

CULTURE AND TRADITION IN SISWATI MODERN LITERATURE: LESSONS FROM *UMJINGI UDLIWA YINHLITIYO* “LET ONE FOLLOW THE HEART’S DICTATES” BY S.W. NSIBANDZE

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ABSTRACT

Literary works in any language are intended for conveying specific messages. African contemporary writers tap into the reservoirs of their culture and tradition in transmitting their messages. Since most African societies are patriarchal, it is no wonder that they portray patriarchal inclinations in their modern products. This article seeks to review the patriarchal air; that is the trends that suppress the voice, actions, and visibility of women in the public domain. An analysis of the Siswati play entitled *Umjingi udlwa yinhlitiyo* “Let one follow the heart’s dictates” by SW Nsibandze will illustrate the upshots of using culture and tradition in promoting the theme of the play, while challenging some cultural stereotypes. The womanist approaches will form the theoretical foundation for this discussion. On the basis of this play, I will draw conclusions from the research that has already been undertaken to make proposals on how traditional and cultural trends can be used in streamlining gender equality.

Keywords: culture; modern literature; polygamy; tradition; womanism



INTRODUCTION

Literature that was read by emaSwati prior to the country's independence was written in isiZulu because then the Siswati language had not been converted to the written form. It was only after emaSwati had attained independence from the British colonists in 1967 that they started developing the writing of their language. Until then emaSwati employed the oral tradition to convey their cultural practices and beliefs, as well as both the social and philosophical aspects of their lives. This article seeks to evaluate patriarchy with its trends and endeavours, as patriarchy is behind the oppression and domination of women by men, and or by other women, a tendency which removes the voice and visibility of women in the public domain.

The rationale behind this discussion is that indigenous and the cultural trends are integral to the African literary writers' lives—thus these aspects still consciously or unconsciously form part of their modern creations. While these traditional and cultural aspects enrich and heighten the quality and relevance of the contemporary fiction, it is also arguable that some undesirable patriarchal trends also find their way into contemporary fiction.

The analysis will be conducted, using a Siswati play written by a woman playwright S.W. Nsibandze entitled, *Umjingi udliwa yinhlitiyo*, loosely translated as, "One has to eat soft porridge that he/she likes." Figuratively, the title means "Let one follow the heart's dictates"—a person should be allowed to follow his or her heart when it comes to matters of love. The article focuses on language, issues of *lobola*, forced marriages, polygamy, obligatory motherhood, women as children, belief in ancestors and witchcraft. The intention is to illustrate how literature can be employed into service both as an agent for male domination and for the mainstreaming of gender inequality.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The desired womanism referred to for the analysis can be referred to as an "amalgamated womanism." This approach may be explained as an African womanist theory that is an amalgamation of a number of womanist theories. It opposes forced marriages, exclusion of women in decision-making structures in their homes and communities, the oppression of women by their mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law and their parents. In essence, this approach embraces heterosexuality, polygamy that is free of abuse, discrimination, and natural motherhood—while at the same time advocating for the dual approbation of men and women in all domains of life. The discussion is centred mainly on cultural and traditional practices and their impact on women and their freedom.

The article conveys a strong conviction that the proliferation of male domination has been infused to a great extent into almost all cultures of the world, as observed by Benjamin (2000, 93). Benjamin (2000) further accentuates that the subservience of women to men has in most cases become an acceptable way of life. Patriarchy as the driving force behind this form of oppression is delineated by Dlamini (1995, 14) as follows:

Patriarchy may be viewed as the power of the fathers, which is social, ideological, political and in which men by force, direct pressure, or through tradition, religion, law and customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play and in which the female is subsumed under the male.

The quote above affirms that tradition and culture may be instrumental in the subordination of women, and may also influence the way women perceive themselves. This form of oppression has infiltrated with great success into the relations between men and women—even in modern communities. In most African communities patriarchy has dictated the way indigenous traditions and modern cultures are practiced. It is imperative to note that patriarchal oppression is at times perpetuated by women on other women, chiefly by female in-laws from the husband's family.

The term womanism was first used by Walker in her book entitled, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983). This term came as a response to the need for a movement that would fight gender disparities that affected black women. Womanism was, therefore, a specific movement that addressed black women's identity and their gender issues. Walker (as quoted by Kolawole 1997, 21), describes a womanist as:

A black feminist or feminist of colour ... Who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture...sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female....

