwezi mini ke akacingi ukubalahla abantwana abazeleyo ... (p. 107)

("In short, I say it is right that all your estate should devolve on your wife, especially if she has children, because she is more capable of looking after your children than you. Even if she got married to another man, as it is the practice nowadays, she will never forsake her children ...")

Mzamane takes a subtle dig at women who, like MamNzotho, fail to take note of legal and other issues affecting the family and leave everything to the man:

"... Into endiyiqondayo ndabuzwa ukuba ndiyavuma na ukusayina, ndavuma ndingazikhathazanga ngokuqonda ukuba ndivumani na, kuba ingqondo yam ndandidla ngokuyivalela etyesini ngaloo mihla ndijonge nje ukuba kusebenze eyakhe kuphela." (p. 109)

(“. . . I remember being asked whether I agree to sign and I agreed, not bothering to establish what it was that I agreed to because I used to lock my mind up in a cabin trunk in those days and expected only his mind to work.”)

After this epiphany, MamNzotho can certainly not be the same old naive woman she revealed herself to be earlier.

Another interesting departure from the norm in this book is that the amaHlubi sing the matrilineal clan-praises instead of the patrilineal ones as is done by the other Xhosa tribes. This is a novel recognition of the role of women by the amaHlubi. By reciting the matrilineal genealogy, they give recognition to women ancestors who should be revered for their worth and role as mothers of the nation.

Through various characters in this book, Mzamane makes it clear that he is opposed to the ill-treatment of women. Physical violence against women, though strongly condemned by society, manifested itself in many households at the time as men believed that they had the right to discipline their wives when necessary.

While Lupuwana gave a cursory glimpse of widowhood, Mzamane gives us not only a complete but also a moving view of the woman as widow. MamNzotho's view of herself as a widow encapsulates Mzamane's concern for this unfortunate class of people:

“. . . Undixolele ngolu hlobo le ntetho yam, anditsho ukuthi akuphilanga nto nje ngekuba ndicacisa ukuthi mna sendazabela kwiqela lemithi egecwe yalahlwa, engasajongelwanga ntweni, ngaphandle kokuba ibaswe ivuthe iphele tu . . .” (p. 169)

(“. . . Excuse me for saying that, I don't mean that you are sick, I was just trying to explain that I take myself as firewood that has been cut and thrown away with no-one bothering about it except being eventually thrown into the fire until it has all burnt out . . .”)

This is all because widowhood carries some hidden stigma. A widow, therefore, finds it difficult to marry again while it is much easier for a widower to remarry. Given this second chance, MamNzotho proves to the world that she is still a normal productive and creative citizen. She initiates many community projects instead of doing menial household chores.

To further prove woman's ability, Mzamane introduces us to academically oriented women such as Miss Tshilembe who pursues degree courses in science. In so doing, he suggests the fallibility of the myth that women are less intelligent than men, hence the comment by one of the male characters, Manzodidi:

“... Ngubani owathi imfundo kukho eyamadoda kukho eyabafazi? Ungadelumqulu wena, kanti yho zizigebenga zamantombazana eziya...” (p. 215)

(“... Who ever said there is education for men and education for women? Don't underestimate those girls, they are real giants...”)

Montagu (ibid:113) states the woman's plight in this regard very articulately:

The tradition that women are unable to do as well as men in anything requiring the use of the mind is a very ancient one. Now, it is common knowledge that if you continually tell a person that he is born mentally inconsequential, he is likely to become so. If you make it clear that he belongs to a group which has never ever achieved anything and never will, and that everything ever achieved in the world has been accomplished by persons of another kind; if you tell him that it is useless to attempt to provide him with an education, or with more than the rudiments of one, because he wouldn't be able to take advantage of it; if you make laws which prevent him from owning property, as well as laws that put him at a low level in the hierarchy of statuses; if you exclude him from all activities except those limited to the menial tasks of cooking, housekeeping, and executing the will of his superior in looking after children; and if you conduct yourself as if you were his natural lord and master, you will succeed - have not the least doubt of it - in convincing him that such is a natural order of things.

Instead of good looks and household chores, intellectual strength and the ability to guide their husbands as equal partners are the main attributes ultimately assigned by Mzamane to women. Woman's political awareness and power is manifested when MamNzotho and other women decide to fight for their rights, demanding access to the courts of law as magistrates, lawyers and judges while the dismayed men resist this encroachment on their “sacred” domains:

“... Into esingethwe ngabafazi asiyazi, kodwa ke ngathi kuthiwa bathi bafuna amalungelo abo. Bafuna ukuba nelizwi nabo emicimbini yeenkqubo zonke. Kuthiwa bathi liphelile ixesha lokuba babebexelelwa ukuba indawo yabo izezimbeni, mabashiyeke emakhaya bona, xa kuya kuxoxwa imicimbi edla umzi uphela. Bemingento yokuba namadoda akananto ade aphumelele kuyo ebonakalayo, nali ilizwe liya lisonakala, loo nto bathi yenziwa kukuba bona bafazi bashiywa ngasemva; into ke leyo edalwa kuzicingela kwamadoda.” (p.338)

(“... We don't know what the women are after but they say they want their rights. They want to have a say in all matters that pertain to progress. It is said they say gone are the days when they used to be told that their place is in the kitchen, and therefore they should remain at home when the men go out to discuss issues that affect the community at large. They insist on the fact that the men don't achieve anything of significance, the country is going from bad to worse. They say the reason for that is that they [the women] are left behind because of the arrogance of the men.”)

The woman question is internationalized when MamNzotho attends an International Women's Conference in Chicago to further champion their cause. The woman's grievances in this conference are significant as could be seen from the following extract from the book:

Ayiqala amakhosikazi intlanganiso yawo; ayindulula ngobushushu obungumangaliso, phezu kwegama elithi ihlabathi lonakele; ligula emzimbeni,

emphefumleni nasengqondweni. Loo nto yenzeka phakathi kolawulo olucalanye kuphela. Into abayikhalazelayo bona basetyhini kukuthi ngoku bekho, bengabantu nabo, izinto ezininzi zenziwe bengaxelelwanga nto; benganikwa nxaxheba neyokuba mabakhe bacebise, okanye bancedise ngokubona kwabo. Icala lasebuhlanti lizenzela nje loo nto licinga okokuba ilungile. (p.376)

(The women started their meeting; commencing it with tremendous enthusiasm, on the theme that the world is corrupt; it is sick physically, spiritually and mentally. All this is happening within the one-sided rule [of the men]. The women complain that although they are also there, as people too, most of the things are done without consulting them; they are not even given a chance to advise, or to help as they deem fit. The men do just what they think is right.)

That Mzamane, as pointed out by Jafta (ibid:56), 'attempts to bring about equality of the sexes,' cannot be denied. This is a great climax to a great effort by Mzamane to present, very objectively, the plight of the Xhosa woman.

## 5.7 *Resumé*

While Dana confirms most of the male stereotypes about women, she subtly draws the reader's attention to women's power to manipulate men if necessary. She also shows very clearly how women can use their collective power to reach their goal - good or bad. Dana's novel epitomises the force of socialization and acculturation yet she certainly succeeds in drawing attention to women's power. Tsotsi, on the other hand, adopts a style that favours androgyny. While not overtly challenging the stereotypic images of women in her book, she highlights the subtle changes that are bound to usher in a new era for women. Gwashu shows some sensitivity for woman's plight while obviously bent on retaining the status quo with men taking a leading role.

Tamsanqa pursues the motif of androgyny when he depicts Mlungisi as not being ashamed of sharing domestic responsibilities with his second wife. A further development in the position of the woman is discernible in Lupuwana's book, *Khe kukhiwe iidiliya*. Professional women such as Nomadinga do not have to justify their womanhood by doing menial domestic chores. Secondly, she almost breaks with tradition by staying unmarried while Bukelwa deviates from tradition by pursuing her erotic freedom.

Mzamane's portrayal of the woman question is certainly the most insightful and objective. While the woman starts in her usual shackles and fetters, she ends up as independent. Women's reawakening in the novel is remarkable. The pillars of male domination are shaken to their foundations. Women are exhorted to rid themselves of man's oppression. In fact, in this regard, Mzamane can be regarded as a water-shed in

the portrayal of women in Xhosa literature. While in the previous works, such as those by Sinxo, women who dared defy the narrow social code were regarded and portrayed as social deviants, Mzamañe positively identifies them as fighting for their rights, thus legitimizing a stand that was previously ridiculed and stigmatized.

## Notes

1. See also Gakhulu's comment in *Umzali wolahleko*, p.33.
2. See also Jolobe's *Amavo* (1973:17).
3. See Mrs Adams in *UNomsa*, p.8.
4. See also Opland (in Whitaker et al (eds), 1986:136).
5. Cf. Tsotsi in *UNtabaziyaduma*, p.26.
6. See Saule (1989:54).
7. Cf. Mary Allen (1976:2).
8. Cf. Zoleka in *Ukuqhawuka kwembeleko*.
9. Cf. Nolishwa in *UNolishwa*.
10. "Iyokothwane," "ivamna" or "ihabiya" are generally regarded as potent medicines for the purpose. Zulus call them "igomondela".
11. See e.g. Tuttle (1987:357) on the Women's Franchise League founded in Britain in 1889, and the National American Suffrage Association formed in 1890 (Tuttle, op. cit.:217).
12. See Saule (1989:63). Obviously this problem manifested itself as early as 1929.
13. See also Tsotsi (1952:43).

## Chapter 6

# Woman as image in the Sixties: 1960-1969

### 6.0 Introduction

The following books will be considered in this chapter:

*Ukuqhawuka kwembeleko* (1960) by D M Jongilanga,

*Bhota Nonceba* (1960) by B B Mafuya,

*Masibaliselane* (1961) by S M Burns-Ncamashe,

*Induku ayinamzi* (1961) by E Setidisho, ✓

*UNojayiti wam* (1961) by G B Sinxo,

*UNomsa intombi yakwaZulu* (1963) by R P Mirsky/Mahlasela, ✓

*UNonzuzo* (1965) by R Silinga, ✓

*UNomnyamezeli* (1966) by E G N Mda, ✓

*Ukuba ndandazile* (1967) by W K Tamsanqa,

*Hayi lo mlomo* (1968) by G Mdledle. ✓

Four Xhosa female writers feature in this decade - Edith Setidisho, Rose Silinga, E G N Mda and Gertrude Mdledle, besides Paeff Mirsky who wrote the novel in English and had it translated into Xhosa by B E N Mahlasela.

## 6.1 Jongilanga: *Ukuqhawuka kwembeleko* (1960)

Jongilanga is one of our few graduate writers. He has written successful short stories, a novel and drama. One of his strong points as a writer is his successful depiction of urban and rural life, having experienced both modes of existence himself.

Zoleka, the main female character in the story, is in a typical female predicament of being forced to marry a man whom she does not love. Secondly, she is still at high school.

One of the greatest frustrations experienced by young girls is to be deprived of educational opportunities for various excuses as can be seen from Thandeka's comments to Zoleka, her younger sister:

"Khumbula kakhulu Tshangisa ukuba kutata akukho nto ingaphaya kwekhazi. Imfundo kuye yinto nje yokulibazisa ixesha okweli thuba ungekabonwa lisoka. Kwaye, njengomntu ongafundanga kuyaphi akazange abubone, abuqonde ubulumko bokufundisa intombazana . . . ." (p. 11)

("Remember, Tshangisa, that daddy values nothing more than bride-price (lobola). To him education is just a pastime until one finds a suitor. Moreover, as someone with little education, he never appreciated the wisdom of educating a girl . . .")

The scepticism of parents in this era regarding formal education for girls emanates from the same type of sentiments as expressed earlier by Liziwe Tsotsi.<sup>1</sup> This is how Thandeka describes the attitude of contemporary parents:

". . . Kwaye isidanga abaxhentsa ngaso apha abantu sesokuba ayinamvuzo nangenelo into yokufundisa intombazana kuba ithi igqiba nje ibe selisenda naloo mfundo yayo ingabasebenzelanga abazali bayo . . ." (p. 11)

(" . . . And it is generally believed here that it is of no good to educate a girl because no sooner is she through with her schooling than she gets married, before she can do anything for her parents. . . .")

Zoleka always emphasizes self-sufficiency and independence even after the death of one's husband.<sup>2</sup> This view is diametrically opposed to that of her parents which is inclined to be selfish as it does not take the long-term interest of their daughter into consideration. The importance of education in the liberation of African women is emphasised by Katherine Frank (in Jones, Palmer and Jones, 1987:23) with regard to Emechata's writings:

Emechata, more than any other woman writer in Africa today, sees education as the most potent means of women's liberation . . . Most obviously, it equips women to be economically independent, to prepare for a job or profession that will enable them to take care of themselves and their children without the help and protection of men.

The image that arises in this novel by Jongilanga is that of Xhosa women tightly fettered by unreasonable cultural norms regarding the choice of a marriage partner. Parental power is so strong that whoever tries to resist it has to face the wrath of public sanction.

Zoleka's sister, Thandeka, is, on the other hand, a typical Xhosa girl who accepts social norms and parental control as the Biblical truth which every girl or woman should obey without question even if, in the process, she loses her identity:

“. . . Ndingisa ukuba Tshangisa zixolise usincame isikolo, uphumelelise umnqweno wabazali bakho, kungenjalo uya kuzizisela ukuthetha, imilomo emibi neziqalekiso . . .”  
(p. 12)

(“. . . I think, Tshangisa, you should reconcile yourself to the fact that you must leave school and obey your parents' wishes, failing which, you will bring upon yourself a lot of talking and curses . . .”)

Zoleka's protest against forced marriages is symbolic of the frustration of thousands of Xhosa girls who found themselves in this predicament:

“Yi! Thandeka, uyasiqonda ukuba esi sinxiphothi somfo endisiwa kuso andisazi. Khona sekusithiwa yinzwana engenasiphako, yingcwele yeengcwele, ilula into yokuzinikezela kumntu ongamaziyo ongathi kanti ehleli nje ngumva wekhabhathi ulwandle oluzele ngokrebe, ziingwane namawa? Zingaphi iintombi namhlanje ezingomabuy'ekwendeni ngenxa yolu nyanzeliso?” (p. 12)

(“What! Thandeka, do you realize that I do not know this ugly looking man whom I am being forced to marry? Even if he were a flawless gentleman, the holy of holies, is it easy to give yourself over to somebody you don't know, someone who could turn out to be like a white washed grave, a sea full of sharks, octopuses and rocks? How many girls have had to desert their married homes and go back to their maiden homes with all the stigma attached to that because of these forced marriages?”)

This protest culminates in Zoleka's defiance of all taboos that ought to be revered by married women, in the hope that in this shrewd way she would be sent home by her in-laws themselves who would thereby forfeit their claim for the return of the bride-price.

Zoleka's obstinate father preposterously bases his so-called superiority on the Bible<sup>3</sup> and he takes advantage of his wife's humility:

Ezi mpawu ke zezona zabangela ukuba indoda yakhe ibe nala magunya nobo bungqwayingqwayi. Ubesithi nokuba uphikisana nendoda yakhe abuye athi khunubembe yakumkhuphela amehlo esanyankomo, ibuye imxelele ukuba umfazi wagwetywa nayiBhayibhile ngoko ke ayinakuya ngaye. (p. 14)

(Those attributes gave her husband all the authority and superiority. Even when they had an argument she would quickly withdraw as soon as he looked at her with bullfrog eyes and told her that the woman was condemned even in the Bible, therefore he could not be dictated to by her.)

Besides the popular stereotype of the woman as a gossip, Jongilanga reintroduces another interesting feminist image - the shebeen queen. She is normally a peculiar character, clever and so courageous that even men have to tread warily before her:

UNozililo lo wayeze ngokusebenza apha eQonce, kodwa waphelela kumasihlalisane njengabantu abaninzi kwiidolophu ngeedolophu. Wayesaziwa ngumntu wonke, isintwana simazi ngokuba nguSisi Nozwityi, ngenxa yamakhwelo awayewenza xa ekhwaza amadoda abaleka neemali zakhe ezama ukumphepha ngakumbi ngeempelaveki . . . (p. 45)

(Nozililo had come to seek work in King Williamstown but ended up cohabiting with a certain man like many other women in the cities. She was known to many people, children called her Miss Whistles because of her whistling to men who were running away with her money and tried to dodge her especially during weekends. . . .)

It is obvious in this description that the roles of women and men are changing. Women are developing independent lives in as far as generating income is concerned. The shebeen queen commands a lot of respect among her male clients. Her male patrons know that she can match or even outmatch many of them in physical encounter, hence their running away when unable to meet their obligations.

It was said at the outset that Jongilanga's character delineation transcends rural and urban life. Nontsomi is a woman in transition. She is a nanny in an urban area. Such characters represent thousands of young girls who are forced out of school at an early age by lack of means and unco-operative parents to become victims of urban life with all its attendant social evils.

Working in European homesteads has serious implication for African women compelled by social and economic pressures to do domestic work which, in most cases, is coupled with a cruel psychological warfare on the part of the conquerer employer designed to inculcate a sense of white supremacy in the minds of the black women. Cf. Cock (1980:197):

Domestic work constituted an important initial point of incorporation whereby the conquered population was absorbed into the colonial economy. The economy was structured by the capitalist mode of production.

The brutality and the backwardness of the practice of forced marriages is clearly manifested when Zoleka runs away from her married home into which she had been coerced. Her father traces her and chases her on horseback after brutally assaulting her.<sup>4</sup> She is beaten until she feigns death to avoid further victimization.

She becomes the epitome of women's resistance and revolution as she adopts all tactics to prompt her in-laws to send her back home. When a go-slow campaign fails to have the desired effect, she axes Zolile, her husband, to death, as will be evident from the extracts cited below. Gone is all the timidity and the subservience stereotypically associated with women.

Zoleka has been so harassed by her parents and later by her in-laws and society in general, that her determination to stand her ground as revealed in the following passage can only be admired:

Wambola-mboleka uZoleka ezibuza imibuzo ngemibuzo enjengale yokuba yintoni na esafuneka eyenzile ukuze ancanywe. Uzenzile izinto ezinamagama kodwa zazimnceda ntoni kuba nanko esacweza kwaXatasi....Yaba nye into eyathi tha kuye yeyokuba yena Zoleka nendoda yakhe kwanoyise besadla ubomi, le ndlela wayeyihamba yayisaza kuqhuba kwaye engasiboni engusazi (sic) nesiphelo sayo. (p.76)

(Zoleka stood there highly agitated, asking herself various questions such as what she should still do so that her in-laws should reject her. She had already done very serious things to no avail as witnessed by the fact that she was still at Xatasi's house. One thing dawned to her, that was as long as she, her husband and her father were still alive, the status quo would remain and she could not see and did not know how this would end.)

As can be observed from the above passage, Zoleka sees both Zolile and her father as symbols of injustice. They are both the embodiment of the gross unfairness of the Xhosa custom to which she has been subjected, hence her brutal murder of Zolile:

Wema phezu koZolile ixesha elide engathethi. Wamjonga engaqhwanyazi eqonda okokuba akalele ufile. Ukusuka apho wonda ngezembe elalisemva kwebhokisi walithi ruthu ngokukhawuleza. Kwakuse kusisa ke ngoku neenkuku seziwile. Wema kwakhona phezu kwendoda yakhe engasemntu intloko yakhe ingathi ikhala amabhungane, iindlebe zisenza inzwinini... (p. 77)

(She stood silently over Zolile for a long time. She looked at him not winking an eye and realised that he was in deep slumber. From there, she went straight for the axe at the back of a kist, and grabbed it very quickly. It was becoming daybreak and the fowls had started moving about. She stood again over her husband mad with rage.)

Towards the end of the novel Jongilanga introduces us to the image of hardened town women who are as tough as nails and as crude and shrewd as any man can be. Perhaps the most cunning of these girls is Zodwa. She not only uses extremely foul language to Zwelakhe, whom she happens to share with Zoleka, but, like a real Eve or demon, she coaxes him with all the flattering she can muster until he drinks a lethal dose of poisoned liquor she had prepared.

In this novel Jongilanga has succeeded in highlighting the evils of forced marriage and woman's determination to launch the strongest opposition to it. These women are certainly a new breed. They refuse to sit down and accept their fate like those of the earlier decades. Their survival does not depend on how well they can cook and do other domestic chores but on what tactics they employ not only to resist but also to destroy male dominance.

## 6.2 Mafuya: *Bhota Nonceba* (1960)

Mafuya is one of the least prolific Xhosa writers so far. He has written only *Bhota Nonceba* and has disappeared from the literary scene. His novel is important because it is one of the few novels by men that appeared in the last few decades to be wholly devoted to a woman main character.

