

Position of Women in Zulu and Shona Societies: The Case of *Uvalo Lwezinhlonzi* and *Nervous Conditions*

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Abstract

African cultures epitomize patriarchy in which cultural practices are inherent and in that way translated through certain practices. Some of the patriarchal ideologies, while present in African cultures in general, do sometimes focus specifically on the relationship between men and women. Superiority of the male child and the convention of the female being responsible for the domestic space are amongst sensitive issues that critical debate on any discourse on patriarchy and gender may be perceived to be mitigating. While gender issues are a universal concern some societies are far deeply affected by them than others as this article will demonstrate.

Tackling issues of gender discrimination and in their distinctive contexts, Jordan Ngubane and Tsitsi Dangarembga in *Uvalo Lwezinhlonzi* (1975) and *Nervous Conditions* (1988) respectively, address issues that still affect most women within the African continent even in the twenty first century. This situation is not restricted to rural and illiterate women but extends to urban and educated women just as this will be revealed through selected novels. This article examines intrinsic gender oppressive practices prevalent in Zulu and Shona cultures taking into account the voice of male and female authorship. Some of the most critical key issues to be investigated centres around language, gender and power as reflected in the literary works of these authors. An analysis of key characters in the two novels will be juxtaposed with an objective of re-thinking new ways of redressing gender iniquity in African societies in particular. Using as my framework feminist approach to gender as a social construct, I will challenge the traditionally held notion of women as inferior and in the process offer some perspectives on the subject in question.

Keywords: literature, patriarchal discourse, gender, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Jordan Ngubane

Introduction

Within a family structure optimum psychological well-being need to be maintained at all times. As such, diverse gender roles regulate individual and general social behavior, sanctioning only specific behaviors for each gender. Mbiti (1969: xi) argues that traditional concepts still form the essential background of many African people though obviously this differs from family to family and from place to place. Given that disagreement is inevitable in any human society, specific forms are but one of the explicit means through which verbalization of these conflicts amongst women and men echo the value systems of various societies. Furthermore, it is known that literature is highly influenced by the society and cultural contexts in which it is produced or read. Needless to say it is a reflection of how a particular society, through family, has been socialized; and socialization plays an important role in society since it welcomes and incorporates new members into a particular society. In this way values, beliefs and norms are transferred from one generation to another. In patriarchal societies people are socialised to believe that masculine gender is superior to feminine gender. However, as argued by Murray (1999:72) ‘there is no factual inherent reason why the male should be valued more than the female’. Taking the argument further Memela (2005: 96) argues that it then becomes a problem when male and female differential socio-cultural evaluative categories are used negatively or used to benefit only one group of society over another.

It is necessary to caution that feminist approach is not a monolithic process but rather one that incorporates various argumentative schools of thought. Bearing in mind that a common characteristic of literary texts is that they never quite fit the critical –analytical grids that readers try to place over them in that they always mean more than we can grasp and explain, I will nevertheless present my own response to the reading of these texts as far as feminist approach to gender as a social construct is concerned. The article attempts to challenge the notion within patriarchal societies; of women being considered inferior. In this regard the assertion of Anderson and Zinsser (1988: xiv) holds true when they claim that in as much as there are many

factors which have limited women's lives, negative cultural traditions have proved the most powerful and the most resistant to change.

The focus as far as this article is concerned, is the common commitment to the cause of objection against conventional male and female role designation in society. Because the discussion revolves around patriarchal power and gender, the article legitimately draws from post structural feminist theory as put forward by Weedon (1987) who perceives patriarchal power as structural and existing in institutions and social practices rather than merely being individual intentions; thus reinforcing that engendering is a social construct. The theory further speculates that power rests on the societal meaning validated by biological and sexual distinguishing features. Women are thus defined in relation to the male norm with the result that women's welfare is subordinated to that of men. However, women in their own right are complete members of the species to which both sexes belong and as women they are also capable of participating in the full range of human activities. Through analysis of the two novels these 'entrenched' ways of thinking about gender roles will be debated with an objective of finding alternative ways of addressing the matter. Furthermore, in the twenty first century, and within the context of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this deep rooted issue should not even be a constant subject of debate.