Walker's womanism sparked criticism, premised on its controversial nature and its irrelevance to some matters that affect African women, both on the continent and in the diaspora. A number of African scholars came up with different definitions of "womanisms" that would purportedly address some of the issues that were not appropriately addressed by Walker's womanism. Scholars involved in this debate included Okonjo Ogunyemi, Hudson-Weems, Ogundipe Leslie, Nnaemeka Acholonu and Kolawole Mary, to name a few. Their main objective was to come up with a womanist theory that would successfully address the complex and diverse gender-related issues experienced by women in Africa and the diaspora. I strongly align myself with the views of the above scholars, because the nature and magnitude of gender oppression experienced by African women is diverse and demands to be approached from different angles and also demands that different strategies be employed. To illustrate some of the dynamics, there is polygamy, the oppression of women by female in-laws, culture, traditions and customary practices—and all of

these are unique to each context. It is imperative to state that some of the aspects that Walker perceives as oppressive are in fact, embraced by most African women. For instance, the majority of African women consider motherhood as vital to their womanhood. This in principle means that they do not accept Walker's womanism when it alludes to women loving other women sexually.

CONTEXTUALISING THE ELEMENTS OF THE STORY

The context of any story is its very significant element. If the context is not appropriate, the events that take place are rarely convincing. The playwright has deliberately chosen the rural settlement of Engcoseni in Swaziland, where Siswati tradition and culture are still highly prevalent and practiced as the setting of the play. The reason for choosing the rural context is to allow the events and activities of the story to unfold in a convincing manner. This is how the story is able to deliver the intended theme. This context is credible to all the events that form the plot of Nsibandze's play—natural vegetation, the rivers, forests, and traditional homesteads are all elements of a rural context that render the events that take place convincing.

This is a context in which typical Siswati culture and traditional practices are the order of the day. In effect, the community is the custodian of the culture that forms the foundation of the events of the whole play.

Lindsey (1997, 53) proclaims that:

A **culture** involves the total way of life of a given society. It includes material aspects, such as buildings and books, as well as nonmaterial aspects such as religion and roles. Our culture defines which behaviour patterns are considered appropriate. Indeed, culture encompasses all that we have developed and acquired as human beings, with each generation transmitting essential cultural elements to the next generation...

The above quote gives credence to the view that culture is sustained through the use of institutions that ensure that it is acquired and sustained throughout generations. The community of emaSwati is no exception to such leanings. Culture can broadly be understood as a collection of shared and commonly practiced tradition, social heritage, customs, knowledge, skills, and beliefs. Nsibandze chose a credible setting that does not only allow typical traditional acts to occur, but theme. Mafela (2012, 191) proclaims:

Among all the uses of literature, however, serving as a vehicle for culture transmission is the most important. Culture can be transmitted to readers in different ways, that is, through language usage and depiction of characters, themes and settings.

The success of the theme is dependent on the proper selection of, amongst other elements, the setting. This is where culture unfolds and contributes to the success of

the theme. The specific culture in this particular play is the culture that pertains to women and gender.

THE SYNOPSIS OF *UMJINGI UDLIWA YINHLITIYO* ("LET ONE FOLLOW THE HEART'S DICTATES") BY SW NSIBANDZE

Sibandze forces his younger daughter Sebentile to be married to her brother-in-law Mshiyeni. Sebentile's elder sister LaSibandze is married to Mshiyeni, and is alleged to be barren. Sebentile defies her father Sibandze and accepts Lusekwane as the love of her heart. An authoritative Sibandze cannot accept being defied. Mshiyeni, who has strong feelings of love for Sebentile, resorts to consulting his *inyanga* (traditional healer) for enigmatic power to kill his competitor Lusekwane. In his encounter with Lusekwane, Mshiyeni overpowers him and leaves him to die in the veld. Two women who were passing by rescue Lusekwane—they go and report the matter to the local *inyanga* (traditional healer), by whom he is healed. The matter is escalated to the chief of the area, who invites the whole community to the traditional court that tries the matter. Mshiyeni is found guilty of attempted murder and is fined two cows. He also gives his victim a cow for damages caused. Lastly, he gives a cow to the traditional healer who saved Lusekwane's life. In all Mshiyeni parted with four heads of cattle for his wrong doing. Sebentile is granted the freedom to publicly declare whom she wants as her lover, and she chooses Lusekwane. Sebentile's parents, notably her father, who acknowledges his wrongdoing, offers Lusekwane's family accommodation and even slaughter a beast for them. At the end Sebentile's parents allow her to leave with her in-laws after realising that Mshiyeni is capable of killing for Sebentile.