Nonceba is the main female character in this novel. From the outset, we are introduced to a traditional-minded girl who sees nothing wrong with carrying heavy loads of household necessities on her head and in her arms:

Ngaphaya koko engaboni zintloni ekubeni athwale entloko, isiqhuma sombona, ebeleke emhlana esinye, ngengalo yasekhohlo ajingise ubungxowana, eli xa phantsi kwekhwapha langasekunene wayenomgodlo wembewu yeetapile. (p. 2)

(Moreover, she saw nothing sinister in carrying on her head a bundle of maize, and another on her back, hang a little bag on the left arm while under the right armpit she carried a load of potato seed.)

Mafuya presents us with contrasting images of girls. Nonceba is a naive Xhosa girl whose education has not affected or changed her personality in any discernible way. Funeka, her elder sister, is a sophisticated or modern girl with long painted nails.

Nonceba's obsession with Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, albeit the Xhosa version *Uhambo lomhambi*, is in line with an age-old female stereotype mentioned by Florence Howe (in Hall et al, 1976:232) of a woman as someone who 'enjoys art and literature very much' since she allegedly cannot comprehend mathematics and science.

While Lindile favours Nonceba as his ultimate life partner, Nonceba's mother strongly wishes that Lindile marry Funeka instead. Mothers are stereotypically regarded as ever desirous of seeing their daughters married like themselves. Some will even go out of their way overtly to encourage friendship between their daughters and eligible young suitors.<sup>5</sup> Besides absurdities often committed by mothers in pursuit of this ideal, mar-

riage, according to de Beauvoir (1987:352), offers most women great pleasure in that it allows them to find sexual fulfilment without losing their social dignity. Mbiti (1975:133) clearly demonstrates that marriage for African people goes much deeper than what de Beauvoir says above:

For African peoples, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all the members of a given community meet; the departed, the living and those yet to be born. All the dimensions of time meet here, and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalized. Marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator. Therefore, marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society, and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate. Otherwise, he who does not participate in it is a curse to the community, he is a rebel and a lawbreaker, he is not only abnormal but 'under-human'. ✓

The peculiar coincidence of Lindile's mysterious appearance whenever Nonceba is in need of help can only be symbolical of the stereotypic dependence of woman on man. Consequently, although Nonceba is well educated and old enough to fend for herself, she remains a perpetual baby up to the end of the story. Her naivety and subservience are unparalleled except by feeble-minded women. She epitomises helplessness<sup>6</sup> to the letter. All three main female characters in this book are peculiar. Funeka's excessive hostility towards Nonceba, her own sister, can only be matched by her mother's strange partiality and cruelty towards the poor girl.

While MaDlamini symbolizes non-racialism among Xhosa girls who readily marry men across the racial line, this positive image is tainted and tarnished by her cruelty and degenerate character:

Wabehle waqonda ngomfutho, nevumba leqhunguwa nentsangu nekofu, notywala namakhwapha antsuku agqibelana namanzi, ukuba eli vumba lintshontsho lelikaMaDlamini ... (p. 78)

(She realized from the hisses, the smell of tobacco and dagga, coffee and liquor as well as stench from armpits which had not been washed for several days, that that was MaDlamini's bad smell ...)

Funeka ends up as a shameless flirt while Nonceba is an angel to the end. Nonceba's closest confidante, Lindile, is a boyfriend in name only because Nonceba fits the image of an ideal Victorian woman as described by Mitchell (1981:49):

The ideal Victorian woman was completely ignorant about sex. She could not fall: she could not consciously decide to engage in sexual activity because she did not know what sexual activity was.

Her greatest weakness is lack of self-esteem. She does not seem to have any confidence in her own capabilities. This leads to a naive acceptance of and resignation to a role manifestly below her potential and qualifications.

As could be expected, Nonceba ends up marrying Lindile and becomes "a conduit and sustainer of life" to quote Sylvia Bryan (in Jones et al; *ibid*:119). Among those people she so unselfishly serves and provides for in their hour of need, is none other than her mother who once treated her very badly. Nonceba's whole life neatly matches the image of an angel as defined by Cornillon (*ibid*:34):

The Angel can be of any age, married or single, pretty or plain. She is above earthly concerns, generous to the point of self-sacrifice, quiet, forgiving and capable of absolute selfless love . . . . Sometimes the Angel is rewarded on earth for her behavior, usually through marriage at the novel's end.

### 6.3 Burns-Ncamashe : *Masibaliselane* (1961)

Burns-Ncamashe, a Fort Hare and U C T graduate, is highly talented. His knowledge of the Xhosa language is unparalleled as evidenced by his oratory as a poet and speaker as well as by his effective use of the language in writing.

In this anthology of prose and poetry he first introduces us to a narrative essay - "Amararabe Agxwala Emswaneni Ngonina" - in which he bemoans the death of Chieftainess Nobantu Sandile, the mother of the late Paramount Chief Archie Velile Sandile.

This is the first image of a woman in a position of power. Nobantu acted as regent for some years after the death of her husband, Chief Faku. As cited by Ferrante (1975:8) women in other parts of the world have also acted in this important capacity:

In the early Middle Ages, women were apparently active in various areas of public life. There are numerous examples of women who acted as regents for their husbands or sons, women who led the defence of their towns, who conspired for power against the rightful heirs, or who mediated between warring parties; their exploits can be read about in contemporary histories and chronicles.

Burns-Ncamashe calls to mind several other eminent Xhosa women of royal extraction or attachment - Nokapa, Chief Gonya's wife; Noposi, Chief Sandile's wife and Suthu, Chief Ngqika's wife. Although it could be said that these women all had indirectly derived power only, it should be remembered that Chiefs' wives are normally also of royal extraction and therefore command respect in their own right.

The respect and obedience that male subjects show towards women regents is magnificent compared to male resistance to female rule in other spheres. Cock (*ibid*:257) cites an interesting case of male revolt against a female principal in Port Elizabeth as reported in the *Eastern Province Herald*:

Male hostility from an African source is illustrated by the discontent at Kwazakele High School in Port Elizabeth in 1976 which apparently derived from 'the resentment

of men teachers working under a woman principal... . Women's lib plays no part on the African scene. A woman's place is still in the kitchen. Kwazakele's head Mrs Vera Gundwana is most eligibly qualified but men teachers resent her superior position,' a source said. Male hostility and the manipulation of a sexist ideology appears to increase with the structural insecurity of the working class.

While Burns-Ncamashe in the subsequent poem, "Umgoduko WoKumkanikazi", pays moving homage to this eminent woman, it is interesting to note that he cannot altogether divorce her as a woman from such domestic chores as cooking and dishing out food even in heaven:

Lath' uNombishimbishi ugodukile;  
Uwelele koLwaganda noZanzolo,  
Uphuthunyelw'ukwenz'ingxelo ngamaRarabe,  
Yena mntu kwashiywa yena nentonga yokulawula  
Abantu bakaNojoli noRarabe.  
Uphuthunyelw'ukupheka nokophula,  
Aphek'iint'ezimnandi zasezulwini,  
Eboniswa zizikumkanikazi ezamandulelayo; (p. 8)

(It said that the mother of the Great one has gone;  
She has crossed over to Lwaganda and Zanzolo,  
She has been fetched to report about the Rarabes,  
As she was left with the staff of authority  
To rule the people of Nojoli and Rarabe.  
She has been fetched to cook and to dish out  
And to cook heavenly delicacies  
Under guidance of queens who departed before her.)

Burns-Ncamashe also touches on woman as witch, an age old female stereotype in the following quotation:

Satsho isiqhumiso kwasibekela,  
Angqung'amabandl'akwa Qwempe naseGwadana,  
Zaphutshuluk'iinunu zemibhinqo kubafazi,  
Zavakala'izandi zabaw'izijuju,  
Benga barhaxwa yintsentse kanti ziintsenene,  
Ziyababhojabhoja nasetyalikeneni. (p. 12)

(Incense permeated the church like thick clouds,  
The group of Qwempe and Gwadana felt uneasy,  
Witching snakes fell off from their dresses,  
Some women collapsed with a thud fainting  
As if the incense was the cause whereas in fact  
Their snakes were furious and pestered them in church.)

In the story "Izimo ezingangqinelaniyo" Burns-Ncamashe depicts conflicting views of a man and his wife regarding crime and punishment. Siporho kills his servant, Julibhokhwe, and buries him in the far corner of the orchard. His bones are later discovered by Nqu, one of his servants, and he alerts Siporho's wife. Mrs Siporho, contrary to

stereotype, is bold and resolute. She confronts her husband and later turns him over to the police.

The image projected here is one of a woman who is bent on seeing justice done at all costs, regardless of who the culprit is. The first conflict is therefore with regard to this woman's character and that of her husband.

The conflict is further exacerbated by Nqu and his wife's attitude towards the culprit. Nqu's wife adopts a "served him right" attitude while Nqu prays for mercy and forgiveness for Siporho. The normal roles have been reversed here as women are normally regarded as emotional and passionate and therefore unable to make rational decisions.

The female traditional diviner is another important figure in Xhosa society. Ntombek-haya in this book is not only attractive but she is also articulate, accurate and respectable. Perhaps the importance of this image lies in the fact that some women have turned full circle from being regarded as witches to being diviners.

The image of women as hoers and tillers of the land as in "USoSobose" has often led to misconceptions, some believing that women are treated as slaves in African society. This voluntary community service by women is designed to help maintain their own families. As more and more husbands left for the cities to seek work, it became all the more important that women supplement the meagre wages earned by their husbands in towns by tilling the soil and producing food for their families.

SoSobose's wife suffers retribution because she married against her parents' wishes with a man of her own choice. Eloping with a man is stigmatized in Xhosa society hence Nonga's being severely castigated by her father despite her pleas for mercy. Her father's wrath is only appeased when she marries a wealthy man in accordance with his wishes. In this way, woman is not only subservient but she is also destined to marry.

In "Umfazi okhonkothayo" Burns-Ncamashe presents us with the image of a woman who is far from being docile and humble. She is the type of woman who believes in using abusive and abrasive language to her husband even if this results in her being at the receiving end of a few blows. This assertiveness can be seen in the story "Ukub-

hubha kukaNdabemfene” when ladies from the Tshawe royal house refuse to be bullied by their male relatives regarding funeral arrangements.

Although Burns-Ncamashe has not divorced himself completely from male stereotypes, some of his female characters subtly and gradually show audacity and assertiveness.

#### 6.4 Setidisho: *Induku ayinamzi* (1961)

Edith Setidisho sees the role of the woman as being mainly child-bearing and child-rearing. Like other female authors, she finds it easy to write about a male main character, Mpayipheli.

All earlier writers, male and female, are constant in describing women in terms of skin complexion, height, dark hair, beautiful eyes, white teeth and good conduct. Beauty without good character is eschewed in Xhosa society, hence Setidisho’s comment about Nonzwakazi:

Wayedume kwilali yakokwabo ngesimilo esisulungekiieyo, into ke leyo enqabileyo kuba ubuhle bekhiwane budla ngokuba ziimpethu . . . (p. 20)

(She was widely known in her village for her impeccable character, something rare as all that glitters is not gold. . .)

Setidisho, in this novel, either in solidarity with female victims of witchcraft accusations or because of missionary influence, subtly rejects the existence of witchcraft. As explained by Van Vuuren (ibid:71):

Witchcraft, in the view of the Roman Church, involved the opposite of godliness, for witches gained supernatural power through the enemy of God, the devil. Witchcraft, therefore, became closely intertwined with heresy and the Inquisition. All three became predominant concerns of the church around 1300 and continued throughout the Reformation period. The consequent trials and executions had died down throughout Europe and American colonies by 1700. But during those four centuries hundreds of thousands of persons, the majority of whom were women, were convicted of witchcraft and burned or hanged.

Woman as second wife is another crucial issue dealt with by Setidisho. Marrying a widower who has children by the first wife invariably leads to frustration, tension and bad blood between the second wife and either the children or the in-laws. In most cases, the husband sides with the second wife as seen in this story.

As evidenced in the book, women’s defiance and rejection of parental choice of partner was sporadic but culminated in today’s total rejection of the practice. Thembisa agrees to marry Fikile in defiance of her parents’ wishes.

Because stereotyping presupposes 'sameness', educated girls have to do menial household chores to remain the same as other Xhosa girls. This was Nonkungu's passport to marriage, the inevitable 'enclosure' to which every woman is destined. Even Nosisa who vowed emphatically that she would never marry, ultimately marries.

No doubt, Setidisho has shown that while a woman can bring together a broken home and bring new hope and life to despondent hearts, she is equally capable of causing untold misery especially when this involves caring for two groups of children - her own and those of the first wife.

### **6.5 Sinxo : *UNojayiti wam* (1961)**

Guybon Budlwana Sinxo has a wonderful predilection for characterisation. His acute sense of humour and sharp powers of observation enable him to depict various images and characters in his books. In the above-mentioned book of short stories, he gives us the best glimpse so far of man-woman or husband-wife relations, using himself (disguised as Koranti) and Nojayiti his wife, as central figures. Each story abundantly reveals the character of both these characters. Not all the 32 stories will be discussed here as time and space does not allow this. Besides, the stories are mainly designed to be character studies which depend on exaggeration and humour for their success. It will therefore, for the purposes of this study, suffice if comments are made on one or two of them, followed by a broad generalization on the import of the book as a whole.

In the story, "Ukuqeqesha kwakhe", Nojayiti is depicted as one of those temperamental disciplinarians who resort to harsh words and actions to achieve their goals. Should anything fail to meet with her liking, she would send both her husband and her children scurrying off from her wrath. Sinxo hastens to emphasize that she is otherwise the type of woman who never bears anyone a grudge. Consequently, harsh as she is, children love her and prefer her to him.

But the crunch always comes between Koranti and Nojayiti. The significance of the whole book is that Sinxo has successfully depicted a very strongwilled and domineering woman, on the one hand, and a henpecked, obliging husband, on the other. It is obvious that Sinxo condemns Nojayiti's behaviour which he regards as socially deviant. He is clearly satirizing people who disregard contemporary social values and gender divisions.

What makes the stories interesting is their satirical effect and the obvious tongue-in-the-cheek style and attitude of the author when depicting the calamitous experiences of Koranti as he falls backwards and forwards to satisfy his wife's whims.

Looking beyond the comic, however, one clearly realises that Sinxo wishes to point to the dynamics of the current man-woman or husband-wife relations. The carefree comic style is designed to coax conservatives into temporarily suspending their inherent prejudices and biases and pay attention to the changing circumstances and roles in the marriage context.

From a moral point of view, Nojayiti, right from the outset, is destined to be of stronger character than Koranti who is weakened by liquor consumption and a tendency to roam about at night in search of liquor.

Note how these two misdemeanours reduce him to a real nonentity in the eyes of Nojayiti whose majesty towers triumphantly above him as he struggles to please her:

Ezi ndawo ke zombini zandihlalisa ubomi bentshontsho kuMaMngwevu lo, imihla le ndihamba ngemiba ukugoduka, ndide maxawambi ndingene ngefestile endlwini, ndisenzela ukuba ndibe ngathi kudala ndafikayo. Andibhaqe apho uTshangisa, uyive intswahla, endifanisa naso sonke isilo kulo mhlaba .... (p 5)

(These two issues made my life unbearable under MaMngwevu, with the result that every day I had to take great care on my way home not to be spotted, sometimes even entering the house through the window so as to give the impression that I had long been in the house. Tshangisa would spot me as I do that, and you would hear her noise as she likened me to all the ugly creatures of this world....)

Progressive submission goes hand in hand with Nojayiti's gradually gaining the upper hand as Koranti becomes more and more subservient to her. No sooner has he decided to submit in one way, than Nojayiti brings pressure to bear on him to add something else to his list of rapidly growing obligations. As soon as he stops his nocturnal escapades, Nojayiti pressurizes him to help her with the domestic chores:

".... Yiyiphi enye into owakha wandenzela yona, vilandini? Into elala ilanga lonke lehlobo ibhekise isisu phezulu, ingakhangela indincedise nakancinane oku kumsebenzi wam!" (p 7)

(".... Which other thing did you ever help me with, you lazy man? You the thing that lies on its back with its stomach facing upwards, without having helped me at all with my work!")

Koranti literally goes down to his knees and promises to oblige in every respect:

Ndikhawuleze kwa oko ukufunga, nditshaye izithupha, ndithembisa ukuba kwixesha elizayo ndiya kumncedisa kuyo yonke into ayenzayo....(ibid)

(I quickly swore most solemnly that in future I shall assist her with everything she does....)

Note how he subsequently performs, without batting an eyelid, tasks that are normally assigned to women:

Ndaqala kwangoko ndaqubula izembe ndaya kutheza. Ndibuyile, ndaya kukha amanzi, andayeka, ndaya kukha ubulongo, ndasinda. Ukususela oko ndaba ngumpheki, ndangumshayeli, ndangumgcini bantwana, ndangumhlambi ngubo, ewe, ndathi ndisemasimini ndabe ndiseziimbizeni (sic), kwayinto emnandi kunene emzini wethu. (op. cit.)

(I started immediately by grabbing an axe and went to cut firewood. I came back and went to fetch water, and didn't stop there, but went to fetch fresh cowdung and smeared the floors. From that time, I became a cook, a sweeper, a nanny, a washer of blankets, yes, I worked in the fields the one moment and busied myself with the pots the next moment, it was so nice in our home.)

In "Ndicetyiswa ukululeka umfazi" we note how men, Koranti and his friend, Zixinene, conspire to place their wives in their place by manhandling them and imposing their male authority over them by whatever means.

Nojayiti is baffled by this change of attitude and ultimately walks out on her husband, exposing Koranti's helplessness without his wife's assistance:

Ayikho into embi njengokuthi ube nomfazi uzibone ngoku sewuyimpuku eseselweni, ungcunguza wedwa endlwini. Loo ndlukazi yethu yesuka ngoku yaliholoholo elindithukuthezelayo. Abantu ababeqhele ukuza kuthi besuka ngoku bacezela phaya besithi bona abanakuhlala endlwini engenamnikaziyo. Indlala yaqala kaloku ngoku yasifikela, sisitya iimbiza ezingavuthwanga; baqala abantwana bazizinto ezimdaka, ezikrazukileyo, ....(p 11)

(There is nothing worse than finding yourself without your wife and be at home all by yourself. Our spacious house suddenly became one huge empty structure that left me with a desolate feeling. People who used to pay us a visit suddenly avoided coming near our home saying that they could not come to a house whose female owner is not there. Hunger started playing havoc with us, we ate food that was not properly cooked; children started being dirty looking things, with their clothes in tatters, ....)

The irony is that in the end, after Zixinene's advice had destroyed all the happiness in Koranti's home, Koranti decides to pay his old friend a visit when he finds him running for dear life, followed hot on his heels by his irate wife who took no notice of his pleas for mercy.

Woman's role has certainly changed. She is no longer docile and submissive. The tables have been turned on the men who are now at the receiving end of this domination. Besides this change of roles, this book contains a real compendium of female stereotypes, incorporating flattery, vanity, humour and the unpredictability of human nature,

more so female human nature, if there is such a thing at all. The book does not merely reflect current changes in the male- female relations at home, but it predicts to a large and prophetic extent what is likely to happen if women are allowed to dominate men. The first victim will certainly be man's self-esteem as could be seen from Koranti's experiences.

## 6.6 Mirsky : *UNomsa intombi yakwaZulu* (1963)

Reba Paeff Mirsky wrote this novel in English and the late Mr B E N Mahlasela translated it into Xhosa in 1963. Though the main character, Nomsa, is a Zulu girl as suggested by the title, it should be interesting to note how Mirsky sees one example of the African women and how the images of Zulu women compare with those of their Xhosa counterparts. Right from the outset, we see Nomsa playing her conventional role as a young girl. Coming from a polygynous home, she has no fewer than thirty brothers and sisters. It should be pointed out that in African thought and society polygyny<sup>7</sup> is not viewed as critically as it is viewed in the West. Cf. Jones, Palmer & Jones (1983:41):

The issue of polygamy in Africa remains a controversial one. The received African wisdom seems to be that polygamy has distinct social and economic advantages, that its practice in the traditional milieu does not necessarily result in the erosion of the status and dignity of the woman and that it is perfectly accepted by both men and women.

In this novel, the story is centred round a woman, Nomsa, who is debarred from taking part in an elephant hunting expedition merely because this exercise is a male activity. This restriction is only relaxed after she has shown her prowess and extreme bravery when she is confronted by a mamba. Her composure in the face of such danger speaks volumes of the emerging young woman of which she is a typical symbol. Her greatest attribute is perhaps her androgynous outlook. She declares openly that she does not care for work that is set aside for females only. This is indicative of her unlimited potential which is crying out to be exploited and released from gender-related circumscription. She is restrained by her biological identity from fulfilling her life dream of going out to hunt elephants with her father.