Background

To facilitate understanding and appreciation of the article it is crucial that the contextual background and highlights of the texts are offered. Writers of extended fictional prose often use particular devices to give shape to their ideas; to give them structure or form. These include setting, character, protagonist, narrator and narrative technique (Murray 1999). Similarly, and within a feminist perspective proposed in the introduction above, the main argument throughout this article, and as depicted in the two novels, is the gender inequalities which mirror the gender relations found in a patriarchal society and which defy geographic location as seen in the setting of the two novels – one set in South Africa and the other in Zimbabwe.

The fundamental question that the article aims to address through a critical and comparative analysis of the two selected fictional literary works *Uvalo Lwezinhlonzi* (1975) and *Nervous Conditions* (1988) is why the status

of women within patriarchal societies seems to be still predetermined by the class which women hold in society and which categorises them into lower ranks than men. Class by virtue of this article defines the position certain group of people hold in the westernised educational context – the so called educated versus the uneducated societies. The critical analysis of the subservient position of women in the Zulu and Shona societies will attempt to explore this question with an aim of addressing the fundamental dilemma within the patriarchal order as well as recommending future approach to the problem. In essence – the notion that the experiences of women around the world and perhaps throughout time and irrespective of position they themselves hold as women in society, have been shaped by beliefs in men’s superior authority – is being questioned in this article.

In order to appreciate what is happening in the selected texts, a summary of the stories will be presented. The précis of texts accompanied by underlying personal remarks will be presented separately and then a comparative analysis will be drawn.

Synopsis of Plot in *Uvalo Lwezinhlonzi*

Set in 1975, in South Africa, the novel reveals a period of continued migrant labor system where men would leave rural areas in search of better opportunities in urban areas. A brief outline of *Uvalo Lwezinhlonzi* explores key issues that highlight the focus of the article. Literally and contextually translated the title means ‘Fear of the frowns’, immediately alluding to a sense of anxiety and nervousness which conjure images of emotional oppression generally typical of subjugation. The main character, Zulumacansi who comes from a rural village of Buthunqe goes to the city of Durban, in search of work. The same problem of subjugation of women was already an issue even as seen in this context through Zulumacansi leaving his village to go and look for work in order to pay *ilobolo* (bride price) for a potential wife. He returns to his village after having saved what he considers to be substantial for him to secure a wife. Even though, he is not popular with girls –and is what could be called in those days ‘*isishimane*’ - as a result of his newly acquired wealth, and in line with the traditional belief that a man is the provider of a home, he suddenly finds himself an eligible bachelor - a target with families which want him to marry their daughters. Amongst these families is a man by the name of Manamuza who has earmarked Zulumacansi for his daughter, Bajwayele.

Bajwayele is portrayed as an uneducated woman who has been raised to observe all duties and roles befitting of a rural woman, whose fate is to merely get a husband. She has been trained from her family about what she has to do and how she is supposed to behave as a woman. While she has feelings for another young man, Potolozi, she cannot convince her father that she does not want to marry Zulumacansi. After all, lacking in material possessions, Potolozi, according to her father, is not in the league he would want to associate with. Because Bajwayele's mother succumbs to the authority of her husband all the time, Bajwayele has nothing else to compare her status as a woman to, so she cannot question any of these issues except to simply comply. Hence at some point we hear her uttering short I affirmative responses to her father's coercion to marry Zulumacansi. These include:

'Ngiyezwa baba' page 36.
(hear, father)

'Ngiyakuzwa loku okushiwo ngubaba' page 37.
(I hear that which father is saying)

Zulumacansi proposes marriage to Bajwayele, but the young woman rejects his advances because she does not have feelings for him. This makes her father, Manamuza furious and after beating her up for trying to present her case, Bajwayele finds herself with no choice but to marry the man even against her will. In fact, she is also coerced into the marriage by the very woman who is supposed to be on her side, KaMemunce, her mother. She says to her girl-child,

'Kulungile Bajwayele, sale usuhamba mntanami. Umhlaba lona ubuswa ngamadoda' page 60.
(It's fine Bajwayele. Just go my child. This earth is controlled by men).

It is important to note that Bajwayele's mother refers to the fact that the world is ruled by men- she does not qualify the type of men who rule, that is as defined by class. She, even as an uneducated woman, seems to know that men in general rule the world, and hence that makes women powerless to

make their own decisions. At the same time, the same uttering by Bajwayele's mother can be viewed as yet another justification that when one is not educated one does not tend to have the same world view and power to realise that she or he has choices in life. This is a contradiction posed by the article – that is, where does one draw the line where women oppression is concerned!