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY

The discussion of the story centres on the use of culture and tradition in advancing the theme of the play. The analysis of the story highlights the challenges faced by women, as a result of some cultural stereotypes. Drawing from the literature on the use of culture and tradition, this story reviews the different dimensions of the treatment of women as identified in the story.

The Title and Proverbial Language

Nsibandze (1991), a woman playwright, uses the title *Umjingi udliwa yinhlitiyo*, which literally means let one follow the heart's dictates. In essence, this proverb shouts loudly—that let there be freedom of love. In effect, this proverb questions the culture of forced marriages in Swati communities.

Sebentile: *Hawu make, mine ngiye kaFakudze? Kantsi umunfu uyamikiswa yini endvodzeni angayitsandzi?*

Sebentile: (“Oh no mother! You mean I must be married to the Fakudze family? Does one get pushed to be married to a man that she does not love?”). (Nsibandze 1991, 27)

LaMasuku: *Ngelisiko lesiSwati intfombatana iyenziswa mntfwanami.*

LaMasuku: (“My girl, according to Siswati culture, a girl is sent to be married by a man chosen by her parents”). (Nsibandze 1991, 27)

The whole play is about forbidden love as Sebentile is being forced to obey her father’s instruction to marry the man she doesn’t love. Sebentile defies her father and ends up with Lusekwane, the man she loves. The play concludes in a manner that affirms the message of the title. The proverb is well utilised and successfully drives home the point that women should be free to follow their hearts.

The proverbial language continues to be used in this dialogue:

Vusi: *Uyangihleka Ndleleni, ucala kubona lingce lihluftuke intsamo ngami?*

Vusi: (“You are laughing at me Ndleleni. Is it for the first time that you see a vulture without feathers on its neck?”). (Nsibandze 1991, 21)

Figuratively, Vusi is asking his friend if it is for the first time he sees a person whose efforts are not bearing any rewards? Vusi finds his friend not to be sympathetic to his plight. Ndleleni also employs a proverbial expression when he warns Vusi against his intent to fight his competitor Lusekwane.

Ndleleni: *Ubobona ungatidvonselile emanti ngemsele wakitsi.*

Ndleleni: (“Be careful, lest you find yourself in serious trouble”). (Nsibandze 1991, 36)

Figuratively, this statement suggests that one needs to be careful with certain intentions as he/she may find him/herself in more trouble. For instance, if Lusekwane overpowers Vusi the latter may suffer from the consequences of his ill-advised decision—especially because he does not know how skilled Lusekwane is in fighting.

Therefore, traditional statements do not just serve a cosmetic function but promote the culture that emaSwati treasure so highly. In this way, the proverbial expressions are preserved and will be passed to the next generations, who in most cases reside far from rural areas, where such language is mostly used. The playwright should be commended for her use of proverbial language in the development of her play.

The Culture of Lobola

Lobola is a term that refers to the practice of giving cattle to the bride’s father or family by the groom’s family. Views on *lobola* have varied from generation to generation and from one community to another. Some researchers consider *lobola*

as the purchase price, a view that has been debated broadly. For instance, Nkumane (1999, 145) observes:

In virtually all African societies, traditional marriage is confirmed by the payment of bride price by the husband and his close relatives, to the bride's father and his relatives. Presumed beneficiaries are men, especially the fathers.

The emphasis in Nkumane's observation is on *lobola* being a payment and bride price. I strongly distance myself from such a definition. According to the Siswati custom, *lobola* ought to be a token of appreciation given by the groom's family to the bride's family. In return, the bride's family also gives presents to the groom's family in the form of *umhlambiso* (wedding gifts).

The two men sent by Mshiyeni's family engage in this dialogue with Sibandze:

Indvodza yekucala ...*Tsine sentiwa kunitsandza nje kuphela. Futsi sigabe ngetinkhomo, asifehli.*

The first man: ("We are driven by love only. We are also bringing you cattle without complaint"). Nsibandze. (1991, 19)

All along, Sebentile's father did not welcome the request by the Fakudze family, represented by the two men. However, after hearing that they are bringing him cattle, his attitude immediately changes.