Instead of this, Nomsa, like so many other African girls, has to go through a rigorous apprenticeship in a wide spectrum of female activities ranging from feeding a baby, washing it by letting a dog lick it clean, to preparing the most delicious meal for a male

visitor. One can see from this that her role is prescribed by her sex as defined by Miller (ibid:6):

In these relationships, some people or groups of people are defined as unequal by means of what sociologists call ascription; that is your birth defines you. Criteria may be race, sex, class, nationality, religion, or other characteristics ascribed at birth.

Mirsky clearly demonstrates that acculturation or socialization takes place very early in children's lives, from the time they start playing with dolls and mud cattle. Boys will emulate adult males, visualizing themselves as possessing large herds of cattle while girls will play games that are aimed at improving their supportive role. Cf. Hall, Jones and Sutherland (1976:233):

Children learn sexual stereotypes at an early age, and, by the time they get to fifth grade, it may be terribly difficult, perhaps hardly possible by traditional means, to change their attitudes about sex roles - whether they are male or female.

As evidenced by Mirsky in the book, girls' games involve some subtle acculturation as they learn to imitate certain female roles such as how to run a home:

"Ungumfazi wam wena kulo mdlalo. Andazi ke ukuba uya kuba nokundifeza."  
Watsho umnene. (p. 40)

("You are my wife in this game. I don't know whether you will cope with me." The chap said.)

Girls spontaneously respond by cooking for their so-called husbands while there is no indication of what the husbands are expected to do to prove their worth.

That Nomsa is a different kind of person is borne out by the fact that she displays great prowess as a sharpshooter. Her subtle revolt at not being allowed to do what is normally regarded as boys' activity filters through every action. She systematically breaks the fetters that restrict her to the role of a girl.

At last, her ambition is realized when her father ultimately allows her to join the hunting expedition in the place of her brother who cannot make the trip. Admittedly, she had to prove her skills by killing a wild boar before being allowed to go because, as pointed out by Rayna Reiter (1975:39):

Regardless of its status as a survival, hunting, by implication as well as direct statement, is pictured as a male activity to the exclusion of females. This activity, on which we are told depends the psychology, biology, and customs of our species, is strictly male.

This hunting expedition is highly symbolic of women's quest for equal opportunity. Nomsa's inclusion and role in the expedition is full proof of women's ability to match men in any undertaking. The achievement does not change Nomsa's personality and

her feminine attributes such as love, generosity and sacrifice, as she gives everything she gets in the expedition to her brother who could not make the trip. In this way, Mirsky deliberately seeks to allay men's fears that giving women equal opportunities will result in the loss of their femininity and all its attendant virtues.

## 6.7 Silinga : *UNonzuzo* (1965)

Rose Silinga is one of the few women writers whose works appeared in the Sixties at a time when female interest or output in this undertaking was beginning to flag. The reasons for this flagging interest are not very obvious.

Hospitality and the ability to serve the others' needs still hold sway as evidenced by the following quotation<sup>8</sup> from Silinga's book:

Inkosikazi yakhe ibe iwufanele lo mzi, intombi yakwaThaba, ibingumhlobo omkhulu ezihlotyeni utshaba ezintshabeni, indlezana ngobubele, kuba siqaphela ukusoloko kunyakazela abantu emzini wakhe. . . . (p. 1)

(His wife was just the right person for this household, this girl from the Thaba family was a great friend to friends of the household, an enemy to enemies, a very kind person which we could see from the large number of people who flocked to her house. . . .)

Silinga emphasizes the woman's role in a home by using highly suggestive symbols:

Njengoko inkosikazi yalo mzi ibifunde yaphela kweyebanga lesiThandathu nje, yaba yiyona ifana nentloko kaloliwe, yena ongasoze ahambe intloko ingekho, okanye ingenamalahle umfazi onjalo ke usisihombo endodeni yakhe, kuba uyayiruqa, eyiruqela kwizinto ezintle. . . . (ibid)

(Since the lady of this household had passed Standard Six, she was the locomotive without which a train cannot move, she is also like the coal without which the locomotive cannot move either, a woman who is like that is an object of pride to her husband, because she leads him to good things. . . .)

She also goes all out to show us that girls learn to play the role of being girls from childhood by fetching water, washing dishes, carrying dolls on their backs and mending clothes. This is obviously in preparation for their future roles as mothers.

Needless to say, marriage is the inevitable end to this novel. Nonzuzo's marrying a semi-literate husband is not just coincidental or just a stroke of bad luck. It should be remembered that writers in this period and before strove to show that educated women should not differ from their less educated or uneducated female contemporaries. The final image that emerges here is, therefore, one of an educated woman gladly playing

the role of the Great Mother. Her leading role is paradoxical - she can always play a leading role provided she does this very unobtrusively.

### 6.8 Mda : *UNomnyamezeli* (1966)

This is the first novel from the pen of E G N Mda, a lady teacher who taught in Port Elizabeth for many years. Right from the outset, Mda highlights woman's suffering as unfounded accusations of witchcraft are levelled against her. As indicated by the title of this book, woman's life requires tremendous forbearance.

Whilst she touches on crucial issues such as the education of girls and parental control, Mda's primary objective for writing the book is to emphasize the need for self-sacrifice, forgiveness and loyalty in marriage. *Nomnyamezeli*, as evidenced by her name, is an archetype of such women throughout her ups and downs. She sees all these problems as ephemeral phases in the life of every woman as in the end, those who have endured will be richly rewarded with unending happiness in their married lives. The theme and the structure of this novelette resemble those of the folk-tale. There is a goal that the woman wishes to attain but her aspirations are thwarted by several obstacles on the way. Only by perseverance and sacrifice does she achieve her objectives. This clearly indicates that the arrogant, the indolent and the fickle cannot achieve anything in life.

### 6.9 Tamsanqa : *Ukuba ndandazile* (1967)

In this novel Tamsanqa deals with one of women's vexing problems especially nowadays - polygyny. He not only highlights the serious ravages of this custom on women's lives but he also shows how the custom can be misused by an unscrupulous man.

Although Tamsanqa occasionally falls into the trap of making unfounded generalizations about women, he certainly depicts some women in a manner that disproves some of the myths and stereotypes about them. He is conscious of the male sense of superiority over women, hence Joe's statement:

“... ndaqonda ukuba icebo lam liphumelele, kuphelile okuya kundweba uyazazi ukuba ubhinqile ndingumfana ndingentla kuye...” (p. 32)

(“... then I realized that my strategy has worked successfully; gone was all her boldness, she knew that she was a woman and being a young man, I was above her....”)

Tamsanqa confirms the general notion and belief that while Xhosa women do not appear to wield any power in public, their role as private advisers to their husbands cannot be underestimated. This comes out very clearly when the traditionalists meet to discuss the question of taking a second wife for Chief Lindikhaya:

“Aniboni na madoda ukuba le nkosi yenu ithiwe nqo ngempumlo ngulo mfazi wayo? Ayikho into engayenzayo ingadlulanga kuye. Ndiyaqiniseka nangoku sothi sidibana nayo ibe seyithetha iilwimi ngeelwimi kuba iza kuhlohlwa yonke into loluya dlolwazana lomfazi linobukhwele gqitha. . . .”

(“Don’t you see, men, that this chief of yours is henpecked? He cannot do anything without consulting with his wife. I am sure that even now when we meet him again he will offer all sorts of excuses because that barren, overjealous little woman is going to influence him against our wishes. . . .”)

Nobandla’s vehement opposition to this practice is typical of present day women’s. She speaks with authority and is determined to challenge the practice to the bitterest end. Chief Lindikhaya who has always opposed this second marriage succumbs to the temptation when he meets Nomazizi, a woman of outstanding beauty and virtue setting the stage for a total showdown between him and Nobandla.

After Nobandla’s successful bid to prevent her husband from marrying a second wife, Tamsanqa makes the following authorial comment about women:

Inene le nto ingumntu obhinqileyo inzulu, kwizidalwa ezilapha ehlabathini esi silibhinqa ndisothulela umnqwazi, ingade sibe sibalelwa kwizidalwa ezibuthathaka kodwa isibindi saso nobunzulu buhambisa umzimba.

(Really, this thing called woman is very difficult to fathom, among all the creatures on earth, I take my hat off for the woman, even if she is regarded as one of the weaker creatures but her dauntlessness and her depth are frightening.)

Although Nobandla’s victory cannot be denied, it is invalidated or negated by Nomazizi’s pregnancy. According to tradition, this child who has been fathered by Lindikhaya may ascend the throne one day seeing that Nobandla has no children. Perhaps this is one of those crushing humiliations that a Xhosa woman has to suffer or endure in a social context where custom is greater than the individual, especially if that individual happens to be a woman.

## 6.10 Mdledle : *Hayi lo mlomo* (1968)

Gertrude Mdledle begins the book with a gloomy image of a woman who is assaulted by her husband. Male dominance becomes even more unbearable and abhorrent when accompanied by physical violence. Mdledle goes all out to castigate young women who fail to show respect to their husbands:

... kuba eliyinyaniso lona aba bafazana bale mihla banemilomo, batsho uthandabuze nokuba bakhe bayalwa. Wofika bengahloneli namadoda ale mizi, bewabazele imicondo neziqulubana ezithe nkqi, okuzizidwatyana zakhona kuthe xhwa emadolweni, kungekho kwaqhiya entloko kukhutshiswana ngokuqhina iinwele kanti akukho mntu unqwenela bunzi lomfazi lithe nka, into efunwayo apha yintlonipho yomzi wabantu... (p. 3)

(... the truth is that these young women of today are too talkative, so much that you begin to doubt whether they were ever warned about the things they should not do when they got married. They do not even respect the male members of their married homes, they go about with short dresses, exposing thin legs and hard calfs, wearing nothing on their heads as they compete with one another over plaiting hair and yet no one wishes to see their large foreheads, what is required here is respect for their married homes...)

The inventory of issues that are raised in this passage is both interesting and significant. Mdledle charges the contemporary young women with failing to fulfil the role of the woman adequately. First of all, they talk too much, i.e. they want to dominate their husbands and the in-laws. Young women are always warned against this behaviour when they enter marriage. Secondly, they wear, contrary to tradition and custom, short dresses whereas in the past their dresses had to be fairly long. Failing to do so is not in keeping with their dignity and respect for the male members of their married homes. Mdledle further deplors their walking about bareheaded in defiance of the traditional rules of conduct.

This is another serious indictment against modern young women. Lidiya is so dominating that her husband nearly commits suicide, hence Mdledle's concern for the future of wife-husband relations. She puts the blame squarely on today's young women who do not show reverence for their husbands and the in-laws.

It is interesting to note that Mdledle, despite the fact that she was an educated woman, a teacher by profession, unreservedly confirms all the stereotypes normally associated with women. This total acceptance can be ascribed to acculturation. The force of socialization is sometimes so strong on women that they find themselves conforming to the typical female stereotype.

### 6.11 *Resumé*

Writers in this period concentrate on several problems that affect women in general. The first of those problems is lack of equal educational opportunities for boys and girls. Parents would rather see their daughters married than attaining secondary education. Jongilanga shows that women are better off if given higher education as they can eas-

ily become self-sufficient in the event of unforeseen crises. He also highlights the evils of forced marriages and women's determination to fight the injustice.

While Mafuya views women as totally helpless and dependent on men, in Burns-Ncamashe's short stories we come across a wide spectrum of women characters. This cross section made it possible for him to deal with divergent women characters. They ranged from Chieftainesses to the most down-trodden women such as Nonga. Some of his female characters are of a type that challenge the status quo by showing independence, audacity and assertiveness.

Sinxo departs from the beaten track by venturing to depict the woman as dominating while men are portrayed as passive partners forced by circumstances beyond their control to adopt an androgynous stance as the only way out. Had it not been for Sinxo's rather comical exaggeration of Nojayiti, this work would herald the long expected androgynous marriage. Viewed in this light, the book reveals male insecurity over, and ridicule for, female attempts at domination.

Setidisho and Mdledle unreservedly accept male stereotypes whereas Mirsky makes it abundantly clear that, given the opportunity, women are capable of doing anything that men can do. Silinga comes with one new dimension in the woman question - women do have the power to rule provided this is done unobtrusively and from behind the scenes. This notion is also confirmed by Tamsanqa with reference to Nobandla's powerful influence over and successful stand against Chief Lindikhaya.

Finally, Mda depicts woman as virtuous, loyal and self-sacrificing. Opposition, albeit subtle or covert, is a discernible motif in most of these works.

## Notes

1. Cf. Tsotsi in *UNtabaziyaduma*, p. 26, and Gwashu in *Intombi yolahleko*, p.8.
2. Cf. Nomadinga in *Khe kukhiwe iidiliya*.
3. A more detailed discussion of this issue is given in the conclusion.
4. Maphike (1978:97) mentions an old Sotho custom whereby a 'maiden who was reluctant to marry a young man of her father's choice had her finger tied painfully

with a string until she consented'. This method, a thong, was used to extract evidence from certain accused in primitive Xhosa society.

5. Cf. Mrs Adams in *UNomsa* and Solakhe's wife in *UNolishwa*.
6. See Russianoff (1981:33).
7. See also Mbiti (1975:142).
8. Sinxo describes Mrs Ntobeko in almost exactly the same words in *UNomsa*, p. 1.

## Chapter 7

# The portrayal of contemporary women : 1970-1980

### 7.0 Introduction

The following novels will be considered in this chapter:

*Umzi omtsha* (1970) by K S Bongela,

*Alitshoni lingenandaba* (1971) by K S Bongela,

*Ntengu Ntengu Macetyana* (1972) by E G N Mda,

*Izagweba* (1972) by Z S Qangule,

*UPhumeza* (1975) by A M Dikana,

*UNongxaki nezakhe* (1976) by G Belebesi,

*Owu ndanele* (1977) by S A Dazela,

*KuLavisa ngothando* (1979) by Y Y Taleni,

*KwaZidenge* (1980) by R L Peteni.

Mda, Belebesi, Dazela and Taleni are female authors. Although writings by female authors are, on the whole, a trickle compared to the male output, it is encouraging to have even a handful of female writers on our literary scene.

### 7.1 Bongela : *Umzi omtsha* (1970)

Knobel Sakhiwo Bongela, one of the most prolific Xhosa writers of the Seventies, is also one of the few Xhosa writers who have university degrees. His keen interest in

Xhosa literature manifests itself in the number of books he has written either alone or in collaboration with other co-writers.

While women still play their contingent role as someone's girlfriend, mother, wife or maid etc., they gradually switch over to more assertive roles. Some modern women are so assertive that they will even resort to murder or crime to achieve their goals and objectives.

As less and less emphasis is placed on good character, more stress is placed on beauty and attire as people are becoming more and more materialistic:

Hayi ke wawuthi wakukhangela umthinjana ufike unganxibanga uxhomile. Wawuthi wakuqwalasela ufike kunxitywe izidwadwalala ezisefesefe neendwangu ezibuyokoyoko bambi bethe chu nje emagxeni abo iindwangu ezenziwe ngentuku. Abanye babemenyezelisa amaso namatyathanga amahle ezintanyeni. Hayi ke ngasezihlangwini kwakufuneka umfana elumkele unyawo lwakhe hleze aluve seluthunukwa ngenxa yobukhali bazo. Iinwele zazalukwe iindidi ngendidi. Iqela elininzi lalizilungise zasefesefe zajonga macala onke. (p. 35)

(When you looked at the young girls you would see them in their best attire. When you looked at them closely you would see them wearing flowing dresses of very light material and lavishly decorated attire, some wearing on their shoulders mole-skin coats. Others wore shiny beads and beautiful chainlets round their necks. When it came to shoes, young men had to take care that their feet are not hurt by those sharp pointed shoes. Hair was plaited in various fashions. The majority had straightened their hair making it soft and straight, facing all directions.)

These are, no doubt, fashion conscious young women or girls. They will go to great lengths and expense to beautify themselves by making stylish hairdos or by wearing the most expensive dresses and using the most sophisticated cosmetic products and beauty creams.

The reluctance of parents to educate their daughters persists even in this period with parents advancing the same hackneyed reasons for their reluctance.<sup>1</sup>

Premarital sexual relations, resulting in pregnancy are one of the most serious misdemeanours ever to be committed by unmarried lady teachers. While social sanctions and school authorities dismiss the female victims such as Nontando forthwith, men, the principal culprits, are allowed to continue working. To add to the women's dilemma, they, like Nontando, have fewer chances of finding alternative employment. Consequently, Nontando is compelled to enter domestic service as a maid in White homes despite her professional qualifications. This is certainly a double humiliation for, in

most cases black women, regardless of their qualifications, are compelled by economic pressures to work for uneducated lower-stratum white employers where the racial prejudices are at their most rife. This context is fraught with dehumanising racial stereotypes. Cf. Cock (ibid:181)

Within this structure of inequality the nature of the relationship between employer and domestic worker varied from kindly paternalism to extreme brutality. Both sets of attitudes and treatment involved a denial of human dignity. The most typical viewpoint was that servants were like children and should be treated with kindness and firmness. The child-like qualities most commonly attributed to them were irresponsibility, secretiveness, an inability to work without close supervision, and frivolity. In addition, they were generally perceived to be lazy and dishonest (at least inclined to petty theft), often stupid, lacking in initiative, ungrateful and indubitably inferior.

Although Bongela only gives a cursory view of the woman as a victim of the vicious pass laws, it cannot be denied that this was the worst humiliation ever to be experienced by African women in general. It was an affront to their dignity especially because these notorious pass laws did not apply to all other women in this country.

Woman Alone,<sup>2</sup> Nontando's stereotypic image as she struggles to bring up her deviant boy, David, is presented as traumatic. Nontando can hardly cope with the stress and strain. This is also the fate of the present day mother as she battles to bring up children in the absence, through migratory labour or death, of the head of the family in a world that is increasingly leading to disorientation and disillusionment among black children.

Bongela deviates from the beaten path by presenting us with a new female image - the journalist. Despite depicting Nontando as a successful journalist, Bongela cannot resist the temptation to bind her to cooking, knitting and sewing. Nontando's literary skills open up new avenues for her and she starts writing a book.

According to Bongela, Woman Alone is nothing but disaster and trauma. His women characters are not only all contingent and passive, but they also declare openly that they cannot exist without men.

## 7.2 Bongela : *Alitshoni lingenandaba* (1971) ✓

As we have seen in previous discussions, women's role has covered a wide spectrum of social roles - housewife, teacher, nurse, domestic worker, nanny, liquor seller, journalist and shopkeeper, to mention but a few. Bongela introduces us to another slightly different type of woman - the housemaid who works for black employers. For a long time

black domestic workers shunned working for blacks but as things got tougher and tougher for them economically, more and more found themselves in the employ of other blacks.

Besides the housemaid, Bongela introduces us to yet another kind of woman - the beauty queen, a byproduct of western culture - Nonzwakazi whose captivating beauty is used as bait to attract men to mQwathi's shebeen. Nonzwakazi is a popular beauty queen in East London but she is far from being submissive and passive as could be seen from her inflicting facial wounds on mQwathi and her successful repulsion of an attack by a gangster.

It is interesting to note that Nonzwakazi, or Dora as she is sometimes called, grew up doing all the conventional household chores:

Wayesithi ukufika kwakhe ukucela esikolweni athi egqiba nje ukutya abikelwe uludwe lwemisebenzi emakayenze . . . ukusinda, ukutheza, ukuxova, ukupheka njalo njalo. (p.37)

(Whenever she came back from school, after she had had her food, she would be told of a string of duties she had to perform . . . smearing the house with fresh cowdung, fetching firewood, kneading the dough, cooking, etc.)

Otherwise, the woman's life in this book is characterised by a complete absence of reference to domestic chores as such.

Nomathamsanqa also represents the new woman who refuses to be bullied by men. Men such as mQwathi soon find that such women are no easy target. At times the roles are so exchanged that women play the more dominant role even though they cannot rid themselves of the contingency role of being someone's girlfriend as both Nomathamsanqa and Nonzwakazi are mQwathi's girlfriends. Jealousy and enmity between the two is therefore unavoidable.

Although Bongela does not give a total view of the woman because of the rather scenic plot structure of the book, he does give us a glimpse of the woman as beauty queen, domestic worker, nurse and model. These urban activities are interspersed with love, plotting and counter-plotting with men and women vying for superiority.

Xhosas are very sceptical of woman's ability to keep secrets. Women are said to be treacherous and unable to control their emotions let alone their tongues. Should they

quarrel with a confidante, they will divulge even the deadliest secrets as can be seen from Dora's actions:

Kuthe emva kokuba kuliwe, uDora waphuma ethukela. Uthe ngqo emapoliseni wafika wabika ukuba uThamsanqa Gebe uthengisa utywala ngaphandle kwemvume kaRhulumente. Wawachazela indawo nendlela abuthengisa ngayo. Kwakhona wawaxelela nangompu angenalungelo lawo. (p. 150)

(After the fight Dora came out of the house hurling insults. She went straight to the police station and reported that Thamsanqa Gebe was selling liquor illicitly. She told them where and how he sold it. She also told them about the unlicensed firearm which he had in his possession.)