Here one can point out elements of woman oppression since as a girl-child, Bajwayele is under the authority of her father, and as a young woman she cannot go against the rules imposed on her by tradition – to listen to her father even on matters of the heart. She finds herself in a compromised position where her feelings, as a woman are disregarded in favour of the two men; her father and the man she is expected to marry. Her father saw an opportunity of replenishing his cattle byres by offering his daughter to the highest bidder regardless of the fact that Bajwayele wanted Potolozzi to be her future husband. Her father used her to add more cattle into his byres while Zulumacansi as her husband, used *ilobolo* to 'own' her. It is therefore clear that Bajwayele is perceived as a commodity by her patriarchal system.

At this point it is important to offer an essence of the concept of traditional marriage which societies later changed to suit their belief systems. Ancient Zulu society saw marriage as essential for the continuation of a man's lineage so that he could achieve the status of 'ancestor', revered and remembered by his descendants for generations. A woman was 'brought in' as a kind of 'borrowing' to 'do the job' of producing children for the man and his clan. The idea of 'borrowing' soon became one of 'buying the services of' due to the greed of the 'lending' family (Zondi 2007:21). In this sense it is evident that originally there was no clause, written or unwritten that sought to perpetually oppress women. It is societies that have distorted what was initially a worthwhile practice; leading to the current situation which sees objectification of women. This abuse of culture is seen in Manamuza's rigid and daunting statement to Bajwayele. He says:

'Ngiyakuthuma wemntanami, ngithi ngilandele izinkomo kwaBhekokwakhe' page 57.

(I send you my child, I say go and fetch the cows for me from Bhekokwakhe)

This refers to Zulumacansi's ancestors. Masovenyeza, another main character

in the story, has several wives; one of them being Zulumacansi's sister, Qimbile. There exists a conflict between the two men; Zulumacansi demands the balance of the *lobolo* cattle paid towards his sister, Qimbile, and Masovenyeza does not succumb to his demands since he is not yet in a position to pay the remaining cows. After all according to tradition a man was not bound to pay all the *lobolo* cows at once. The irony is that Zulumacansi himself acknowledges that he does not have sufficient cattle to entirely meet his *lobolo* obligation towards Bajwayele; which is why he is demanding outstanding cows from Masovenyeza. He wants to sort out his own 'outstanding debt'. In all these dialogues women in question or their mothers have little or nothing to contribute in the discussion about the affairs that concern them. They are discussed and referred to as if they are not part of the problem when, in fact they are the centre of the debate. Does this have anything to do with being uneducated in an African society and in this case a Zulu society?

Most of the women in a discourse are not given much value. For instance, Zulumacansi's sister is a crucial character for him to finalise his *lobolo* requirements yet she does not have a say. Nobody cares about the possible consequences the demands made on her husband are going to have on her. Perhaps that is one of the devices, however, subtle, that the author uses to further comment on the marginalisation of women even on issues that touch specifically on them. In this context, John et.al (2006:28) depicts the scenario discussed above fittingly when he argues that in patriarchal societies a woman is rarely consulted and defers only to her husband.

Traditionally a woman is never married to her husband only but to his whole family or clan. A newlywed woman has to show her competence by doing chores that will demonstrate that she is the 'right' woman that will 'build' the family. Under her husband's authority, Bajwayele, is subjugated to all kinds of servitude; her husband's and his family. Despite this she is not appreciated. Due to her continued unhappiness, Bajwayele finally runs away leaving her husband even though it is culturally unaccepted for a woman to resort to abandoning her husband after *lobolo* has been paid out for her. Under such circumstances it is customary that the girl's family has to return *ilobolo* to the husband if she leaves him on her own initiative or if the husband chases her away on infidelity grounds; misconstrued or confirmed. According to Delius and Glaser in Mkhize (2011) married women were expected to remain loyal to their husbands regardless of whether they had extra marital relationships.