Sibandze: *Tinkhomo tona ngiyatifuna, futsi ngifuna tihambe embili, lishumi letinkhomo, bese kuba lugege nensulamnyembeti.*

Sibandze: ("I do want cattle. I want them up-front, ten heads of cattle, one that is slaughtered for the *lobola* function (*lugege*) and one that belongs to her mother (*insulamnyembeti*"). (Nsibandze 1991, 19)

As mentioned already, at first Sibandze is not keen to entertain the two men sent by the Fakudze family. However, on realising that they are offering a full set of *lobola* cattle, his attitude immediately changes. Meanwhile, his wife doesn't want to be party to the request, but her husband shouts at her and tells her to shut up as he is busy talking with other men. Here we see the power of wealth that men acquire once *Lobola* is paid for their daughters.

In Nsibandze's play, Mshiyeni voluntarily offers *lobola* for Sebentile under the pretext that she is going to bear children for her elder sister, who is alleged to be barren. What is interesting is that, according to Siswati custom, Sebentile ought to join her sister as an *inhlanti*; that is a girl who is given to her brother-in-law to bear children for her sister or aunt. According to Siswati culture *Lobola* is not paid for *inhlanti*. In essence, the custom is being abused by both Mshiyeni and Sibandze who are driven by patriarchal inclinations. In this case Mshiyeni loves Sebentile and wants to marry her as his second wife, but hides behind the custom. In support of the above assertion Zondi (2011, 21) proclaims:

Spurred on by the greed and materialism of the girls' fathers who tried to replenish their cattle byres by offering their daughters to the highest bidders regardless of the girls' wishes. Wealthy men used *lobola* to 'purchase' as many women as they could afford. The custom of *ukulobola* is associated with gender construction in African cultures.

Even though the sentiment in the above quote applies to the traditional emaSwati society, there are some African communities that still practice this culture. This tendency subjugates women and puts them in a vulnerable position of being abused by their men, who believe they have bought them. It is unfortunate because the rationale used by men to sustain the existence of these practices is that such practices cannot be abandoned or changed as they were practised by their forefathers. In actual fact, the reason is that they serve patriarchal interests. The behaviour of Mshiyeni and Sibandze in this play highlights the greed and abuse of power that these men indulge in.

The issue of *lobola* is becoming more complex, especially in the 21st century. According to Nkosi (2011, 72), most female participants in her research asserted that gender inequality was ingrained in the *lobola* practice, while the male participants argued against the assertion. Women pleaded for equality in marriage even if *lobola* is paid. Nkosi indicated that some male participants proposed that *lobola* needs to be equally paid from both sides, which means the bride's family should also pay *lobola* to the groom's family in appreciation for the groom who is marrying their daughter. An explanation given by Mafela (2014, 5) upholds that:

Marriage in African societies is not reciprocal, i.e. a man and a woman do not marry each other; a man marries a woman and a woman is married by the man. This means that a man takes the woman. As a result, the man is expected to offer bride-wealth for the woman. The woman in turn leaves her parents and joins the family of the man.

One could then postulate that the man has an upper hand in this union. This means that the man will be in control of everything particularly, the economy and wealth of the family. Nkumane (1999, 145) makes a valid point when she declares that, "it is the aspiration for a high economic status that drives fathers, to force their daughters to marry men with a lot, of cattle." The womanist approach cannot condone this practice, as it has become a source of controversy in most instances. It also has become a source of abuse for women.

For instance, nowadays with the prevalence of HIV/AIDS women whom *lobola* has been paid for cannot negotiate safe sex or take decisions regarding their bodies. Khanengoni (2012, 13) alleges this about the vulnerability of married women:

Married men's control over sex does not only infringe women's rights, it also exposes them to HIV infection. Some married women find it very hard to negotiate safe sex since their husbands simply say 'Dzakaenda dzakapfeka macondom here?' ("Did the cattle we paid go with condoms on?").

In essence, women lose all their rights after *lobola* has been bestowed to their parents. Womanists would undoubtedly refute such a practice, as it is clear that it is the woman who suffers.

Obligatory Motherhood and Barrenness

Obligatory motherhood is one of a number of issues deeply embedded in patriarchal perceptions, and it forms the core of the conflict in Nsibandze's play. Sebentile is supposed to join her sister as the second wife since her sister is alleged to be barren. In most African communities a barren wife is considered useless and to have failed in the execution of her key responsibility. Masuku (2005, 84) succinctly states that "according to cultural expectations, the main duty of a wife is to be productive. A barren woman is condemned whilst the one who is able to bear children gets better recognition in the family."