Unlike in the previous book, Bongela's main female characters in this book are all stereotypical urban women who are not only extremely shrewd but also treacherous and exceedingly bold and assertive. They show no signs of passivity and subservience and, with a few exceptions, are equal to men in most respects. Of course, it should be pointed out that most of these women operate in quite abnormal situational contexts of crime and speeding cars. They therefore do not truly reflect the conventional base-line urban women. It is obvious that Bongela sees such women negatively.<sup>3</sup>

### 7.3 Mda: *Ntengu Ntengu Macetyana* (1972)

This is E G N Mda's second novel. The title is extracted from a Xhosa folk-tale.

MaNxele's plight after the death of her husband who died during an epidemic symbolizes the plight of Woman Alone. She is reluctantly compelled to let her daughter, Nanziwe, go and work in town as she has lost everything in the drought.

Nanziwe's encounter with an unsympathetic gardener in town reveals Mda's concern for male arrogance and man's lack of decency. While Sinxo's Nomsa expressed disgust at the White Station Master's lack of respect,<sup>4</sup> Mda's Nanziwe expresses indignation at the black gardener's insolence. These seemingly insignificant incidents clearly demonstrate woman's dilemma. She is both oppressed as black first and as woman in the second place.<sup>5</sup> Going out to work has traditionally been the role of men. Economic circumstances have led to a changing of roles as women too are forced to leave homes and go to look for work in towns and cities. While men have a tendency to either disappear in the cities or cohabit with newly acquired lovers and forget about their hunger-stricken families at home, girls can be relied upon to treat their homes more tenderly:

Labuyisa inina elinguMaNxele ekhaya, intliziyo yonwabile umntwana walo elisebenzela ikhaya lakhe, esitsho nokutshipha komnakwabo kwalibaleka shici. Le ntombazana ilihlaziye ikhaya kwanga kukho umntu oyindoda. Kambe imizi emininzi yakhiwe okanye ivuswa ngamantombazana, ngoko uNanziwe wayesenza into eseyikhe yenziwa ngamanye amantombazana. (p. 12)

(Her mother, MaNxele, picked up weight once again back at home, as her heart was happy because her child was working hard for her home, so much that they forgot completely about the disappearance of their son. The girl renovated the home as though she was a man. Many homesteads, of course, are either built or renewed by girls. Nanziwe was doing what other girls had done in the past.)

Mda's response to the parents' reluctance to educate their girls to enable them to lead better married lives, comes out very clearly in the following authorial comments:

Singaba ke sicela umngeni emadodeni xa sisithi umntu ongazalanga ntombi ufana nongazalanga? Le ntetho ibangwa kukunonelela kwamantombazana enonelele amakhaya. Ingade ibe yendile kodwa ayililibali ikhaya ngoku seyisemzini. Mangaphi amaxhego namaxhegokazi aphelele kwimizi yeentombi? (ibid)

(Will we be challenging men when we say if a person has no girls he has no children at all? We say this because of the way in which girls will look after their homes. Even if a girl is married she never forgets her home. How many old men and women ended up staying with their married daughters?)

The female characters in this book are mainly virtuous and helpful to one another. While Mda tries to justify urban women's virtues, with the exception of a few deviants, she also draws attention to male violence against women. Mda's concern for the plight of women is reflected in MaPulane's call for unity among women so that they can fight their common enemy - man:

"... Inye into emasiyenze kukudibana thina bafazi sibe yimbumba yamanyama silwe olu tshaba luza kusichitha-chitha ezindlwini." (p. 85)

("... We must do only one thing, we the women, we should unite and fight this enemy which is trying to divide us in our homes.")

The commercialization of "lobola" (sometimes erroneously referred to as bride-price) by unscrupulous men adds to the woman's predicament as this reduces her to a mere commodity. This can be seen from how Miya is fleeced by Nanziwe's brother, Sithembile:

Ebesithi akuza nebekuthiwa isafuneka ukongezelela kosekukho kwikhazi kuthiwe makabuye eze nenywe. Ngenxa yothando nethemba obo bunzima bolobolo olungavumi kwanela ebebuva engabuva. (p. 86)

(Whenever he brought what was said to be still outstanding to add to the lobola he had already paid, he was told to bring something else. Because of love and hope, he did not quite feel the hardship caused by unending lobola.)

Subjugation of the woman to men in general and to a male next of kin, in particular, has serious implications for her as can be seen from Nanziwe's dilemma. Her brother

is playing the fool with her fiancée, Miya, while she waits in vain for the marriage to materialize.

Contrary to the majority of women who feel shy about their dark skin complexion, Mda derides women who use skin lighteners<sup>6</sup> and special beauty creams:

Ubengathini kodwa xa ebona usatshazana lwale mihla luzityikile ngemigubo,  
namafutha nemithombothi yabaMhlophe selutsho lwampemvu ngokokude  
ungabinakwahlula nokuba luNtsundu okanye lolwabeBala kusini na. (p. 109)

(What would he say when seeing today's youth having smeared their faces with European powders, creams and other face ointments that make them have reddish complexions so much that it becomes difficult to know whether they are Africans or Coloureds.)

Woman's infidelity is evidenced by Nanziwe's falling in love with Kimundu, a wealthy businessman while preparations are under way for her marriage to Miya. For a girl who has been leading such a virtuous life, this is, no doubt, a blemish even though she was wrongly informed that her fiancée was married.

After making a long compendium of Nanziwe's frustrations, Mda ends the story by depicting her as a fairly independent Woman Alone. She devotes herself to rehabilitating her wayward brother and to caring for her aged mother.

#### 7.4 Qangule : *Izagweba* (1972)

Zithobile Sunshine Qangule was a professor in the Department of Xhosa and Sotho at the University of Fort Hare. He held a PhD degree in literature from the University of Cape Town. His works include drama and essays as well as poetry.

The initial image of MaRhadebe is one of domesticity. She is home-bound and has to provide her husband with all the household necessities such as food and had to wash his clothes.

Qangule's reference to marriage as "marriage chains" symbolizes the proverbial binding effect of marriage on married women.

The ambivalence of woman's position or role comes out clearly in the initial portrayal of MaRhadebe who prays, cries and goes about cheerfully with her domestic chores - watering vegetables, looking after pigs, providing for her hungry son, securing tobacco

plants and collecting eggs from the nests. This is a really diligent housewife. Despite all this, she still has to show hospitality to both foreigners and relatives alike.

Qangule gives us a glimpse of modern woman's thinking and outlook in his depiction of Nkosazana Lwazi, a bright looking and determined undergraduate student whose goal is the upliftment of herself and other women.

Women's informal visits to one another are normally associated with gossip.<sup>7</sup> Males become sceptical when women get together to discuss their own feminine problems while men would sit and talk for hours on end:

Namhla wayengayithembi kwaphela inkosikazi yakhe ngenxa yamanye amakhosikazi ayethanda ukuza kuphunga ikofu kwakhe xa yena ezitsibele ezindywaleni. (p. 30)

(Of late he did not fully trust his wife because of other women who frequently came to his house for a cup of coffee whenever he has gone out to drinking parties.)

Qangule's concern for the plight of the female teacher is clearly manifested in the following utterance by Nkosazana:

"Nkosi ubutitshala obu ndiboyika ngento enye, le yokuba mhla ndatshata ndophelelwa ngumsebenzi. Nokuba sowude uvele ndakuhlala ndingcucalaza, ndingqiba ezi zikolo. Khona ukunyselwa ndenziwe inqununu koba lithamsanqa leKrisimesi, isimanga! - " (p. 33)

("Lord, I fear teaching for one thing, the fact that as soon as I get married I shall lose my job. Even if it could be there, I will remain temporary and go from school to school. Promotion to principalship will be as rare as luck if not a miracle! - ")

Nkosazana's speech, quoted below, echoes Qangule's own feelings regarding the egalitarian treatment of women:

"Akukho talente ndoda natalente mfazi kuba okubalulekileyo emntwini ngumphefumlo, asingomzimba. Ukuba kwakukhanyile oku ezingqondweni zabantu kwamhla mnene, ngekungazange kubekho nkcaso yokuba abafazi balingane namadoda. . . ." (p. 44)

("There is no male talent and female talent because what is important in a person is the soul, not the body. If this had dawned in the minds of people right from the outset, there would have been no objection to equality between men and women. . . .")

It is remarkable that these views coincide one hundred percent with those of Christian feminists as explained by Tuttle (ibid:63):

During the puritan revolution of the mid-seventeenth century the entrenched sexism of the church was challenged as the concept that all human souls are equal in the sight of God gathered force. The more radical puritan sects took the idea of spiritual equality to its logical conclusion, accepting the authority of the spirit over that of the church or state, even if that spirit happened to be manifested in a woman or a child.

Nkosazana articulately and vehemently rejects all the Biblical premises postulated by men to enforce their superiority over women. She lays emphasis on women's changing roles and the emergence of a new class or breed of women - MP's, lawyers, church leaders, graduates, writers, social workers, doctors and university lecturers.

In the light of all these developments, parental control is, as exemplified by MamBhele's case and that of her husband's objection to his daughter's marriage to Langa, waning by the day.

The story also reveals that spinsterhood is so eschewed<sup>8</sup> that a spinster, no matter her age and intelligence, is regarded as inferior to a married woman even if that woman is younger than her:

"Nokuba intombazana ingade ibe nezimvi, ukuvuthwa kwengqondo yayo kungaphantsi kwentombi elula eseyitshatile."

("It does not matter how old an unmarried woman can be, her maturity of mind is less than a younger married girl's.")

While Madangatye, as usual, overemphasizes the amount of money he has spent on Nkosazana's education, his wife is more rational regarding the education of girls as she points out that the aspiring suitor's parents have also spent money on his education. There is, therefore, no need for the exorbitant "lobola" or hard feelings.

Society takes note of the least deviation from the norm in girls' behaviour, thus enforcing strict uniformity of behaviour between educated and uneducated girls. This can be seen from the social sanction against Nkosazana:

Abantú balapha bakhalazela ubuvila bale ntombi. Ayizange ibonwe emasimini ngexesha lokuhlakula, ayizange ibonwe emthonjeni nokuba sekuphele amanzi etankini... (p. 60)

(Local people complain about this girl's indolence. She was never seen in the fields during hoeing time, she was never seen at the fountain even when water has run out from the tank...)

As pointed out by Langa's father, traditionalists further detest her wearing of slacks, mini-skirts and her using red lipstick.

Both Nkosazana and Langa vehemently reject their fathers' efforts to prevent them from marrying each other. They both challenge them in a joint protest letter in which they point out that the final say in this matter is theirs and not the parents'.

Nongqikelelo seems to be a very progressive woman as she is a lady teacher and belongs to various women's groups. She is assertive to the point of crudeness. An old spinster, she is a typical example of a modern woman. Her refusal to compromise her personality is evidenced by her remaining a spinster until death forcibly commanding respect even from her detractors:

"Ewe bantu bakowethu. lo ungasabeliyo namhlanje ebesatyelwa esaphila, mna bendimthatha njengendoda. Yiyo le nto ndithetha ngolu hlobo ngaye. Ubudoda kaloku asizondevu nje kuphela koko zizenzo. Nimazi nonke ngobuqhawe bakhe. . . ." (p. 72)

("Yes, my dear people, this one who can no longer answer today, used to be obeyed when she was still alive, I took her as a man. That is why I speak this way about her. Manhood is not just the beard but it is actions. You all know her as a heroine. . . .")

Nkosazana and Langa's marriage against the wishes of their parents epitomizes the attitude of today's youth towards parental control.

The woman question is quite a vexing problem. Some say that all is well with the African woman whereas others maintain that she is "like a doormat", to quote Qangule and MaDlamini in this book. Qangule pays the following tribute to her:

#### OBHINQILEYO

Indawo yomfazi iphi na?  
Kumnandi kukubi unguNdikho,  
Kuvuywa kulilwa unguSelekho.  
Kuphilwa kufiwa unguMakhonza.  
Endalweni kwathiwa nguNokukhonza.  
Umda womfazi uphi na? (p. 87)

#### A WOMAN

(Where is the woman's place?  
In joyful times and sad times she is there,  
In happiness and in sorrows she is there.  
When all is well and when death strikes she serves,  
Nature branded her the Mother of Service.  
Where is the woman's limit?)

He adds to this image women's role as principals of schools and decries discriminatory practices against them as far as salaries are concerned in spite of equal qualifications with men.

MaRhadebe depicts the plight of the Xhosa woman graphically in the following excerpt:

". . . Sizele umntwana samkhulisa esonwabisa. Ebenelizwi ngomntwana nam bendinelizwi. Sakungevani besicimba sibonisane, adede akoyisakala, nam ndirhoxe ndakugutywa. Namhla andixelelwanga nto, uluvo lwam luyatyeshelwa, ubukhosikazi bam butshabalele. Namhla ndchlele kumgangatho wesilwanyana sona kwenziwa unothanda ngaso. . . ." (p. 96)

("... We gave birth to a child and brought it up. It brought joy to us. He [the husband] had a say on the child, I also had it. When we held different views we used to discuss and he would capitulate when I convinced him, I would withdraw if he wins me. Today I am left in the dark, my opinion is deliberately shunned, my womanhood has been destroyed. Today I have degenerated to the level of an animal about whom everybody does as he likes...")

The unfortunate family disputes between Nkosazana and her husband indicate that Nkosazana refuses to be bullied by her husband and the in-laws. She is resolute and determined to fight for her rights to the bitter end as can be seen from the following outbursts aimed at her father-in-law:

"Akasoze aphinde athi mandimsilele utywala ndingelolitye nje, akasoze ayicinge nokuyicinga kwakhona into enjalo yaye engasokuze aphinde athi mandiyi kusila kwaVondo namakhwenkwe amadoda ekhona. Ayisoze iphinde imfikele nasephupheni into yokuba mandiyokuhlakula zikhona iinkabi..." (p. 154)

("He will no longer say I should brew beer for him because I am not a grindstone, he will never even think of such a thing again and he will no longer say I should go and make beer at Vondo's place with boys when men are there. It will never cross his mind even as a dream that I should go and hoe in the fields even though oxen are there...")

This is certainly protest at its best against male dominance. It is quite obvious that Qangule favours androgyny<sup>9</sup> as can be detected from Nkosazana's outbursts to her husband:

"Nguwe oweza noSathana kule ndlu. Wawukade usenza izinto ezintle, wayeka esithubeni. Wagqibela nini ukundihlambisa izitya? Wagqibela nini ukutshintsha umntwana ebusuku?" (p.155)

("You brought the devil in this house. You used to do good and you stopped half way. When last did you help me wash the dishes? When last did you change the child's nappy at night?")

Qangule advocates mutual understanding and consideration between man and wife instead of having one party dominate the other:

"... Ekuboneni kwam kufuneka ube nengqondo esabela izimvo zale nkabi ubotshwe nayo, kufuneka uthelekise ngenyameko enkulu uluvo lwayo nolwakho, uxubaxube, uqhuzule, udibanise, uhluze, ubonde kude kuphume izimvo ezingqinelanayo..." (p. 157)

("... In my opinion you should have a mind that relates to the opinion of the ox with which you have been inspanned, you should carefully compare its opinion with yours, mix, subtract, add, strain, stir until you get unanimity...")

Professor Manzodidi (or shall we say Qangule) admits that men's sense of domination stems from fear:

"...Xa ndijongile amadoda aphantse angooZwilakhe xa ewonke, nam lo ndicinga ukuba ndinguye. Sithi sesifuna ukubaphulaphula abafazi, soyike kuba sicinga ukuba bosuka bawubhukuqe umbuso. Eneneni bakhona abasoloko betsazele ekuwubhukuqeni. Iinkunzi ezimbini zange ziphathe ebuhlantini obunye..."

("... In my view, all men are so to speak dictatorial, I think I am that myself. Sometimes we come close to listening to the women but get scared because we think

that they will overthrow the government. There are, of course, those who are bent on overthrowing it. Two bulls never rule in one kraal. . . .")

While it must be admitted that Nkosazana symbolizes modern women, especially because of her assertiveness, her general behaviour, however, leaves much to be desired. She does not only seek equality with her husband and fair treatment by her in-laws, but she is also downright provocative:

Eneneni wayengatshayi uNkosazana koko wayezama nayiphi na into enokucaphukisa uLanga. (p. 171)

(In reality Nkosazana did not smoke but she was only trying anything that could make Langa angry.)

Towards the end of the story, Qangule introduces us to two caricatures - a huge church-woman who showers insults and abuses on an equally rude school girl. Both characters are an indictment, if not a shame, to the morality of the Xhosa women. They epitomize utter degeneration and abomination.

Nkosazana is so tormented by rumours to the effect that her husband is in love with Nomaphelo that she goes completely out of her mind and has to be admitted to a psychiatric hospital. This reaction shows just how some of today's women abhor unfaithful husbands. Nkosazana's decision to continue with her marriage even after this experience is also typical of the African woman who sometimes has to learn to live with this trauma.

## 7.5 Dikana : *UPhumeza* (1975)

This psychological novel was awarded the first prize in the National Xhosa Writing Competition, *Indyebo yesiXhosa*, organized in 1973 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the first printing in the Xhosa language by John Bennie and John Ross at the mission station, Tyume, 18th December 1823.

The image of the nurse portrayed so far has been shadowy and non-enterprising. Like teachers, nurses act on the periphery with little or no clear cut impact on the social life. They have to show role solidarity with other women.

Lulama in this story is not only humble as suggested by her name, but she is also a potential candidate for the women's stereotypical role of contingency. She is, as can be seen from the following quotation, ever in search of someone interested in her:

Wayengumntwana ozithobileyo koko kunzima ukuba abantu bayibone loo nto. Wayefuna umntu - umntu oya kuba nomdla kuye; amthande njengomhlobo, amqinisekise ukuba akasayi kuze akruke nguye. (p. 7)

(She was a humble child but people could hardly realise that. She was in need of someone - someone who will be interested in her; who will love her as a friend, and assure her that she/he will never get tired of her.)

Her subsequent becoming someone's girlfriend is no surprise. Such an angel cannot by any means be allowed to wither away without male attendance.

Woman as a gossip is a well known stereotype in Xhosa society. This practice has always been associated with traditional women but has now been gradually moving into the realms of professional women as well, e.g. Nomase, a nurse, in the story:

Ndandingamthandi kwaphela ngenxa yokuthanda kwakhe ukuhleba. Wayemhle, ecocekile nempahla yakhe yonke iphucukile, kodwa hayi ngokuhleba. . . . (p. 14)

(I didn't like her at all because of her propensity for slandering others. She was beautiful, clean and all her clothes were very smart, but she had that weakness - slandering.)

Phumeza, the narrator of the story, initially derides the popular "female contingency syndrome":

Ukhe wangenwa kakhulu uNomase lo ngumkhwa wokucinga ukuba ndothi ukuze ndonwabe ndibe ndinomfana endithandana naye. Ndakhawuleza phofu ngokuyichitha loo ngqondo kuye apho. (ibid)

(Nomase laboured under the impression that I could only find happiness if I could have a boyfriend. I soon dispelled those thoughts from her mind.)

Empathy with the distressed is part of the upbringing of young girls as can be seen from Nomase's concern for Phumeza. This develops in them a keenness to serve others and to make self-sacrifice where necessary.

Sinxo<sup>10</sup> and Dikana single out railway officials as the worst examples of prejudiced or anti-black civil servants. This is how Phumeza expresses her disillusion with these officials:

Ndajika ke ndaya kulungisa kumgcini-sikhululo mayela nendawo leyo ndandisendenze izigqibo ngayo kuloo loliwe wayendishiyile. Ndathenjiswa ke kodwa emva kokuthukwa okwakusekuphelela ekubeni ndikhalale. (p. 15)

(I then went to talk to the station master about the booking on the train that I had missed. I was promised some accommodation after being insulted to such an extent that I was on the verge of rejecting their help in disgust.)

Phumeza declares her right to freedom from inconvenience and domination in no uncertain terms:

Nam njengabantu bonke ndiyindalo, ndinezinto ezisisabelo nelifa kum njengabanye abantu. Enye yezo zinto yinkululeko evangwe nolonwabo. Akukho apho mandingonwabi khona ngenxa yokuba ndiyintombazana. Into yokuba ndiyintombazana ayithethi kuthi ihlabathi lonke linelungelo lokundihlutha izinto ezilunge kum ngokwendalo. Yayiyingqondo yam ke leyo naphi na apho ndikhona okokoko ndalahlekelwa ngabazali bam. (p.16)

(Like everybody else, I am created by God, I have certain things which are apportioned to me as a heritage like other people. One of those things is freedom tempered with happiness. Nowhere should I not be happy just because I am a woman. That I am a girl does not mean that the whole earth has a right to deprive me of my natural rights. That was my outlook where ever I was ever since my parents died.)