For fear of losing his *lobolo* and on Zulumacansi's insistence, Bajwayele's father, Manamuza, goes in search of his daughter. The reason for finding his daughter is crucial in this argument. It is not because Bajwayele's action has awoken a sense of guilt in him for marrying her to a man she does not love but he goes to Benoni (where he has learned the daughter fled to) in search of her for his self-serving interests. He wants to turn her in to her husband in order to maintain his dignity and status as *umnumzane*, head of the household with a herd of cattle. There is no change of heart at all. This situation echoes similar views held by women in the recent study which I conducted and where women shared their intimate attitudes about the men in their lives. One such reaction was that in the eyes of their men they are like trash; something that is of no use to anyone; 'we are doormats for the men. Yes, they paid *ilobolo* for us but we do not want to be treated like doormats' (Zondi 2007:26).

When Bajwayele's father gets to Benoni, he is confronted by a different way of thinking, where male dominance and the oppressive nature of patriarchy is perceived to be outdated, unwelcome and discouraged. This could be perhaps from yet again a migrant labour and resultant lifestyle perspective. In the novel, we therefore see that women in Benoni rebuke Manamuza and this upsets him immensely as he thinks that cultural values are being eroded. In turn, and ironically Manamuza rekindles male consciousness in the men he finds in the city. As if they have been in a slumber, the eyes of the men from the city, are open and they listen to Manamuza with renewed faith thus ushering in the cycle of women oppression and while bringing them face to face with their fate; if women had thought male domination was a thing of the homesteads they were wrong because patriarchy does not belong to a particular space; it is what informs the belief system and is thus taken everywhere people go. As long as there is no transformation and acknowledgement that culture evolves, whatever is suggested will seem far-fetched. Bajwayele is brought back home and to her husband but she flees again. The fact that even after being brought back to her husband, Bajwayele escapes again, could be interpreted that she is symbolically challenging the status quo, a topic that could be a debate on its own. However, in the context of her absconding yet again to where nobody finds her this time, one can conclude that Bajwayele may have run away from one man, but she is still trapped by all other men even away from her geographic place of birth.

Gender Roles Played by Male and Female Characters

The unfolding of the story reveals different roles played by male and female characters. Women equal private space while men equal adventure. Zulumacansi as a male is free to leave his home and go to the city to find work. Even if he is not educated, his value is still equally held with high esteem as he is able to still integrate with the urbanized world and earn money that will profile him as an important man in his community. What defines his power in this context is his role as a man in a male dominated society. He is going to put a mark by doing what society expects of every man; to have a wife and children despite his contrary personality. He does not treat his hard won wife any differently. In fact he marries her with an intention of entrenching and perpetuating this oppressive system. He does not try to find himself a wife in the city. Instead he returns to his village; a place which epitomizes control and domination, and where he knows chances of a woman, escaping male domination are very rare. This is the place where women are fit to be wives who are provided for by the husbands who work away from home while as women they have to stay at home and in their men's absence, maintain the dignity of the men as heads of the homestead.

The other relevant factor to bring forth is that of authority. Zulumacansi's father is no longer alive but his mother is. By virtue of being the only grown son, Zulumacansi becomes the provider for the whole family. Regardless of the presence of his mother he is still the head of the family. Just because she is a female she cannot be entrusted with authority. This means that even the family cattle which once belonged to his father, now belong to him. His mother is nowhere in the picture as far as these possessions are concerned. This is a reason Zulumacansi demands the outstanding *lobolo* cows from his brother-in-law, Masovenyeza, without even consulting with his mother. One would be inclined to think that even if only for respect Zulumacansi would at least inform his mother of his intention. This is not so as even the *hlonipha* (respect) culture is biased against women.

Correspondingly, Bajwayele and her mother submit to Manamuza's orders; that of marrying Bajwayele to the man she does not love. Her mother is silent on the matter that concerns another woman; her daughter. In fact she is so unspoken that the little she says is not firmly stated. She sees her daughter as a sacrificial lamb going for 'slaughter' but does not come to her rescue; even by just mere futile exercise of attempting to stop her daughter's

imminent marriage to a man she does not love. The same goes for Qimbile, Masovenyeza's wife. She is a bone of contention with regards her *lobolo* cows which are outstanding. She is being discussed by the two men as if she does not exist. She cannot even put in a word that she disapproves of being excluded in the argument around her marriage. This is a true reflection of women's situation in patriarchal societies.

Synopsis of Plot in *Nervous Conditions*

Nervous Conditions can be situated in the socio-historical and geographical period of the 1960's and 70's Rhodesia in which black people lived in the context of a white ruled country in the mid twentieth century. The novel draws on the life of Dangarembga whose invented characters resemble actual events and situations from the life of the novelist.