In Nsibandze's play, the fact that Sebentile's sister is barren had become an issue of great concern her in-laws. However, in the play it has not even been proven scientifically that she is indeed the one who is barren. Again, because of power inequality, LaSibandze cannot even challenge her husband about his certainty of the fact that she is the one who is barren. In this view, Ngcangca (as quoted by Masuku 2005, 137) observes that "if the couple is not able to produce children, the curse is usually on the woman. This is a common observation in most of the African communities." EmaSwati are no exception to such dispositions.

In confirmation Akujobi (2011, 3) states:

Every woman is encouraged to marry and get children in order to express her womanhood to the full. The basis of marriage among Africans implies the transfer of a woman's fertility to the husband's family group. Motherhood is so critical in most traditional societies in Africa that there is no worse misfortune for a woman than being childless. A barren woman is seen as incomplete; she is what Mbiti calls the "dead end of human life, not only for genealogical level but also for herself."

Amongst emaSwati a barren woman is called by derogatory names such as *inyumba* ("the one who does not bear children" or *umgodzi longagcwali* meaning ("a hole that never gets filled up"). This becomes the case with LaSibandze who is the one who is allegedly barren, no-one sympathises with her anguish. Akujobi (2011, 4) further alludes:

A woman without a child is viewed as a waste to herself, to her husband and to her society. So in cultural/traditional sense, one finds out that patriarchies can easily deploy notions of motherhood to foster traditions no matter how obsolete these may be, and in especially these traditions motherhood also becomes a means of female control.

It is as if LaSibandze has deliberately put herself in this position of not been able to conceive; as if it has been ascertained that she is indeed the one who is barren.

There is a customary step that has not been followed in this play; that of having LaSibandze being taken to her parents' home for her parents to take her to traditional healers to ascertain if she is indeed barren. As it stands, the playwright left out this stage deliberately, with the intention of highlighting how men can manipulate culture to achieve their ends. Even her parents did not, at any stage suggest to take their daughter for treatment.

As much as womanists embrace motherhood, they still consider it abusive when it is obligatory or being forced onto women—particularly so if there is no solid evidence that proves that the woman is the one who is barren.

Forced Marriage and Polygamy

In this play forced marriage and polygamy benefit men and strengthen their power over women. Among emaSwati there is a custom of *kwendzisa*; that is to have a girl forced to be married to a man chosen by her parents. Under this custom, some men and women are forced to marry a person who is not of their own choice (Nkumane 1999, 144). More often than not, forced marriages are coupled with polygamy. On the whole, women tend to suffer most in such marriage arrangements. For a man, even if he finds himself in such a situation, he still has leeway to marry another wife—the one he loves. Culturally, women do not have such a liberty. Polygamy is one aspect of culture that is used in this play. The disadvantages of such a marriage are well summarised by Dlamini (1995, 92) when she observes:

Polygamy is a common institution in Africa. The most disturbing thing about it, is that it creates serious problems for the women. It involves the husband's sharing cohabitation among his wives. It often makes women enter a world of jealousy and uncertainty since one wife may be pushed aside to make room for another.

Even though there are such expectations in a polygamous marriage, a womanist view is that a woman who enters into a polygamous marriage should do so out of her own choice. Even the first and/or second wife should give her blessings for such an addition. Indeed, in some instances it has worked better to have a girl from the same family join her sister or aunt as an additional wife, which is the case in Nsibandze's play. Womanists welcome some cultural practices that are constructive and are applied without putting pressure on or bringing discomfort to any of the women concerned. In this case, Sebentile's sister is ignored and is not involved in the arrangement being made for her sister to join her as per the dictates of Siswati culture. In this case she is the most affected individual, as she is expected to accept a new wife and the fact that she now has to be in a polygamous marriage. Womanists do not condone such a treatment towards women. The experience proves to be very traumatic for Sebentile's sister, who feels extremely isolated and neglected. Unfortunately, she is helpless, as a result of the unequal power relations in society, which gives more power to men.

On one occasion, LaSibandze attempts to bare her soul to her mother-in-law, LaNkhosi. Her mother-in-law tells her to stop crying because the community will ridicule her for refusing to share her husband with another woman. LaSibandze even considers walking out of the marriage. Her mother-in-law, goes on to ask if any woman has ever been killed by being in a polygamous marriage. This illustrates an instance of a woman who is being oppressed by another woman. LaNkhosi is a typical product of a patriarchal society. Such attitudes from some African women make it very difficult to eradicate gender inequality as such women see nothing wrong with it.