This is certainly the outlook of all present day women. This does not only tally hundred percent with current feminist outlook, but also shows that things have changed considerably in women's world.

It was pointed out and amply illustrated in earlier discussions that stereotyping enforces artificial uniformity among all women since it eschews individualism.<sup>11</sup> Deviation from the main stream norms and values means ostracization and stigmatization. Contemporary women, on the other hand, do not fear standing out as individuals.

Dikana introduces to us a totally different kind of feminine image - the woman as orphan. This certainly adds to the woman's plight emotional frustrations that no man can appreciate. Phumeza mentions the following disastrous effects of this orphan syndrome which at times borders on neurosis:

Le meko ke izenza inkedama zibe ngabantu abanochuku, kodwa ngendlela engaqondakaliyo. Zihlala zilinde ukukhohlakalelwa, ukuze zibone inkohlakalo nalapho inkohlakalo ingekhoyo. . . (ibid)

(This condition makes orphans very sensitive and touchy people, but in a very subtle way. They always expect to be abused and will see abuse even where there is none. . .)

Even the new image of woman - the doctor - does not differ from other women's images. She is beautiful, devoted to her work and cannot escape contingency as she falls in love with a male colleague on the staff, thereby disturbing him in the execution of most of his responsibilities.

As can be seen from the following quotation, Phumeza could not bear the mental strain she was obviously so susceptible to in her life:

'The way she loses control of her mentality at times, makes me sure she has a measure of hysterics. The bad thing about it all is that she may be a mental case for the rest of her life. Poor thing.' (p. 165)

The woman's predisposition to hysteria is explained as follows by Gilbert and Gubar (1984:53):

It is debilitating to be *any* woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters. Recently, in fact, social scientists and social historians like Jessie Barnard, Phyllis Chesler, Naomi Weisstein, and Pauline Bart have begun to study the ways in which patriarchal socialization literally makes women sick, both physically and mentally. Hysteria, the disease with which Freud so famously began his investigations into dynamic connections between *psyche* and *soma*, is by definition a "female disease,"...

Phumeza could hardly escape this onslaught. When her career as a nurse ends abruptly and ignominiously as she is expelled for misconduct after having had a child and after assaulting a sister in the hospital, she loses her senses and lands in hospital as mentioned above. This shock is further compounded by the fact that Siphos father opposes their marriage and when Siphos subsequently dies in a car accident, she is left as a stigmatized and frustrated unmarried mother.

The woman's fate, as pointed out by Woodward (1987:128) in her study of gender in Christina Stead's work, has always been one string of unenviable experiences:

Generally, Stead has women objectified in male genderlects to mirror their oppression in the social formation. They are idealized as goddesses or denigrated as whores, stereotyped in their relationships with men for whom they are always other. Like Catherine they are driven mad; like the Sydney women they are forced to conform to man-made laws of marriage.

Dikana has succeeded in giving us a balanced or total image of women, unlike many male authors whose efforts in this regard leave much to be desired. In this novel with its psychopathological revelations about womanhood, we see woman's courage and her determination to fight domination. Siphos death, bad as it is, may indirectly signify the author's conviction that such women are capable of facing life without support from male partners. Viewed in this light and from a non-Puritan point of view, having a child does not mean that a girl should blindly rush into marriage as pregnancy is a 'natural heritage' of every woman, to quote Phumeza.

## 7.6 Belebese : *UNongxaki nezakhe* (1976)

Belebese's concern for the plight of the Xhosa woman manifests itself from her commitment in the introduction to her novel:

Ukubhala le ncwadi urhawuzelwa sisilonda sakudala esingapholiyo esabangwa ngulo mkhonto : "The place of a woman is in the kitchen". Lo mkhonto wamhlaba engumntwana wesikolo, inxeba lawo alipholi. Le nto yenza ukuba azibone efana nehlozi kwititshala zakhe, zinge ziwakhuphela phandle amantombazana xa zifundisa.

(Writing this book is a culmination of the itching of an old sore which refuses to heal which was caused by this spear: "The place of a woman is in the kitchen". This spear stabbed her when she was still a child but its wound does not heal. This made her view herself as a disgrace to her teachers who seemed to exclude girls in their teachings.)

As typified by MaMpemvu, woman plays her traditional role in this novel. Her disillusionment with her educated son's support and conduct leads her to antipathy towards education, thus jeopardizing her daughter's chances of obtaining decent education. With the mothers now joining the bandwagon of men who refuse to educate girls, the young girls' chances are even worse off. Fortunately women such as Nozikweliti are very positive about the efficacy of education:

"Hayi, mfazi, masicinge enye into. Abantwana bethu mabangaweli kulo mgxobhozo sawela kuwo thina. Ukuba bekuphindelwa ebuncinaneni mna bendakuba ngowokuqala ngenxa yesikolo qha." (p. 8)

("No, let us think otherwise. Our children should not suffer the same fate as us. If one could revert to childhood, I would be the first person to do so just because of school only.")

The counter-productivity of educated girls' deviation from normal expectations can be clearly seen from how MaMpemvu criticises Nozimanga's behaviour. All this dissatisfaction with Nozimanga is caused by her sitting on her bed and not standing up and making tea for her mother's visitors. This is further exacerbated by her sending a boy to buy bread from the shop instead of making the traditional home-made bread. Nozikweliti's metaphoric reference to women as wearing pairs of trousers in their hearts speaks volumes about the changing sex roles in the Xhosa society. She sees women as being equal to men in every respect:

"Khon'ungatshongo, mntwan'aseMaNgwevini, kanti ngoku siyalingana. Kwalinganwa ngamasimi, kwalinganwa ngeziza, iingqondo zishiya-shiyana ngayiphi indlela?"

("Say it again, child of the amaNgwevu clan, we are indeed equal now. We are equal in respect of arable land, equal in respect of plots, how can the minds differ?")

There is no doubt that there is now a cross-over between men and women's lives. There is a discernible blurring of the lines of demarcation between the activities of the two sexes.

MaMpemvu criticises today's daughters for not upholding certain traditions and for doing things that are considered taboo in African society. In this way, Belebesi emphasizes the importance of adhering to some of the efficacious traditions while women

strive for equality with men. She points out that education is like a safety net for girls as they can always fall back on it in the hour of need.

Parental control suffers a serious setback when Nongxaki and her suitor trick the priest, in the presence of their parents and the man chosen by Nongxaki's parents, into marrying them, before eloping in a flashy car, leaving everybody bewildered. This is certainly a revolutionary opposition to forced marriages.

One of women's greatest source of suffering is migratory labour. Nongxaki's married life is made unhappy by her husband's long absence from home. This inevitably leads to his finally disappearing in the city and to his cohabiting with another woman.

Nozigigaba, Nongxaki's mother-in-law, is nothing but a she-devil as she is an archetype of cruel mothers-in-law. Her lack of sympathy after Nongxaki has been deserted by her husband is peculiar.

Nongxaki's initial stand on the question of choice of partner is bold and assertive. It tallies with modern female attitude towards choice of life partner. Her marriage to Somzi, her chosen partner, is such a distressing disaster that one wonders whether Belebesi does not mean it as retribution for her having violated tradition. On the other hand, she could well be trying to show that Nongxaki's lack of education made her dependent on a man who, typical of his kind, could not be fully trusted.

### 7.7 Dazela : *Owu ndanele* (1977)

Siphokazi Angelina Dazela is a teacher by profession and currently attached to SATV 2 in Johannesburg.

Dazela describes Zimkhitha's physical looks in the conventional manner. She is a natural beauty - with no special make up, hairdo or artificially lightened complexion. In fact, she seems to be proud of her dark complexion and her not so slender figure.

That women wield a lot of power behind the scenes is borne out by Gcobani's reaction when his brother requests that they be given Zimkhitha to assist Gcobani's sick wife:

“ . . . Lo mzuzu angekafiki uNobantu andinakuqinisekisa ngale kaZimkhitha into, anditsho ukuthi uza kuyala kodwa ke ndithanda nje ukudibana naye kuqala ukwenzela ukumnika imbeko yakhe njengomfazi. . . .” (p. 15)

("... Until Nobantu comes home, I cannot give you a definite answer on Zimkhitha, while I do not say she is going to refuse to do it, I should like to consult with her first so that I give her the necessary respect as my wife. . . .")

It is interesting that, even in this decade, Zimkhitha has to do all conventional household chores. Her life, however, is quite androgynous as she does both indoor and outdoor work:

Yonke into enxulumene nasendle wayeyiqhelile kuba uGcobani wayengakhethi, engatsho ukuthi lo umsebenzi ngowamakhwenkwe okanye ngowentombazana. (p. 40)

(She was used to everything connected with outdoor life because Gcobani did not discriminate between work for boys and work for girls.)

Besides their peripheral role, Dazela depicts MaRhadebe and Nowezile as envious plotters who banded together to influence Nojizonka against Zimkhitha who outshines their children at school. This female treachery spans the whole book.

African protocol is sometimes very strict. Men cannot negotiate with women if their husbands are in a position to attend the negotiations themselves. When MaRhadebe violates this protocol and goes to talk to Gweva about her daughter's accommodation, the latter retorts as follows:

"... Mna ndiyindoda andinakho ukujamelana nomfazi ngomcimbi onjalo ngokungathi indoda yakhe ayikho phakathi kwekhaya." (p. 56)

("... I am a man and cannot negotiate with a woman such matters as if her husband is not around.")

While Dazela cannot condone wife bashing, she seems to justify the thrashing that Nojizonka receives from her husband by pointing out how she had allowed herself to be misled and influenced by iniquitous friends such as MaRhadebe and Nowezile. These women are also responsible for the "ukuthwalwa" (a form of abduction for forced marriage) of Zimkhitha - certainly one of the worst humiliations ever to be suffered by Xhosa women when they were forced to marry men they were sometimes not in love with. Fortunately, Zimkhitha outwits the man and escapes.

Nojizonka's committing suicide is nothing but retribution for her waywardness and Zimkhitha's marriage to a Port Elizabeth medical practitioner, after she had qualified as a nurse, is certainly designed to be a reward for her unblemished character and determination.

## 7.8 Taleni : *KuLavisa ngothando* (1979)

Yvonne Yoliswa Taleni is the last known female author to appear in this decade. In the introduction she states openly that the book is aimed at the youth.

In the second paragraph of the book Taleni refers to possible marriage between Lavisa and Kholekile Duma in perfect stereotypic fashion. Whereas in most of the earlier works we were introduced to women from relatively humble homes, in this story both Lavisa and Kholekile are of eminent and affluent parentage.

An important factor regarding Lavisa is that she is portrayed as a professional nurse without having to prove her genuine womanhood by having her do menial household chores.<sup>12</sup>

Changing female values and outlook are discernible when Lavisa cannot hide her admiration for a handsome man she meets on the train to East London. Taleni and other women are no longer shy to admit that they are also capable of falling in love with men even before the latter propose love to them.

Lavisa sometimes appears to be a photocopy of Mafuya's Nonceba. She is unbelievably docile and naive. Her education and professional training mean nothing to her as she soon becomes her cousin sister's Cinderella. Her helplessness and the mysterious appearance of Lunga whenever she is in need of help also resemble Nonceba's.

Woman's independent decision making is proved by the fact that Lavisa severs ties with Kholekile as soon as she realises that she loves Lunga more even though he is a stigmatized criminal.

Lunga's former girlfriend, Thembisa, is stigmatized for the following reasons:

. . . kuba yena wayengeyiyo loo mbo kaThembisa owayethanda nayipi na ipokotho ezele intywenka. (p. 41)

(. . . because she [i.e Lavisa] was not like Thembisa, the type of woman who loved any man whose pockets are full of money.)

This is a serious indictment on the moral character of some of the contemporary women. Proposing love to a man is a serious aberration but loving men for financial gain is even worse as it can easily precipitate prostitution.

As the novel develops, Lavisia gradually takes on the image of a country girl who is overwhelmed by the fantastic world of flashy cars, handsome men, music and a luxurious married home. This is certainly a very materialistic view of life.

Though sometimes meant as a joke, androgyny gradually creeps into the lives of modern people as evidenced by Lunga and Tim's washing of plates and crockery while the girls are plaiting their hair and beautifying themselves.

Marriage and childbearing is the inevitable end to this novel which has virtually confirmed most of the popular female stereotypes. Even Lavisia's occasional cleverness does not redeem the novel from being an anticlimax to a period that has projected women as gradually surpassing sexist dichotomies.

### 7.9 Peteni : *KwaZidenge* (1980)

Randall Langa Peteni is also one of the few highly qualified Xhosa writers. He holds an MA degree in English obtained from the University of South Africa while attached to Fort Hare where he lectured for several years. Like Jongilanga, he has the added advantage of having been born in the rural areas and lived in the cities for the greater part of his life. The book first appeared in English and he later translated it into impeccable Xhosa capturing not only the idiom but also the tone of the original text.

Beauty runs through most Xhosa works like a motif that keeps on recurring. An important feature of this image is that later writers such as Peteni do not couple beauty to good character as earlier writers did. Perhaps the reason for this is that, unlike their Victorian counterparts, contemporary women are no longer regarded as little angels.

Another conventional image that is retained in this book is that of woman doing or failing to do domestic chores as is the case with Zuziwe:

Le nto yenza ukuba uZuziwe angafane awuphathe umsebenzi ngezakhe izandla. Ude waba yintombi enkulu eyithanda le ndlela aphathwa ngayo. Wayekholwa kukuzivalela kwigumbi lakhe lokulala, ahlambe, athambise, azivele macala ngokungathi nguthekwane, ebuka kwisipili esikhulu ubuso bakhe, nokumila komzimba wakhe. Umsebenzi awayewuthanda uZuziwe yayikukuthabatha ibhekile yakhe ahambe yedwa aye kukha amanzi emthonjeni, okanye aye emlanjeni, ahambe umgama oyimayile. (p. 1)

(This made Zuziwe work shy. She grew up and became a big girl admiring the treatment meted out to her. She enjoyed closing herself up in her bedroom, and wash and preen herself whilst admiring her lovely face and her figure in a large mirror. The only work Zuziwe liked was taking a container and walking to fetch water at the spring or going to the river which was about a mile away.)

From the comments made by other girls about Zuziwe, we get the impression of a relatively 'free woman' who does not allow any inhibitive social norms to enshackle her. Her stand against divisive politics is brilliant as will be seen later. Her supposed sensuality is imputed by her detractors and is not reflected in her actual actions.

This girl's assertiveness is unparalleled and her independence and rationality are admirable. This is how she reacts to Diliza's castigation for her association with boys from the rival Thembu area:

'Ndingas'ke ndingabi nabantwana kunokuba ndibafundis'obo bubhanxa. Abantu balaa lali ndiyazalana nabanye babo, neentombi kukh'endivana kakhulu nazo, endizixabise ngaphezu kwezi zalaph'emaHlubini.' (p. 2)

(I'd rather have no children than teach them such nonsense. I am related to some of that village's people, there are some girls there who are my great friends and whom I respect even more than local Hlubi girls.)

The woman as portrayed by Peteni is no longer the detached cold love partner<sup>13</sup> normally depicted by earlier authors. She is openly emotional and responsive to love stimuli:

UZuziwe umjonge uBhuqa ngamehlo adize uthando, noncumo olwalukhanya ngokungathi kukuphuma kwelanga, weva negazi lihamba ngokufudumeleyo, into eyayingazange yenzeke xa enoNtabeni. Wakuva okukufudumala entliziyweni, entloko, esiswini, emzimbeni wonke. (p. 10)

(Zuziwe gazed at Bhuqa with eyes that betrayed internal love and a smile that shone like the rising sun, she also felt a gush of love for him that had never occurred when she was with Ntabeni. She felt that heat in her heart, in the head, in the stomach and all over her body.)

Zuziwe is a martyr in the story as she is a victim of both uncouth boys from her own village as well as jealousy from her contemporaries such as Ntombi who even assaults her. Besides, she is also a victim of circumstances as she is caught in the cross-fire between the feuding amaHlubi and the abaThembu tribes.

Peteni's characterisation of Ntombi as a rude, pugnacious rural girl is unique in the sense that most writers ascribe such waywardness to urbanism only. Such vile language and aberrant behaviour is usually only associated with township life. Viewed in this light, this shows the ravages of moral decay as it has penetrated even rural villages which had always been regarded as model villages.

Zuziwe's stand regarding the Thembu-Hlubi feud shows that she is not only politically mature, but she is also an epitome of reconciliation between the warring factions. This symbol of reconciliation is abundantly manifested in the following excerpt:

Wayephants'ukuqiniseka ukuba umntwana kaBhuqa usesizalweni sakhe. Umelwe ke ngoko asilwele isithandwa sakhe, alulwele nosana lwakhe, usana olwaphuma emzimbeni kaBhuqa lweza kungena kuye, lwenza isimanga, kuba lona aluzange lubukhathalele ubutshaba obuphakathi kwabaThembu namaHlubi . . . Wazimisela ukuxhathisa, engasoze anikezele nokuba bamxhimfa ngamanqindi, bamwise phantsi, bamqushe. (p. 54)

(She had a feeling that she bore Bhuqa's child in her womb. She cannot but fight for her lover, fight for her baby which came out of Bhuqa's body and got into her, doing something miraculous because it defied the enmity between the Thembus and the Hlubis . . . She decided not to yield, she would not give in even if they punch her with fists, throw her to the ground and beat her.)

Zuziwe's admirable stand and sense of independence comes out very clearly when she refuses to be dictated to by Duma or to be forced to sever ties with Bhuqa:

UZuziwe waziva esithi futhu ngumsindo, waphendula ngelithi akukho mfuneko yakwenza sithembiso. Akukho mntu unakho ukuliguqula ikamva lakhe. Uya kwenza loo nto abona ukuba ifanelekile, ngaphezu koko athabathe amacebiso kayise, alandele wona ukuba unakho ukuwalandela. (p. 102)

(Zuziwe could feel the anger rising in her and she replied that there was no need to make any promise. No one can alter her destiny. She will only do what she deems right to do and take her father's advice and follow it if she sees her way clear to do so.)

As can be seen above, parental advice is no longer final. It depends on whether it is acceptable to the child.

Peteni delivers the final blow to forced marriages when Zuziwe's father refuses to force her to marry Ntabeni. Attempts by other members of the family to pressurize her also fall flat. As could be seen from the remarks made by one of Zuziwe's paternal uncles, their reasons for parental involvement in their children's choice of life-partners are as follows:

'Ukutshat' uNtabeni kukugcin' isiko nokuziphatha okuhle, kukulwa nomtyholi, kukulwa nesono. Mntwan' am, yiva ngam, ndimdala. Ndiyayazi le nto ndiyithethayo. Indlu eyakhiwe ngooyihlo yakhiwe phezu kolwalwa. Ayinakuze iwe. Ungaphandlwa luthando. Uthando ngumoya.' (p. 109)

('To marry Ntabeni is to adhere to custom and good behaviour, it is to fight the devil, and sin. My child, listen to me, I am old. I know what I am saying to you. A house that has been established by your fathers is a house built on rock. It can never collapse. You should not be blinded by love. Love is just like the wind.')

These sentiments are in harmony with those expressed by Soga (s.a. :270) close to sixty years ago:

Another charge made against lobola is said to be that it rules out love in the marriage contract. There is a certain measure of truth in this. The arrangements made for a girl's marriage are conducted entirely by the parents, the girl has little or no say in the matter. But the fact that it is the universal custom of all Bantu tribes prepares all girls to face it, though naturally it is accompanied with much that is ugly.

Zuziwe's triumphant death from abortion makes her a victim of circumstances as well as a martyr and a symbol of reconciliation as can be deduced from Peteni's comments:

Waqonda ngengqondo yomntu omkhulu ukuba uZuziwe waba lixhoba lentyano yabantu. Waziva enethemba lokuba igazi lakhe liya kusebenza ngokuphalala kwalo, licime umlilo osezintliziyweni zabantu bezi lali zimbini. (p. 124)

(His adult mind made him realise that Zuziwe was only a victim of the enmity between people. He felt hopeful that the shedding of her blood will have efficacious results and douse the fire in the hearts of the inhabitants of the two villages.)

Although moralists condemn abortion and will certainly not take kindly to Peteni's neutrality in this regard, it is very significant in female social politics these days as pointed out by Carol Christ (1980:52):

The affirmation of a woman's right to control her own body and choose abortion has been fundamental in the women's movement.

Bhuqa's presence at the funeral service marks the possible start of reconciliation and the end of senseless feuding between the two neighbouring villages. The death of this innocent victim has, in a way, been an atonement for the wrongs of both societies.

The book depicts the woman's conciliatory role and her self-sacrifice. It is certainly one of the few disguised political satires that present the woman in her totality. Viewed in this light, the book contrasts very well with woman's image in the novel *Uhambo lukaGqobhoka* in which woman is invariably man's downfall. In fact, Peteni and some of the earlier writers have revealed that man is actually woman's downfall as could be seen in this interesting novel.

In concluding this study, and in order to rule out any possible misconceptions regarding the image of woman in Xhosa literature as a whole, a cursory glance will be taken at how woman is viewed in poetry, one of the most emotive media of expression at the disposal of feminists and their sympathisers.

It is hoped that this will bring home to both students and critics alike the fact that the woman question cannot be compartmentalized into theoretical frameworks of convenience and expedience. What has been attempted hitherto has merely been to take a

glance at one aspect of this broad and deep subject that has been sadly overlooked in contemporary critical studies.

It is very clear from the study that women are becoming more and more impatient about being showered with praises by men who idealize them with the sole purpose of keeping them in inferior positions and status. A quick and final look at the latest Xhosa poetry reveals how men, sometimes, idealize women and how women view male dominance. The best and most up to date example of male stereotypic but highly idealistic view of the woman comes from a poem by a very talented and highly educated poet, Mema (1984:30) whose poem reflects current male stereotypes remarkably:

#### UMFAZI WOKWENENE

Yiperil' enqabileyo umfazi onesidima,  
Yasolok' inomkhitha eyakhe indima.  
Akonwab' ezimbuthweni zokucukucez' uluntu,  
Uyonwab' akhululeke kwakwenzelwana ubuntu.

Ukutheth' ukuvinjiwe ubalasele ngezenzo;  
Akuhlala rhuth' ingxowa aqalise ukuluka.  
Bufika nje ubusika selumfumamfum' usapho;  
Akoyik' ukulwalatha - lulibhongo neqhayiya.

Wakungen' endlwini yakhe kuthi gungqu bubushushu;  
Kubasiwe kuphekiwe, nawe mhambi ulindiwe.  
Ukuncum' akazenzisi kutsh' uzive usekhaya;  
Uyay'qond' intsikelelo yokubuk' abasemzini.

Kwindod' akhe ngumlingane akalilo ipolisa;  
Kwakuqaleka umlilo akagaleli malahle.  
Akayongwe kubantwana bayamthanda bemhlonele;  
Bangelwa babe majaja khe kwagxekw' umama wabo.

Kwimibutho yokuhlala ulilungu lokuqala,  
Ungumakhi wempucuko engancwasanga luzuko.  
Uyazazi iimbedlenge wanyisa iintsizana;  
Ungunina kwiinkedama kuy' inimba ayikhethi.

Awunethi umzi wakhe kub' usebenza ngokwakhe;  
Uyalima ahlakule, ze kungasweleki ukutya.  
Xa esiya kukh' amanzi akalindani namfazi;  
Akukho umenza mvaba, engathuthelwa zindaba.

Lingaphezu kwegolide elakhe ixabiso;  
Ayinakuqikelelwa bani eyakhe intengiso.  
Uvunywa sisizwe sonke ngendili nangentobeko;  
Liyamngqina nalw' izulu ngokholo nangemfezeko.

## THE TRUE WOMAN

(She is a rare pearl, the dignified woman,  
Her role is ever attractive to society.  
She never finds happiness in gossip groups,  
She is very happy when generosity is shown.

She is reticent but gifted as far as actions;  
When she sits she opens her bag and knits.  
By the breaking of Winter her family is cosy;  
Not shy to point them out - they're her pride.

When you enter her house it is nice and warm;  
There's fire, food and the visitor is welcome.  
Her smile is genuine, it makes you feel at home;  
She realises the blessing of being kind to strangers.

To her husband she's a friend, not a policeman;  
When trouble starts she does not fan it all.  
No tiger to the children, they love and respect her.  
They would fight like mad if mama is disparaged.

She's the first member of social associations,  
The builder of culture who does not seek glory.  
She knows the needy and feeds the destitute;  
The mother of the orphans who treats all alike.

Her house is solid as she works herself;  
Tills and cultivates so that there's always food.  
When fetching water, she waits for no womanfriend;  
She's not drawn to say things or brought any gossip.

Her value is certainly more than gold;  
She is priceless, no one can state her value.  
The whole nation confirms her dignity and loyalty;  
Even heavens confirm her faith and her flawlessness.)

It goes without saying that this poem has confirmed each and every attitude or stereotype that has been discussed in the study. Spatial and temporal limitations do not permit a detailed analysis of the poem, its main purpose being merely to confirm the issues concerned by examining a few examples from poetry, one of the vehicles of human communication. However, it should be pointed out that Mema views the woman in her "traditional" role. He idealizes women in terms of men's and societal expectations. To achieve this, he uses powerful metaphorical images such as 'she is a rare pearl' and 'her worth is more than that of gold.' This serves to inculcate in women a sense of complacency and satisfaction. He describes the woman's "attractive" role with the same purpose in mind. Women are, therefore, exhorted to behave according to this idealistic role.

Mema also invokes the stereotype of the woman as a gossip, as well as the Great Mother. He stresses that the woman is homebound as she is expected to give solace to the distressed, succour to the destitute, and to show hospitality to strangers. Her humility is borne out by the fact that she should be a partner and not a policeman to her husband. This means that she should not poke her nose into her husband's affairs for as long as he keeps them away from her. Lastly, Mema clearly highlights the woman's role in social and civic matters.

This idealism, however, contrasts radically with the attitude of one of the most modern women poets, Nobantu Ndlazulwana (1986:27) whose poem, "Ubufazi" (Womanhood) reflects female protest against male domination more overtly than the female novelists have done so far:

#### UBUFAZI

Mandibe sisichenge phezu kweliwa na;  
Mandibe yindawo yengqushu na;  
Mandibe lidini lenkohlakalo na;  
Kuba kusithiwa ndinkene-nkene ndingumfazi?

Ndiyayizam' imizam' iphumelele,  
Ndiyayifezekis' iminqwen' izaliseke,  
Kodw' amalungel' andinawo  
Kuba kuthiwa ndibuthathaka ndingumfazi.

Asingabo bonk' abafaz' abacudiselekileyo,  
Ayisithi sonk' abant' ababandezekileyo,  
Asingomzi wabafazi wonk' ohluphekileyo.  
Kwilizwe labafazi kulapho ndivela khona.

Amalinge am awa phantsi,  
Imiyalelo yam ayinamzalisekisi,  
Imizabalazo yam ayinanzwa bani  
Kuba kuthiwa andinamandla ndingumfazi.

#### WOMANHOOD

(Should I hang precariously over a cliff;  
Should I be the trampling ground;  
Should I be the sacrifice of wickedness;  
Just because they say I am weak, I am a woman?)

I do achieve success in my efforts,  
I do realise some of my wishes,  
But I am deprived of all the rights  
Just because they say I am weak, I am a woman.

Not all the women are oppressed,  
Not all of us are deprived,  
Not all the womenfolk are destitute.  
I come from the world of the women.

All my efforts are in vain,  
My injunctions none will fulfill,  
My struggles none will take heed of  
Just because they say I am weak, I am a woman.)

Ndlazulwana vehemently challenges the treatment meted out to women. She sees women as being exploited, abused, and sacrificed as the weaker sex. Her indignation at this stereotype of the woman as the weaker sex is confirmed by the refrain at the end of every stanza: "Kuba kusithiwa ndinkene-nkene ndingumfazi" ("Just because they say I am weak, I am a woman").

She also uses several images to indicate women's denigration: "the trampling ground", "the sacrifice of wickedness", to mention but a few. In the whole poem, she depicts women as fulfilling their role as adequately as men but, points out that notwithstanding, the women are discriminated against.

Among the male writers who have said anything about the Xhosa woman,<sup>14</sup> Satyo (in Mtuze & Satyo, 1986:48) is certainly the most outstanding as far as expressing the woman's dilemma especially in the present political scenario when children have been detained, killed or sentenced to death for political crimes.<sup>15</sup>

#### UMAMA ONTSUNDU

Uthando olusithonga  
Lukamama -  
Umama oNtsundu.

Intliziy' isemafini,  
Ezinkwenkwezini phaya,  
Nangona phof' ebhajisiwe  
Ziinzingo zobulawulwa.

Intliziy' umnqwen' ifun'  
Ukubhabhel' empumelelweni -  
Ewe, intliziyo, ingqondo,  
Ubuntu bale ndlezana  
Buyankcunkca ...

Nokub' umnyeph' uyamxinzelela  
Umama, .... umam' oNtsundu.

Konke ngenxa yeyakh'  
Imvana.

Le nyibib' umama nangona  
Ilalisw' uqweqwe kukuqhotswa,  
Kuqhotsek' ukhoko olo kuphela.  
Yon' intliziyo nomphefumlo  
Zikhwapheke khu.

Akuzala lo mamandin'  
Ukhokhotyiswayo,  
Ukhusa ngapha ukhokhotyiso,  
Akhuse ngapha ukhobokiso,  
Ze lowo uzelweyo angaqali  
Abon' ubuntlini-ntlini  
Bentlalo, esenofokotho.

Lo mam' umama ayifundis' imveku  
Yakhe  
Ukumemeth' ithemba – Inkxaso-mphefumlo  
Yongonyanyelweyo.

Amfundis' ukuthana  
Ntsho-o-o-  
Nenkwenkwezi ukuz'  
Umphefuml' u-u  
Phuncuncu  
Kudaka abekwe kulo  
Ngabom umam' emama.

Ithole lomam' ontsika,  
Lisungula mayana nje  
Ukuxatyangelwa kolonwab'  
Olumagqagqa.

#### THE BLACK MOTHER

(The thunderous love  
Of a mother  
The Black mother.

The heart is in the clouds,  
There in yonder stars,  
Although she is hoist  
By miseries of subjection.

The heart's desire burning  
To fly up to success -  
Yes, the heart, the mind,  
This kind woman's humanity  
Running at a steady pace...

Even when the white man oppresses  
The woman, ... the Black woman.

All because of her own  
Lamb.

This lily the mother even though  
Her skin is fried to crust,  
Only the crust is fried.  
The heart and the soul  
Enjoy total protection.

When she gives birth, this woman  
Who is abused and battered,  
She wards off this side the abuses,  
And wards off the other enslavement,  
So that the newly born at first  
Should not see the misery  
In his life when still so young.

This true mother teaches her baby  
To hold on to whatever hope -  
Sustainer of the soul  
Of the victimized.

And teach him to  
Stare without flinching -  
At the star so that  
The soul may  
Be released  
From the mire she's dumped in  
Wilfully, this true mother.

The child of mother steadfast  
Will start slowly subtly  
As steadily the gaps are filled  
Amidst that scanty joy.)

Satyo is neither being idealistic nor overtly condemnatory with regard to the role of women. Instead, he, in a calm and collected manner, shows how the women have to cope with the vicissitudes of life especially in the present political context.<sup>16</sup> As pointed out earlier on, the political pressures of the time are always a source of great frustration to all concerned. The hurt felt by the black women is even more, given that their children have had bitter experiences since the start of the political upheavals in the country. Women had been responsible for supporting their dehumanised husbands throughout the years. Now they are charged with the further responsibility of nurturing their children in a strife-torn country, in the same way that they had to stand by their husbands during the colonial times and during the ensuing resistance to white domination. The youth are the leaders of the future, therefore the mothers must cushion them

from the hard knocks of life and teach them hope, love, and equanimity. This whole exercise, as pointed out by Satyo, has not left the Black woman unscathed: "Her skin is fried to crust".

One can see from Satyo's poem that the black woman has been entrusted with a fresh responsibility of bringing up and giving direction to an offspring that is riddled to the marrow by the destructive blows of present day life. She must nurture them and cushion them from the merciless onslaught until they can find some meaning and enjoyment in their lives. Total sacrifice is still part of the contemporary woman but this is now for a cause greater than washing pots and sweeping floors occasionally interspersed with idle gossip and cringing to eke out some existence.<sup>17</sup>

### 7.10 *Resumé*

While Bongela's first book still depicts woman as passive and contingent in the same way as some of his successors, his second book heralds the final image of woman as assertive, independent, shrewd, free and unrelentingly opposed to male dominance, as seen in most of the subsequent discussions. In these works there is a permeative air of counter-attack and revolt that was not distinctly discernible even in works such as Mzamane's *Izinto zodidi*, a book which clearly champions woman's cause. We see in them a force patently stronger than the bold but token resistance offered by Nomsa in Mirsky's novel *UNomsa intombi yakwaZulu*. Qangule, Dikana and Peteni stand head and shoulders above the rest of the writers of this decade, and perhaps even those of other decades, in their sensitive presentation of the plight and the aspirations of contemporary women.

While both sets of writers, male and female, still throw in a negative stereotype here and there in their depiction of women, and while total androgyny is far from being realized yet, there are clear signs of a discernible blurring of the lines of demarcation between the activities or the outlook of men and women. A brief comparative glance at three divergent poems has also demonstrated the different views of men and women on the issue and that the context of the woman always determines the societal expectations.

## Notes

1. See also Tsotsi (1952:26), Gwashu (1953:8) and Jongilanga (1960: 11).
2. Ferguson (1977:14).
3. Cf. Mineke Schipper (in Jones, Palmer and Jones, 1987:48).
4. See Sinxo (1922:5).
5. See also Diane Lewis in Ruth (1980:537).
6. See also Miriam Makeba (1988:19) and Qunta (1987:85).
7. See also Russianoff (1981:21), and also Montagu (1953:85).
8. See Mbiti (1975:133).
9. In so far as it leads to discarding role-categorisation.
10. Sinxo (1922:5).
11. See also Van Vuuren (1938:93).
12. See Sinxo (1927:67), Swaartbooi (1934:14) and Mzamane (1959:19).
13. See also Maly-Schlater (1969:72).
14. See Mqhayi's *Inzuzo*, (1974:43) where Mqhayi pays glowing tribute to Mrs Charlotte Manyhi Maxeke, and p.68 where he sings lofty praises to Miss Minah Thembeke Soga.
15. This theme is dealt with in detail in Shava (1989:146ff).
16. Cf. Harrison (1986: 83) who articulates the plight of the black women as follows:

They have endured incredible hardship and brutality in prison, often in solitary confinement, and have been frequently tortured, while women political prisoners had had no study rights and received no remission of sentence.
17. The role of women in a post-apartheid society is encapsulated in the following extract from the declaration by the ANC executive, cited by Renee Alberts (1989: 20):

We know that we cannot win liberation or build a strong movement without the participation of women. We must make it possible for women to play their part by regarding them as equals and helping to emancipate them in the home, even relieving them of their many family and household burdens. . .

## Chapter 8

# *Summary and General Conclusion*

### 8.0 *Summary*

Because a resumé appears at the end of each chapter, setting out its main findings, this final summary will, of necessity, be brief and concerned only with the deeper and broader implications of womanhood as depicted in literature.

Besides giving the study its theoretical base and perspective, chapter one has revealed that stereotyping as a social phenomenon and construct has its roots in the pre-literate era. It is, therefore, not something brought about by education or modern life. Another important feature of stereotyping is that it is universal as it transcends all racial and national barriers, affecting women similarly in various countries and in different communities. One only needs to read "Women" in Gillie (1972 : 75-85) to appreciate the stunningly striking similarities between the Xhosa and the earlier English women's experiences and frustrations. In fact, I make bold to say that the woman question is universal and differs only in intensity all over the world. No wonder, therefore, that, as pointed out by Dorothy Driver (in Ryan and van Zyl, 1982 : 206):

The earliest concern of current feminist literary criticism was to analyse the stereotypical portrayal of women in literature, the attitudes that these stereotypes betoken and their effect on male and female consciousness.

This has, no doubt, been the main concern of this study as well. These stereotypes and archetypes concretise and reveal, if not betray, men's attitudes towards women. They are, therefore, an important global characterisation of women in a world that is sadly dominated by men and dichotomized into male and female with all that this implies in a capitalist patriarchal society.

Although John Goode (in Mitchell and Oakley, 1976b : 217) ends up questioning current methodology in literary women's studies, he, at least, acknowledges the relevance and significance of such studies.<sup>1</sup> He continues to give a personal experimental analy-

tical model that is certainly beyond the scope of a pilot study such as mine which is inherently inhibited by a feminist tinge in the books under discussion that is not wholly conscious. That the books explicitly reveal clear signs of 'feminist concerns' is obvious, to use Woodward's expression.

Women in the first twenty years of written prose fiction play a subservient role and are strongly stereotyped by the male - only set of writers. Ndawo, in the first available allegorical novel *Uhambo lukaGqobhoka*, depicts woman as Eve who should be treated very warily. Of course, his main concern is sexuality, man's Achille's heel. Even progressive and prominent authors such as Mqhayi portrayed woman's role as peripheral and subservient. Although hinted at in very vague and obscure terms, what also comes out clearly from this early image of the woman is that she is politically quite aware.

The force of socialization or acculturation is shown to be excessive on women of all ages. Its devastating influence can be seen in the fact that even educated women such as Nomsa and Yalezwa are bound to subordinate roles and domestic chores. They are forced to be like other women in every respect. This uniformity syndrome is neither something new nor peculiar to Xhosas only as attested to by Maly-Schlater (*ibid*: 56):

The Victorians, slaves of respectable uniformity, were strongly prejudiced against women who would not fit themselves, at least publicly, to the accepted standard of feminine behaviour. Women writers such as Charlotte and George Eliot showed their revolt against these prejudices by creating heroines who dared defy the narrow code.

Jolobe is the only writer of this period who openly disproves one of woman's most unfortunate depictions - the 'woman as witch' stereotype otherwise the other male writers tend to confirm most female stereotypes.

In the third and fourth decades, we meet, for the first time, the type of woman who refuses to be ensnared by oppressive social norms. Nolishwa is unlike the passive but dangerous Nozizwe whom Ndawo depicts in his first novel. The former is dynamic, proactive and outright deviant at times.

Sinxo also introduces us to a discernible change in woman's life in the person of Nojaji who is rude, unsympathetic and dominating. All this happens against the backdrop of strict adherence to social norms by Gakhulu, an old lady from the earlier breed of women deliberately brought in as contrast to Nojaji, the deviant prodigal woman. The emergence of shebeen queens, now popularly known and registered as taverners -

MaMfene, MaDlamini and MamJwarha, tarnishes the woman's image even more while ushering in the image of the independent woman who does not depend on living off alms from her husband.

The first female writers who appeared in this period confirm popular female stereotypes instead of refuting them as one would have expected. Swaartbooi is the only exception because she goes against conventional norms by not ending Mandisa's life in marriage. This is certainly a pointer to the emergence of a new type of woman who is not contingent on men.

Jordan's *Ingqumbo yeminyanya* ushers in an epoch of enlightenment in which woman totally rejects certain aspects of traditional culture. In fact, Thembeke is such an ultra-modern woman as far as outlook is concerned that she inevitably leads to the downfall of Zwelinzima. We note in this novel that woman's abdication of her traditional role as custodian mother of her cultural values will lead to national tragedy.

The overall impression gained from Minazana's attitude in the early fifties is that she is reactionary. She not only confirms female stereotypes but also seems to coax women back to their former 'glorious state' of subservient housewife and underdog.

Subtly androgynous outlook and inclination filters through in Liziwe Tsotsi's work while she is very cautious about questioning conventional female role categorization.

This androgynous tone is also discernible in Tamsanqa's *Inzala kaMlungisi*. When Mlungisi's first wife dies, he adopts a more androgynous attitude towards domestic chores and does work normally reserved for women. Lupuwana carries the issue further by depicting an educated female character who does not have to perform menial household chores in order to prove her womanhood. He clearly cherishes female independence while condemning female promiscuity. Once again, we see in Bukelwa woman's struggle to be freed from oppressive social norms while her tragic death could have been designed to act as a deterrent to others who may think that being 'free women' means the right or licence to engage in promiscuous activities.

The greatest protagonist for female emancipation in this period is certainly Mzamane who champions the woman's cause more consciously than any of his contemporaries.

Several inhibitive social norms and practices come to this author's attention while women characters do everything in their power to free themselves from such bondage. The clarion call is loud and clear - "women oppose all forms of domination."

Jongilanga introduces the woman of the sixties by portraying Zoleka as going all out to resist parental control, a source of tremendous frustration for thousands of women. This theme is one of the most popular and hackneyed themes in Xhosa literature.

Nonceba's sheepish subservience epitomizes lack of self-esteem in some, if not most, women. In fact, she sticks out like a sore thumb in a decade that has produced female characters who consistently challenge the status quo. Perhaps Mafuya's significance in Xhosa literature is that he serves to remind us that all women are not on the feminist bandwagon yet.

While some of Burns-Ncamashe's female characters still display clear signs of subservience, a growing number of them assume more assertive roles, refusing to be relegated to a position of inferiority.