The main character, Sebentile is not prepared to accept being forced into a marriage that she doesn't want. She also does not want to be in a polygamous marriage. While Sebentile accepts the love of her heart, Lusekwane, she fights the alleged cultural practice with the help of elements found in the cultural context. In this case, the playwright sends a strong message that culture and its complexity is not responsible for the gender oppression that is taking place, alleged to be cultural. Culture as a phenomenon cannot be challenged. Otherwise, the ancestors will be angered and allow disastrous things to happen as punishment.

Sebentile, through her bravery, comes out victorious by being resolute and facing the challenge head on. Her victory elucidates that women should be headstrong in confronting abusive cultural practices. Womanists commend such bravery and would like to see more women following Sebentile's example in this play. It is imperative to keep in mind that emaSwati exist as part of the global community; therefore, their literary products should align themselves with global fundamentals and paradigms. The fight against patriarchy and gender inequality are some of the battles fought by the global village with the intent of ensuring equality and freedom for all.

A Woman as a Child

One of the traditional aspects that the playwright highlights in developing her drama is the traditional idea of women being treated as children. Mshiyeni has a discussion with Sehlephi, his half-sister:

Sehlephi: *Kodywa utsi utayitsandza umkhula wami (LaSibandze) lenzaba?*

Sehlephi: ("Do you think my sister-in-law will like what you intend doing?") Nsibandze (1991, 8)

Mshiyeni: *Umfati ngumfati Sehlephi. Ute umlomo endzabeni lenje. Ngimi makhonya futsi.*

Mshiyeni: ("A woman remains a woman Sehlephi. She has no say on matters of this nature. I am the senior master in that house"). (Nsibandze 1991, 8)

This conversation displays beyond anybody's doubt that LaSibandze is not expected to have a say on her husband's decision to marry a second wife. Mshiyeni further

states that he is the master in his house; thus he would not expect his wife to express her feelings. Sebentile argues against being forced to be married to her sister's husband. LaMasuku gives Sebentile a stern warning:

LaMasuku: *Sebentile sengikutjelile konkhe lebungikubitele kona. Wonkhe umuntfu lapha ekhaya ungaphasi kwababe. Nangabe utikhetsela kwentela phansi emavi akhe, angati kutsi ngumuphi lomunye uyihlo lotamlalela.*

LaMasuku: ("Sebentile, I have told you all that I wanted you to hear. Everyone in that family is under your father. If you choose to overrule his word, I do not know *who* else will you respect"). (Nsibandze 1991, 27)

This conversation clearly indicates that Sibandze as the head of the family expects no one to challenge his instruction. Therefore, Sebentile is seen to be inviting serious trouble by challenging her father.

LaMasuku is being treated like a child, yet she is supposed to be Sibandze's partner. Even Sebentile's age ought to earn her some respect from her father, but Sibandze insists on exercising authority and does not allow any opposition. Amongst emaSwati, women are generally considered as weaklings—both physically and mentally—hence they are at times physically abused as a way of shaping their characters.

Belief in Ancestors and Witchcraft

The majority of emaSwati have a strong belief on the existence of ancestors and the use of traditional medicine. Often, when things are not going well in someone's life the misfortune is often ascribed to ancestors, who may be angry. Unacceptable behaviour such as going against custom is often alleged to anger ancestors. For instance, in the play, LaNkhosi sees two identical snakes few days apart from each other. Her husband blames that on Mshiyeni, who has not yet married another wife. Ojaide (1992, 44) alludes:

The mystically minded African believes that not everything that happens in life can be explained rationally. There are ancestors, spirits and gods influencing the affairs of the living. There are natural laws which when violated trigger punitive responses in the form of ailments from the spiritual world.

It is for this reason that after LaNkhosi has seen two identical snakes she ascribes the occurrence to ancestors who are angry, as evidenced in the conversation between LaNkhosi and her husband, Mkhulunyelwa.