Setidisho's rather cautious stand against male domination received a shot in the arm in Mirsky's novel which clearly asserts woman's equality. Acculturation and socialization are blamed for women's subservience.

Although even female writers such as Silinga, Dazela and Mdledle can hardly be regarded as effective spokespersons for the women, male writers such as Tamsanqa succeed in portraying women's unrelenting struggle against male domination. Sometimes undermined and compromised, these women resist all forms of injustice against them, a stand that certainly augurs well for their future.

Contemporary women are characterised by their obsession with fashion and materialism sometimes to the neglect of everything else. We see them mercilessly battered by pass laws and inegalitarian treatment by males. Migratory labour and forced separation of man and family by the notorious laws such as the Urban Areas Act made life for black women unbearable.

While women in earlier decades mainly worked as humble teachers and nurses, contemporary women have tried their hands at virtually any profession. As women grad-

ually move into various so-called male jobs, their assertiveness is unmistakable.

Social and economic pressure force women to leave their homes and seek new fortunes in towns and cities. This exposes them to all the temptations and the frustrations of urban life. All things being equal, women become more dependable breadwinners than men who have a tendency to forsake their families when the temptations of the cities gain the upperhand. Cf. Kuzwayo (1987 : 259):

Gradually some of these very women decided to defy tradition and dare the cities, going first in search of their husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, then becoming trapped in the urban economy. They were forced to accept domestic work and menial earnings.

Back home, especially in the rural villages, this has led to a discernible change in the traditional life-styles of women. Whereas it used to be taboo for them to enter kraals, milk cows, inspan oxen and do many kinds of work normally set aside for men, they suddenly found themselves having to do so.

Mda's criticism of contemporary women's use of unnecessary skin-lighteners<sup>2</sup> which sometimes disfigure their faces and spoil their natural beauty is also echoed by Miriam Makeba (1988 : 19):

... The advertisements tell us that we are ugly, and the only way to obtain true beauty is to try to become as much like a white as possible. We are encouraged to conk our hair to make it straight. The ads for chemicals to bleach our skin fill a page.

Quanta (ibid : 85) hits even harder at this exploitation of African women by racially prejudiced commercials:

Black women, like women everywhere else who have been socialized into consumerism, are particularly susceptible to this type of anti-African propaganda. The European female image and European standards of beauty are aggressively flung at them daily, hourly, by the racist white-owned South African media. Typically African features such as full lips, naturally curly hair and dark complexions are presented as ugly. In pursuance of the white ideal, African women bleach their skins, straighten their hair and paint their faces; the result is a somewhat pathetic "carbon copy" of a European female. The skin-lightening creams applied to the face often cause disfigurement, sometimes permanently; mercuric oxide contained in these preparations is deposited in the kidneys and can cause renal damage. ...

The woman's cause is further championed by Qangule and Dikana who articulate several frustrations and inhibitions to which women are subjected. They point out the strides made by women in various walks of life in spite of man's reluctance to grant them full equality.

If anything in this period's literature is patently clear, it is that there is a gradual blur-

ring of the lines of demarcation between male and female roles. A gradual crossover is discernible despite vehement resistance and scepticism by men. Man's authoritarianism is waning by the day and parental control is becoming a thing of the past. Cf. Mkonto (1988 : 20) in this regard:

*DEPICTION OF AN AGGRESSIVE FEMALE*

The ongoing battle of the sexes is a topical event of the post-traditional Xhosa society. The female is on the offensive for she is scrambling for social power. Self-assertiveness, confidence and energetic disposition with disregard for the rights of others characterize her. In her bid to climb to a higher social rank of recognition she may resort to cruelty, callousness and ferocity.

Peteni rounds off this period's literature by highlighting woman's role in politics. While women are faced with male domination on the one side, they are also faced with political oppression on the other. Zuziwe not only represents or symbolises woman's laudable stand in this regard, but she also symbolises woman as fighter, seasoned politician and martyr.

The final cue that comes through in Peteni's work is that while in the first decade woman was regarded as man's downfall, in the beginning of the eighties it is man who can be regarded as woman's downfall.

It should be stressed that the development of this sensibility for the plight of women has not been even or consistent. Writers in some decades picked these issues up while others in the same or in other decades simply ignored or remained reticent about them. There has been no uniformity on, or systematic attention to, the issues, as, in most cases, the writers did not attempt to consciously highlight the plight of the Xhosa woman. That is why we find the writers roughly falling into one or other of the following categories : (a) conservatives who have internalized the stereotypes, and reproduced them for public consumption, (b) the liberals whose paucity underlines that they are clearly in the minority, (c) caricatureurs, e.g. Sinxo, who decide to satirize the issues and hold them up for ridicule thus effectively hiding their own superficiality, and (d) the conservative- cum- liberals, e.g. Burns-Ncamashe, who celebrate both the custom and the tradition while allowing women to occasionally wander away from their prescribed roles. They depict women as, for example, housewives but go further and depict other women in the same work as chieftainesses. This ambivalence has characterised women throughout their lives.

## 8.1 General Conclusion

Perhaps the last question that still needs to be answered is the one asked by Kenneth Little (1980 b:7):

In other words, given that African literature presents a particular picture of African women, what are the implications of this image for African society itself; and, indeed, for the world outside?

Before attempting to answer this crucial question, two facts must first be conceded. Firstly, Xhosa literature has not captured all the developments that have taken place in women's world. One important aspect of women's lives, politics, is, for obvious reasons, either avoided altogether or so disguised and watered down that it becomes difficult to appreciate the great role played by women in this regard. The reason for this deafening silence is, of course, not difficult to find. Xhosa literature is subjected to strenuous screening for any "political tendencies" especially because it is primarily aimed at the school market.

The second factor to be conceded is that a man cannot fully comprehend the dilemma of women, as his sense of judgment will be tainted by the predominant male biases and prejudices in his society. Cf. Abrams (1988 : 209):

It is often held, in addition, that the traditional aesthetic categories and *criteria* for analyzing and appraising literary works, although presented as objective, disinterested, and universal, are in fact infused with male assumptions, interests, and ways of reasoning, so that standard critical treatments of literary texts have been tacitly but thoroughly gender biased.

This seems to be a vicious circle as it is quite obvious that even women will also be biased towards women and that their account may also reflect gross female chauvinism. Subjectivity is very difficult to exclude in both cases.

What has, however, come out very clearly from the study is that woman's position has undergone, for better or for worse, a tremendous change over the past few decades. Despite the strides that women have made in various walks of life, negative stereotypes continue to thwart their progress and to undermine their achievements in various subtle ways.

Two Xhosa essays by eminent Xhosa writers clearly reflect the divergent views among men on the woman question. These essays are used as illustrations because of the essay's ability to focus on and reflect contemporary thinking on topical issues. In his collection of essays entitled *Amavo* (1973), J J R Jolobe, the doyen of Xhosa modern

literature, has an interesting essay under the topic "Umsebenzi wabafazi kwisizwe esiNtsundu" (Women's duties in African society).

In this essay Jobe holds cautious but conservative views about the role of women. It should, of course, be conceded that this is an expository essay that serves to focus attention on role categorization in Xhosa traditional society where the lines of demarcation are clearly marked as can be seen from this introduction:

Le nto ingumzi kukuvumelana komntu oyindoda noyinkazana, ukuba bahlale kunye, bajonge ukondla usapho lwabo ngokufanelekileyo nangokwesiko lungahleleleki ngokweenkedama. Le mvumelwano ke iza nezinye iintsikelelo ezinje ngokwahlulelana ngomsebenzi ophathelele kwintalontle yekhaya. Kwizizwe eziNtsundu, amadoda anomsebenzi wamadoda othe geqe nje ngokuba nabafazi benowabo, esingathi siwuqwalasele. (p.14)

(A household is an agreement between a man and a woman to stay together with the intention of bringing up their family properly in a way that will make them feel like other children and not as if they are orphans. This agreement is accompanied by other blessings such as sharing the duties concerning the welfare of the home. Among the African people, men have men's work which is distinct from women's work as women also have their own which we are going to consider here.)

Jobe articulately analyses women's and men's functions in African society and examines even practices that seem to be blatantly unfair towards women. At the end of this interesting essay, he advocates sharing of these responsibilities although he does not seem to release the woman from her natural confinement. The essay largely confirms Montagu's (ibid:20) views on the role of culture in the division of labour:

Culture is the way of life of a people, its institutions, pots and pans. The division of labor between the sexes is a *cultural* expression of biological differences. The variety of cultural forms which this expression may take in different societies is enormous; what may be considered woman's work in one may be deemed men's work in another. In some cultures men and women may engage in common activities which in other cultures are strictly separated along sexual lines. The important point to grasp is that the prescribed roles assigned to the sexes are not determined biologically, but largely culturally.

In his collection of essays, *Iphulo* (1982), Bongela reviews women's role under the topic "ukhomokazi namhlanje" (Women today). In this fascinating narrative essay, he exposes the present day conflict between the views of men and those of women regarding the latter's role. Men have their backs against the wall trying to defend the last vestiges of their authority and so-called superiority over women as can be seen from this excerpt:

"Iqhelekile le nto yakho, MamXesibe, le yokuba uzenze indoda ekhaya apha, ukuze mna umana undenza umfazi wakho. Ucinga ukuba uza kusoloko undinika imiyalelo, undiphosa ngapha nangapha ngathi ndiyinkwenkwana yakho? Akuzazi ukuba ungumfazi? Wenziwa nayile mibutho uthene nca nayo ilalisa amarhatya ku . . ." (p.51)

("This thing of yours is becoming common, MamXesibe, this one of your making yourself a man in this house, while making me your wife. Do you think that you are going to keep on giving me instructions, bullying me around as if I am your little boy? Don't you know that you are a woman? You're also spoilt by these associations you're constantly attending until late. . . ")

The associations referred to by this irate husband, Ngxekengxeke, are the Young Women's Christian Association and the Zenzele Women's Association. Both are powerful black women's social organisations that have done a lot to uplift and mobilise women. Added to other church associations and political affiliations, they have made women a force to be reckoned with in the South African context.

Bongela continues to show that role categories have either been radically modified or changed over the years. Nowadays it is not an uncommon sight to see men doing, albeit in a slightly disguised manner, what was traditionally women's work while, as pointed out by Bongela, women infiltrate conservative male domains. They drive cars, join the national armies and become cabinet ministers. He cites the case of Miss Stella Sigcau who was a cabinet minister in Transkei for several years.

Miss Sigcau later made history when, in 1987, she became the first woman in the whole of Africa to head a government as premier. Her rise to this position immediately threw the man-woman question to the fore as eminent Xhosa politicians expressed scepticism about her new role. This was certainly a giant step forward for women as could be attested to by the wide coverage this development received in the national media. Her rather short reign could not be ascribed to her failure as even men have no cure for military coups.

It should, however, be stressed that one swallow does not make a summer and that, while Miss Sigcau's elevation had been a significant step forward for black women in particular, it should not blind us to the massive disadvantages and limitations in women's world. Cf. Segal (1987:235):

Most feminists are well aware that women do not overturn existing power structures singly by individually entering the more powerful and privileged terrain of men. Once there, they may merely serve as the exceptions, used to disguise the general exclusion of women. Joining the male elite is anyway demanding, depressing and difficult for many women when it operates through definitions of authority and everyday practices designed to exclude or ignore the situation of most women.

Of course in the political arena black women have relentlessly stood their ground alongside men in the struggle for a better dispensation for the black peoples of this

country. One can only read the autobiographies of women such as Frances Baard, Ellen Kuzwayo, Miriam Makeba, and Sybil Dlamini's book to realise the role played by women in this regard. Numerous other names come to mind - Winnie Mandela, Zodwa Sobukwe, Leah Tutu, Florence Matomela, Dr M A Ramphela, Lillian Ngoyi, Miltha "Mamowu" Calata, to mention but a few. Only J G Strijdom could tell how it felt when 20,000 black women marched on him to protest against passes.

The African woman's role in the church has, no less than in politics, been characterised by serious setbacks. Although the women are by far in the majority in most churches, their role in the church has been, up till now, peripheral and full of frustrations as fundamentalists have sought Biblical justification for not granting them equal status with men, both inside and outside the church. This tendency manifested itself in some of the novels studied.

The role of the church in relegating women to an inferior position within its structures, can, of course, not be denied. One only needs to read Karen Armstrong's *The Gospel According to Woman* to appreciate some of the devastating effects of Christianity on women. Some Xhosa male church leaders, basing their actions on the Bible, use the Scriptures to subjugate women inside and outside the church.

Mqotsi and Mkele made, 44 years ago, a very interesting study of one of the so-called 'separatist churches' viz. Bishop James Ngcanjeni Limba's Church of Christ. This is one of the more conservative, traditionally oriented Xhosa-only churches in the Cape. Vide how Mqotsi and Mkele (1946: 111-112) describe the church's policy on the position of women:

Bishop Limba and his people claim to be staunch adherents of the Scriptural precepts and they argue that according to these, women are inferior to men. They may not participate in public discussions with men. They may however pray in the Church. The place of women in the Church is that which St Pauls (sic) dictated in 1 Timothy 2, 8-15 and Ephesians 5, 22-23 as well as Genesis 3, 16 and relevant passages in the Scriptures. Children too are governed by similar texts.

If a woman feels she could raise a point in connection with any discussion she keeps it to herself until such time as she is alone with her husband (1 Corinthians 14, 34-35). The husband raises the point in the next meeting as though it came originally from him. Men are looked upon as the natural guardians of women (1 Corinthians 11, 3). But if a man does not go to Church or has no faith in God it is still permissible for his wife to uphold religious beliefs, for her husband, if he does not ill-treat her, is thereby blessed (1 Corinthians 7, 12-14) although he may not go to Heaven except by his own exertions (Hezekiel 18,20). This also applies to the woman if she does not believe. These strictures are supposed to apply also to the Bishop's wife - the head of the women's section of the Church. . . .

St Peter gives a very vivid exposition of the attitude of the early church towards the woman - man relationship:

**To wives**

In the same way you women must accept the authority of your husbands, so that if there are any of them who disbelieve the Gospel they may be won over, without a word being said, by observing the chaste and reverent behaviour of their wives. Your beauty should reside, not in outward adornment - the braiding of the hair, or jewellery, or dress - but in the inmost centre of your being, with its imperishable ornament, a gentle quiet spirit, which is of high value in the sight of God. Thus it was among God's people in days of old: the women who fixed their hopes on him adorned themselves by submission to their husbands. Such was Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him 'my master'. Her children you have now become, if you do good and show no fear.

**To husbands**

In the same way, you husbands must conduct your married life with understanding: pay honour to a woman's body, not only because it is weaker, but also because you share together in the grace of God which gives you life. Then your prayers will not be hindered (1Pet. 3: 1-7).

Prockter (1988: 29-30) articulately puts this woman question in perspective as follows:

The role of women in the early church was determined by Hellenistic custom. Where pagan precedent and a newfound understanding of 'freedom in the Spirit' led them to overstep the bounds of 'proper behaviour' the writers of the NT epistles wisely appealed to socially accepted ethical standards to impose restraint.

It is, therefore, quite interesting to note how these foreign Hellenistic customs were not only adopted by African Christians but also followed to the letter for as long as they were not at variance with their own customs.

Be that as it may, it is incumbent on me to focus on the church's current role in ensuring a better dispensation for women - its pillars of strength. It is significant to note that this study coincides with the international Ecumenical Decade 1988 - 1998 in which the World Council of Churches cherishes the following objectives with regard to women:

1. Empowering women - to challenge oppressive structures in the global community, their country and their church;
2. Affirming - through shared leadership and decision making, theology and spirituality - the decisive contributions of women in churches and communities;
3. Giving visibility to women's perspectives and actions in the work and struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of creation;
4. Enabling the churches to free themselves from racism, sexism and classism; from teachings and practices that discriminate against women;
5. Encouraging the churches to take actions in solidarity with women. (Decade Monitoring Group, 1988:56)

Pursuant to the above commitment, the church resolves to take the following decisive

action to uproot female oppression in all its diverse forms and manifestations:

We as a church celebrate the visions and commitment of women to the struggles for justice, peace and the integrity of creation in our wounded world. Women and men created in the image of God are today all invited to take part in the human responsibility for caring for all life. During the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, we as a church will rise up and identify the obstacles to women's full and active participation in church and society. We will work to remove the obstacles. We will affirm women's perspectives and contributions. We will pluck up and break down, build and plant. We will participate with God in transforming the world. We will say to each other, "We will roll the stone away" (op. cit. : 57).

The woman's role in the top church structures has been a burning topical issue over the past few months as is confirmed by the appearance, among others, of the following headlines in the local newspaper, the *Daily Dispatch* : "Pope: ban on women priests justified (24/9/88, p.2) and "Church expects divisions as first woman bishop elected" (26/9/88, p.3).

This clearly demonstrates that the issue is far from being resolved yet both by the Roman Catholics and the Anglicans - two of the most enlightened churches of the world today.

Bishop David Russell (1988:1) in his Diocesan letter, *The Greeting*, under the caption "Labouring Lambeth", sums up both the spirit of the Anglican Church and that of the recent Lambeth Conference regarding this issue as follows:

**MAJORITY VOTE FOR HISTORIC RESOLUTION**

There is a photograph in the Church Times showing a sea of raised hands. The caption underneath reads: "The historic moment when the Lambeth Conference voted in favour of women bishops". 423 Bishops voted in favour, 28 voted against, and 19 abstained. The statement in the caption is both correct and incorrect at the same time! It is incorrect in that a very large number of Bishops remain resolutely against the consecration of women bishops. It is correct in that the plain effect of the resolution is to give Lambeth's blessing to those Provinces and Dioceses which feel called to proceed with the election and consecration of a Woman Bishop.

In the educational sphere, it is interesting and encouraging to note that African women are going all out to obtain university qualifications in a wide spectrum of disciplines. The University of Fort Hare *Vice-Chancellor's Annual Report* (1987 : 7) gives the following figures of the distribution by faculty of men and women students (all races but predominantly African) in the year 1987:

| Faculty           |       | Undergraduate registered for first time | Undergraduate all years | Postgraduate | Sub-totals | Total |
|-------------------|-------|---|-------------------------|--------------|------------|-------|
| Theology          | Men   | 5                                       | 12                      | 1            | 13         | 13    |
|                   | Women | -                                       | -                       | -            | -          |       |
| Law               | Men   | 17                                      | 45                      | 8            | 53         | 67    |
|                   | Women | 11                                      | 14                      | -            | 14         |       |
| Arts              | Men   | 101                                     | 494                     | 34           | 528        | 1211  |
|                   | Women | 162                                     | 643                     | 40           | 683        |       |
| Science           | Men   | 39                                      | 107                     | 11           | 118        | 306   |
|                   | Women | 40                                      | 170                     | 18           | 188        |       |
| Education         | Men   | 35                                      | 107                     | 93           | 200        | 443   |
|                   | Women | 33                                      | 138                     | 105          | 243        |       |
| Economic Sciences | Men   | 13                                      | 55                      | 6            | 61         | 93    |
|                   | Women | 7                                       | 32                      | -            | 32         |       |
| Agriculture       | Men   | 41                                      | 136                     | 29           | 165        | 182   |
|                   | Women | 12                                      | 14                      | 3            | 17         |       |
|                   | Total | 516                                     | 1967                    | 348          | 2315       | 2315  |

The statistics, in a nutshell, reveal the following:

- a) No women students enrolled for Theology; no surprise given the severe constraints on women in ministry,
- b) More male undergraduates enrolled for Law courses,
- c) No female students enrolled for postgraduate studies in Law,
- d) More women enrolled for Arts courses at all levels,
- e) More women enrolled for Science courses at all levels,
- f) More women enrolled for Education courses at Undergraduate and Postgraduate levels,

- g) More men enrolled for Economic Sciences courses,
- h) No women enrolled for Postgraduate courses in Economic Sciences,
- i) Only a small number of women enrolled for courses in Agriculture at all levels.

Up to now, I have deliberately and conveniently avoided one crucial question until the end of this study - does the modern Xhosa woman consciously regard herself as being oppressed or is this so-called oppression just imaginary or an imported western feminist syndrome or "penis-envy" (to use a popular feminist jargon) to which black women do not fully subscribe?

There is no doubt in my mind that the woman question is universal and that women in all countries feel oppressed by male authored norms and attitudes. Patriarchy in all its ramifications and manifestations, has a purposely oppressive effect on all women as confirmed by Myra Strober's (in Reskin, 1984 : 144) definition of patriarchy:

"a set of social relations which has a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men, and a solidarity among them, which enable them to control women. Patriarchy is thus the system of male oppression of women."

Nearer home, this oppression is confirmed by Nkululeko (in Qunta, *ibid*:104) who states in this regard:

As women represent the most oppressed segment of society (more oppressed than even the oppressed men in each society) and constitute the majority, they are an essential part of the struggle of the oppressed in each society. For this reason they must resist attempts to subordinate them and undermine their role in the struggle against other forms of oppression, and in the creation of a programme against sexism in their society.

While most black feminists seem to accommodate some aspects of Western feminism, Ojo-Ade (1976 : 14) seems to be very sceptical of its role in Africa and vehemently maintains that African women have never been oppressed at all:

Little does the braless feminist realize that her African counterpart has never been considered shackled by any means. For, in spite of the borrowed theorizations and totally baseless ranting of the alienated intellectual from Africa in support of the foreign-oriented movement, African woman has long held a position of power in society; she has been an integral part of the struggle for survival; she has ruled millions of people, successfully. She is respected for her qualities and treated as a human being. She is the mother, she from whom all life emanates; she is indeed the one most important element of survival and continuity.

That women are oppressed in one way or another came out very clearly in the discussions. This is also confirmed by Ramphela and Boonzaier (1988:166) who counter the contention that 'Black men are powerless and, subsequently, are incapable of oppress-

ing and exploiting their women' by stating that:

The data presented here [i.e. in their research] suggests that this is not the case. As Brittan and Maynard have commented: 'oppression is multidimensional, because its operation in the one domain is easily transferable to another....one form of domination serves as a paradigm for another.'

What remains to be looked at is the reaction of Xhosa women to this oppression. As black women normally take their cue from other women in the various countries, let us first look at these women's reactions.

Eisenstein's (1979 : 51) uncompromizing reaction to patriarchal dominance is unequivocal:

A man's sexual power is not within his individual being alone. To destroy patriarchal relations we must destroy the structures of sexual, racial and class-hierarchy partially maintained through the sexual division of labour.

Perhaps the case of the Australian women, recently reported in the *Daily Dispatch* (1988:7) is a classic example of White women's abhorrence of male stereotyping and sexist language:<sup>3</sup>

**AUSSIE WOMEN TO STAMP OUT MALE CHAUVINISM**

SYDNEY - Australian women are fed up with being thought of as submissive, cute, dimwitted and sexually available.

Angry at what they say is a chauvinist portrayal in the Australian media, they want to desex the English language in official and other communications.

The Labour Party government has come to their aid, warning civil servants and the male-dominated advertising industry to change their ways or face official wrath.

In a 400-page Style Manual for civil servants, government employees have been ordered to use non-sexist language in all their dealings as first step in changing the image of women and curbing male chauvinism . . . .

Other feminists such as Oakley, one of the most outspoken critics of male dominance, have even suggested the abolition of the institution of marriage. It is felt that marriage binds women to an unfair social contract. Like chastity, it is sometimes abused by men to relegate women to a secondary role for their selfish benefit. Since experience had shown that the South African marriage law was prejudicial to the rights of married black women, this law is now being changed to bring the status of these women in line with that of other South African women.<sup>4</sup> Vide the following article from the *Daily Dispatch* dated January 26, 1989 (p.5):

**CHANGE TO S A MARRIAGE LAW IS WELCOMED.**

EAST LONDON - The Women's Legal Status Committee (WLSC) has welcomed a change in South Africa's marriage law which gives black women the same rights in marriage and divorce as other women.

A WLSC newsletter said: "This is particularly welcomed because for many years the WLSC has made numerous lengthy submissions to the Minister of Justice and the South African Law Commission, putting forward our recommendation to bring all South African women into the same legal dispensation".

The new law takes the place of some of the provisions of the Black Administration Act of 1927.

New marriages will automatically be in community of property, and joint property will be jointly administered by husband and wife.

Marital power which gave husbands complete control of the property of both partners would be abolished.

Community of property may be excluded by an antenuptial contract and an accrual system - whereby what a couple builds up together during the marriage would be divided on death or divorce - would automatically apply.

Couples can change their marriage system from out of community of property to the accrual system and marital power can be removed with the help of an attorney, if both husband and wife agree.

On divorce, a spouse married out of community of property had the right to claim a division of assets belonging to the other party.

A man and woman married under customary law may marry by civil law if the man is not also married by customary law to another woman. A person already married by customary law may not enter a civil marriage to another person.

A marriage officer may not solemnise a marriage of a man unless the man made a declaration that he was not in a customary union with any woman other than the one he intended marrying under civil law.

"Appropriate legislation affecting women is essential . . . to establish legal right (sic) for women equal to those for men," the WLSC said. - DDR

Although Xhosa women are, no doubt, aware of their restrictions under patriarchy, they are extremely accommodating and so big hearted that they tolerate inequities that normally send their white counterparts hopping mad to their guns, divorce courts or mental institutions. They refuse to allow this issue to cloud the real issues facing them, hence Frances Baard's (1986 : 90) stand in this regard:

The woman must take part in everything, even our coming government. And the women must organize and march forward to fight for what they want. The women took part in everything during the struggle. They were there during the going to jail, they were there during everything, the women, so they must really be in the government themselves. Our men are not so selfish that they will refuse. I wish it would happen tomorrow. But freedom can come any time now, any time. I still believe I will see freedom in my lifetime.

This solidarity with men against a common enemy, racism, is also emphasized by Eisenstein (ibid:365):<sup>5</sup>

Although we are feminists and lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive black men

and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand. Our situation as black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with black men against racism while we also struggle with black men about sexism.

Nearer home, Nomathamsanqa Tisani (ibid:6) advocates co-existence as a spillover operation from home to society:

We shall go a long way as a black church and black society if we begin to make an effort to restore the self-worth of womanhood without destroying manhood. They can co-exist. That is God's plan. It is this co-existence that should be the ultimate goal in our Christian homes, which ideal can spill over to the wider society.

It is also very interesting to note that our so-called Coloured sisters adopt the same positive attitude to the question of patriarchy and are as vehemently opposed to racism as their fellow blacks. After decrying her three pronged oppression: by the oppressor, as woman and as a Coloured woman, Gardner (ibid:x) states the black woman's point of view very articulately:

Die swart vrou se dubbele stryd veroorsaak dat haar eerste en vernaamste stryd teen die maghebber sal wees, en dat haar stryd teen patriargie ondergeskik daaraan moet wees, of dat sy so volkome opgeneem is in die stryd teen rasse- en klasseverdeling, dat sy die patriargale samelewing noodgedwonge moet verdra. Tog het hierdie toedrag van sake veroorsaak dat daar tussen swart mans en vroue meer gelykheid is as tussen wit mans en vroue in 'n patriargale samelewing. As gevolg van beide swart mans en vroue se gemeenskaplike doel om hulle van die verdrukker te bevry, en as gevolg van die gedeelde verontregting, het daar meer gelykheid en 'n solidariteit ontstaan tussen swart mans en vroue.

This is confirmed by Thoko Ntshinga (ibid:19) who also advocates greater understanding and mutual love and respect between the sexes instead of confrontation:

"Ndiyiqonda kakuhle into yokuba olu hlobo lwengcinezelo phantse ukuba lukho kulo lonke ilizwe; akukhathalekile nokokuba kuseIndiya, eJapani okanye eMerika nangona eMerika amakhosikazi ahambele phambili ngogwayimbo emadodeni mayelana nempatho embi nokuzingca kakhulu kwamadoda ngokuphathelele kubudoda bawo. Oko andikuthandi. Ndikholelwe ekubeni singaziphumeza iinjongo zethu ngendlela endilisekileyo. Oku kungenzeka phakathi kwakho nomyeni wakho nokokuba sisithandwa sakho esiyindoda. Ukuba niyathandana nokuba niyahlonelana, niya kuphathana njengabantu."

("I am quite aware that this kind of oppression will be found universally; it does not matter whether it is in India, Japan or in America although in America women have reached confrontational levels in their fight against male domination and patriarchy. I don't like that. I believe that we can achieve our goals by less confrontational means. This can easily happen between yourself and your husband or between you and your male partner. If you love and respect each other, you will treat each other like human beings.")

As a direct consequence of this stance, African women, as a group, are relatively silent about patriarchy and rather more vocal about, and actively involved in, the political

struggle, more so since it is obvious that their sporadic protests against the former keep on falling on deaf ears.

Be that as it may, Sheila Rowbotham (1983: 29) articulately warns about this kind of silence:

The oppressed without hope are mysteriously quiet. When the conception of change is beyond the limits of the possible, there are no words to articulate discontent so it is sometimes held not to exist. This mistaken belief arises because we can only grasp silence in the moment in which it is breaking. The sound of silence breaking makes us understand what we could not hear before. But the fact that we could not hear does not prove that no pain existed. The revolutionary must listen very carefully to the language of silence. This is particularly important for women because we come from such a long silence.

If Xhosa women in particular and African women in general do not seem to be sufficiently critical of and vocal about their sex related oppression, it does not mean that they condone it or that it is not there, but their priorities or strategies may be slightly different from western women's.<sup>6</sup> This view is confirmed by Dorothy Driver in a lecture "Reconstructing the self - black South African women and the autobiographical text," delivered recently at a Winter School in Grahamstown and reported by Gille Weintroub in the *Daily Dispatch* dated 9 July 1988, (p.7):

Black males were symbolically castrated by the white patriarchal society, and women had to restore their manhood. In such a system the woman had to position herself as either wife, mother or daughter. Black women writers were still searching for a position from which to write.

Dr Driver suggested that western feminism was beginning to surface alongside the voice of patriarchy which presided over the oral tradition.

If Driver's view of the black man as being symbolically castrated sounds harsh or disparaging, it is interesting to note that Steve Biko (1987 : 34) expressed similar views:

... To a large extent the evil-doers have succeeded in producing at the output end of their machine a kind of black man who is man only in form. This is the extent to which the process of dehumanisation has advanced.

Black people under the Smuts government were oppressed but they were still men. They failed to change the system for many reasons which we shall not consider here. But the type of black man we have today has lost his manhood. Reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the "inevitable position".

Lenta (1987 : 15) cites Nadine Gordimer as follows with regard to feminism in Olive Schreiner's fiction and in the South African context:

I suppose one must allow that she had a right to concern herself with a generic, universal predicament; that of the female sex. . . . Yet the fact is that in South Africa, now as then, feminism is regarded by people whose thinking on race, class and colour, Schreiner anticipated, as a question of no relevance to the actual problem of the

country - which is to free the black majority from the white minority rule.

This interesting difference in approach between white and black women is also highlighted by Diane Lewis (in Ruth, *ibid*:537) who says about African women:

... They clearly establish that their aim is not so much to demand rights as women as to clarify issues or to "demand rights as Blacks first, women second." In fact, the shared interests of black women seem to have little in common with white women. Cade asks: "How relevant are the truths, the experiences, the findings of White women to Black Women? I don't know that our priorities are the same, that our concerns and methods are the same."

Lenta's (*ibid*) stand and point of view is, in my opinion, worth considering as she maintains that:

It cannot be denied that the injustices suffered by blacks at the hands of whites are incomparably greater than those suffered by white women. Nevertheless it is true even now that in all sections of society in South Africa, women are disadvantaged and the black women, especially those living in urban areas, would be resistant to the notion that feminism is a white middle-class luxury.

Although African women do not agree with everything the white feminism stands for, and although their *modus operandi* is, for obvious reasons, bound to differ from that of white feminists, it is doubtful that they are as violently opposed to it as Arianna Stassinopoulos (1974:160) seems to be:

I have sought to show that both common and uncommon sense demand emancipation but deny the tenets of Women's Lib. We are different from men - different but equal. The roles which we can play in society are not artificially restricted by some eternal international conspiracy in which all men since the Stone Age have joined. There is no Palaeolithic plot to hold us back. The female woman will assert her right to be free but she will refuse to allow the Libbers to force her to become an *ersatz* man. The frenetic extremism of Women's Lib seeks not to emancipate women, but to destroy society. The hand that refuses to rock the cradle is all too eager to overturn the world. The female woman wants to live as an equal in the world, not to destroy it in the vain search for an instant millenium. Her search for emancipation will improve and reform; Women's Liberation will deface and destroy.

What is, however, patently clear from this study is that Xhosa women are only too aware of their predicament and they abhor the perpetuation of various pejorative and retardative stereotypes by men who are loath to grant them full equality as human beings and who sometimes treat them as non-persons or accidents of nature.<sup>7</sup> That women's patience is running out is clearly evidenced by KwaNdebele women's successful taking up of cudgels against their government's refusal to allow them to vote, as reported in the *Daily Dispatch* of the 24th May 1988 (p.3):

## WOMEN AWAIT VOTE APPEAL

Daily Dispatch Correspondent

PRETORIA - KwaNdebele women will have to await the outcome of an appeal against a Supreme Court decision upholding their right to vote before being sure of voting in the next election.

The state has indicated it will apply for leave to appeal against the Pretoria Supreme Court judgment which invalidated Proclamation R205 excluding women from voting in the 1984 KwaNdebele general election.

The landmark case was brought by five KwaNdebele housewives against the State President, Mr P W Botha, the KwaNdebele chief minister, Mr Majozi George Mahlangu and 15 other members of the Legislative Assembly.

The Minister of Constitutional Development and Planning, Mr Chris Heunis, is studying the judgment.

A legal source said there were serious implications stemming from the judgment.

At stake is the legality of action taken by the Legislative Assembly since the 1984 election.

In his judgment, Mr Justice C F Eloff, declared the election of Mr Mahlangu and the other members of the Legislative Assembly null and void.

It cannot be denied that there is a streak of light at the end of the tunnel for women. Lawrence Tutu has added his name to the growing list of men and women<sup>8</sup> who want to see women freed from all their man-made shackles. After caustically satirizing female stereotypes he (s.a. : 21) ends up condemning all attempts to denigrate women:

... Chaps, man's virility, guyhood and all that jazz that accompanies this sex vanity are as vain as an attempt by the devil to die on the cross for the sins of men.

"So before we reveal more of our vanity, let us call it a day and go back to our women to enjoy the end of a perfect day in the warmth of their arms.

"There is no life without women. They are an asset to society and to the world."

Looking further away into Africa, it is very encouraging to note that the situation is gradually changing as can be deduced from the following comments by Mineke Schipper (in Jones, Palmer and Jones, *ibid*:45):

However, there are male novelists who advocate African women's liberation and do not adhere to the stereotypes of good (=the traditional loving mother) and bad (=the modern, evil, vicious girl).

A final factor that surfaced very strongly in this study is that, despite the setbacks and the frustrations, women's roles have undergone tremendous change over the past decades. Ntusi (1988:20) enumerates the following changes that have been invariably confirmed by this study:

- (i) From housewife to working woman.

- (ii) From child bearers to bread winners.
- (iii) From dependents to heads of households.
- (iv) From femininity to physical strength.
- (v) From domestic to rough jobs.
- (vi) From being domestic to being widely travelled.
- (vii) From individualism to women's organizations.

The advent of the first black women's publishing company in South Africa, Seriti sa Sechaba, will, certainly, usher in a new era of female protest and resistance to male dominance as can be seen from the following prefatory remarks by Dr Ellen Kuzwayo to *Women in South Africa*, an anthology of women's writings edited by Tsikang and Lefakane (1988 : 4):

Let us take this rare opportunity and document our deep seated feelings, our ideas. Let us begin to sort out and clarify our perceptions about the stereotypes we see around us. Let us challenge some of the unfounded statements made about us by those who profess to know us. Let us tell the world about our achievements, our aspirations, hopes and joys. Let us share with them our successes, our failures, fears and frustrations. Let us reflect on socio-economic-political realities of our times and give our point of view on them.

This attitude augurs well for the future of men-women relations in the black society provided that men are reasonable and sensible enough not to ignore these overtures by the black women. Black women's large reservoir of goodwill stems, as seen above, from several factors. I make bold to say that this is made possible, among other things, by the tremendous 'power behind the scenes' that Xhosa women wield. Some have even suggested that their public 'pseudo subservience' is just a ploy and a strategy to dupe men into gloating over their sham superiority while women indirectly lead the way. This view has been confirmed by many of the male and female authors studied and by many extra-literary female personalities.

Laura Cloete (1988 : 58) articulates the same sentiments after conducting extensive research in Transkei:

Ultimately, women in rural Transkei are willingly subordinate to their husbands, if not to all men. But this does not mean that they lack power. Their publicly subservient behaviour acts, on the one hand, to perpetuate their subordinate position. However, on the other, it is a means by which they can put their influence into practice, albeit in a covert manner, without increasing the potential for conflict in a society already under tremendous pressure. . . .

Cf. Mkonto's (1984 : 67) comments about MaGaba's role in *Buzani kuBawo*:

She capitalizes on the traditional rule which demands that a woman should assume a secondary role to her husband. *She appears to be observing and upholding this rule while in reality she is tactically in control of the situation.* Thus in the manner of a serpent, MaGaba first softens her 'victim' before swallowing it. Note how soft Zwi lakhe has become. . . . (My emphasis)

Nomahlubi Makunga (1979:68), who adds an interesting dimension to the debate about the status of women in African society by stating that because African men regard women as status symbols, they actually encourage them to aspire to competitive roles in the economy, also confirms (ibid:71) Mkonto's view in this regard:

The forces inherent in the social system of the black people seem to have had an effect on their lives. Apparently, the fact that most of the black families were *theoretically headed by males but in practice by females*, may have resulted in the sex role identity pattern in which women are permitted to be aspiring in their strivings. (My emphasis)

It does seem as if this is a universal survival strategy applied *mutatis mutandis* by all women who find themselves in the patriarchal context. Cf. Bassnett (1986 : 138) regarding Margaret Thatcher:

Born a woman, Margaret Thatcher has become a lady. Her success story is not the tale of a woman *who rises to power*, but of a person from the *petite bourgeoisie* who crossed the class lines, in precisely the same way as those lionized working-class musicians and business tycoons who broke out of their class enclave in the economic climate of the 1960s . . . *Margaret Thatcher stresses her womanliness, while playing the power game on the same terms as the men around her.* (My emphasis).

In ending this study, I cannot but echo Little's (ibid: p. x) comments and sentiments:

This is also why I hope that this excursion of mine into the fresh pastures concerned will be welcomed by authors and literary critics alike. If in the process it helps to further mutual understanding in our common concern with humanity, that will be for me a sufficient reward.

## Notes

1. A very valid point is highlighted by Goode (in Mitchell and Oakley, 1976b:217) who says that 'what a novel reflects is mediated by its fictional nature, by the determination of its characteristics ... and by the highly specialized productive situation of the writer'.
2. As reported in the *Daily Dispatch* on 27 June 1989, the sale of skin lighteners 'which have already caused irreparable damage to the skins of some of our fellow citizens' has been prohibited in Ciskei.

3. On 25 August 1989 the Rhodes University Senate unanimously agreed that all sexist language be removed from the University Calendar.
4. The irony of the situation is, however, that although the South African marriage law has been changed, Xhosa women in Transkei are subject to the Multiple Marriages Act which, according to an article in the *Daily Dispatch* of 14 August 1989, p.4, entitles a Transkeian male to marry up to five women. According to the report, 'many women expressed abhorrence at it [polygamy and the Act] and said it had never been condoned, and was seen as sexual exploitation.' Some years ago, Ciskei withdrew a similar bill from its list of bills to be tabled before its parliament. It was never reintroduced. Katherine Frank (in Jones, Palmer and Jones, 1987:18) contends that 'polygamy ... is the most glaringly inequitable and sexist feature of traditional African society.'
5. Cf. Ramphela and Boonzaier (1988:165) who point out that the 'debate about the primacy of race and class over gender in resistance politics rages on,' and 'that in this country it has become a highly emotive issue'.
6. Renee Alberts (ibid: 32) notes that this conflation of gender and racial oppression is also part of the broader ANC policy on women. She however, points out that "the obvious danger of such an approach is that the struggle against women's subordination is potentially subordinated to the more urgent task of ending apartheid."
7. Cf. also Mineke Schipper (in Jones, Palmer and Jones, 1987: 45) who states that 'gaining rights is obviously a wearisome task, not only because of the power of parental authority but also because of the fact that most men comfortably prefer to preserve discrimination when it suits their purpose.'
8. Cf. Montagu's (1953:175) impassioned plea for the liberation of women. It is also remarkable that in the *Daily Dispatch* of 8 January 1990, p.2, it was reported that the Mass Democratic Movement has targeted sexism and racism. An appeal has been made 'to all community organisations in the country to come up with an affirmative action plan against sex- discrimination.' Perhaps the most interesting development in this regard is that reported in *New Nation* (p.6) on 19 January 1990, under the caption "Women for Freedom". The article deals in detail with the international women's conference due to be held in Amsterdam. According to the report, "The Malibongwe conference in Amsterdam has placed the need to unite and organise women firmly on the agenda of the struggle for democracy in South Africa." One of the main objectives is to revive the Federation of S.A. Women which collapsed in the sixties after the banning of the ANC. The force behind the conference is the exiled ANC Women's League.

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