LaNkhosi: *Nangifika lapha ekhaya ngitsi ngetfula inyandza yetinkhuni, nansi inyoka itigocile khona lapha kulenyandza.*

LaNkhosi: ("When I arrived home and put down the bundle of firewood I saw a snake that had coiled itself on the bundle"). (Nsibandze 1991, 3)

Mkhulunyelwa: *Watsi Sikhondze labaphansi bayatsetsa, batsi akutekwa ngani umfati lotawandzisa lelikhaya, atale bantfwana. Futsi bangeke babindze kungakenteki lentfo labayifunako.*

Mkhulunyelwa: (“Sikhondze said ancestors are shouting at us about the issue of not marrying another wife who will enlarge this family by bearing children. They will not stop shouting until what they want is done”). Nsibandze (1991, 3)

This conversation ought to put pressure on Mshiyeni to marry another wife. The mention of ancestors serves as a warning, and it is clear that something more serious may happen if what the ancestors want is not done.

Moeketsi, in Meko (2011, 206) explains how revered an *inyanga/ngaka*/traditional healer is amongst Africans in these words:

The African *Ngaka* holds a unique position in the African society. First and foremost he is a product of *Badimo* the ancestral spirits who are living dead who even though dead are inseparably involved in the lives of their kinsfolk.

This is the reason why everything that comes from Sikhondze is taken in a serious light in the Fakudze family. Sikhondze is also the healer who treated LaSibandze for barrenness. When Mshiyeni resorts to using witchcraft to fight his opponent in order to win Sebentile’s love, he consults Sikhondze, who practices witchcraft as well.

Mshiyeni: ... *Mine ngifuna kutsi lomfana simkhweshise emhlabeni angaphindzi abonane nalentfombatana.*

Mshiyeni: (“My wish is that we kill this young man so that he never sees this girl again”). (Nsibandze 1991, 48)

Sikhondze: *Kutawufuneka ukhe indvuku uyiletse lapha kimi. Ngifuna kuyipheka ngesihlungu lesimatima kabi ngiyiloye.*

Sikhondze: (“You must bring a stick to me. I will bewitch it with strong medicine such that it does not take long to kill him”). (Nsibandze 1991, 48)

Indeed, Mshiyeni hits Lusekwane, who becomes unconscious. Mshiyeni leaves him lying in the veld, convinced that his victim is dead. Subsequently, two women find Lusekwane, who appears dead and report the case to Gobela, the best traditional healer in the Ngcoseni area. Gobela goes with the women and finds Lusekwane, who has lost his mind and cannot speak. Gobela takes him to his place and treats him, using indigenous herbs.

The matter is escalated to the chief of the area. The chief invites the community to his traditional court, where Mshiyeni’s case is tried. The chief finds Mshiyeni guilty of attempted murder and is very angry with the culprit. Mshiyeni is instructed to give four heads of cattle as a fine. He gives Gobela a cow for treating Lusekwane. He also instructs him to give a cow to Lusekwane for the damages he has caused him. The chief also makes Mshiyeni pay two heads of cattle as fine for his bad and horrible behaviour. By so doing the chief wants to send a message that no one should

ever commit such horrendous acts in his area. Indeed, even Sibandze changes his attitude and allows his daughter to be married to Lusekwane, the love of her life. He offers to accommodate the Lukhele family after the hearing. He slaughters a beast to entertain his new in-laws.

CONCLUSION

Nsibandze's play makes a credible product in that she uses aspects of indigenous culture to show how men use culture for their own benefit and to perpetrate discrimination against women. She successfully exposes her audience to both the positive and negative aspects of the Siswati culture that she uses to characterise the context of her play. This assists the audience to gain a balanced view of Siswati cultural practices. It is astonishing to see an indigenous institution—such as the traditional court—protect both men and women equally so that they may enjoy life as they live side by side. It is also impressive that the play has confirmed the fact that culture is not static, but moves with the times. It is also heartening to see some of the old customs like *kwendzisa* being challenged to victory. This is in line with the view that culture is not static but dynamic, thus it must be approached as such.

An African author of modern literature cannot always divorce him/herself from the original form of literature that has always been part and parcel of his/her existence. Such elements do not only add beauty to the modern literary product but also uphold and sustain indigenous and cultural practices. Used responsibly, they strengthen the identity of emaSwati and allow them to pride themselves as a transformed nation in as far as the scourge of gender inequality is concerned. In a nutshell, the Swati readership and/or audience deserves to read modern literature that advocates and endorses their culture. However, it is of crucial importance that writers of modern literature align their products with global fundamentals and paradigms, as emaSwati exist as part of the global community.

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