The story centres on the Sigawuke family. It is told by Tambudzai (or Tambu), daughter of Jeremiah and Ma'Shingayi, a girl who had a great yearning for education but was unable to afford it in the beginning due to her family's dire poverty. After all under male domination it was not important for a girl to receive education. To beat the odds Tambu kept a small maize garden which she cultivated and sold to get the little education she had. Even then when the cobs were ready for eating they would begin to disappear. As things turned out it was his own brother, Nhamo who stole them and distributed them to his friends. He ridiculed his sister for being a girl with remarks such as these:

'it's the same everywhere ... what did you expect because you are a girl ... you can't study... did you really think you could send yourself to school ...' page 21.

In patriarchal communities such as these and as argued by Talbot (1998:3) 'being born male or female has far-reaching consequences for an individual'. The above scenario could not be truer for Tambu. She had been unconsciously 'schooled' in matters of the superiority of male child, the convention of a female being responsible for the domestic space and the prioritization of a higher education for male children amongst others (Murray 1999:50).

Written in a first person narrative, the story presents firsthand experience of oppression under male domination. In this sense it is more

powerful as it situates the position of women under male authority in a forceful manner. Tambu thus becomes a voice of other voiceless women in the story. The very opening sentence 'I was not sorry when my brother died' (Dangarembga 1988:1) is pregnant with meaning. It relates the circumstances which lead to Tambu receiving good education which was only by chance.

After a tragic death of her brother, Nhamo whose mission education was sponsored by their rich and educated uncle, Babamukuru, the offer was extended to her. This on its own is a living proof that the state of a girl child is precarious. Babamukuru only extends the offer to Tambu because the male child meant for it has died and there is no other son to 'inherit' this offer. Thus Tambu becomes the channel for this action rather than the agent. In fact Tambu's mother, Ma'Shingayi and Jeremiah, her father are not consulted about the recommendation to send their daughter to school. Babamukuru makes a ruling which gets implemented. Because of his state of poverty, Jeremiah's manhood is also undermined in this context. His wealthy brother, Babamukuru, oversees his younger brother's family affairs. Ma'Shingayi is not particularly excited about the news because she fears that her daughter might take after Nhamo and imitate the 'Englishness' that she considers as a curse that caused her dear son's death. Her son had changed drastically since attending the mission school and Ma'Shingayi felt she had been robbed of him. Education had changed Nhamo into some kind of a monster; bullying everyone in her family when he came to the homestead for holidays; hence Tambu's contention: 'I was not sorry when my brother died' (page 1) and further on 'I became confident that I would not go the same way as my brother' (page 71).

Babamukuru and his wife, Maiguru and children, Chido and Nyasha left for Britain when the kids were still young. On their return to Rhodesia they continued to provide their children with good mission education where Babamukuru was a headmaster. When Tambu was given the opportunity previously meant for Nhamo she joined her Babamukuru's family at the mission house.

On arrival at the mission house Tambu makes friends with her cousin, Nyasha. In principle, Babamukuru does not approve of their association because Nyasha is very rude and uncontrollable. She cannot adapt to life as expected of young Shona girls. She rebels any kind of authority to such an extent that she gets into a physical fight with her father when he asks her about coming home late one night. This episode leaves Tambu perplexed.

Babamukuru fears that Nyasha would be a bad influence to Tambu with her unbecoming manners.

Maiguru, Babamukuru's wife is a highly educated woman who is also trapped in her husband's spell. This is confirmed by her answer to Tambu when she wants to know if it is true that Maiguru, like Babamukuru, is also highly educated. She responds in these words '...we both studied, your uncle and I, in South Africa for our Bachelor's Degree and in England for our Master's' (page 101). Tambu feels sorry for Maiguru because in her view, she should be more independent and assertive. However, 'she could not use the money she earned for her own purposes and had been prevented by marriage from doing things she wanted to do' (page 102). In this context, the role of family as an institution where the transmission of culture and, the process whereby men learn the rules and practices of social groups cannot be overemphasized (Worsely 1970:2). Taking the argument forward, George (2005:20) maintains that patriarchy includes but is not restricted to 'various discourses and practices that allow men to set the terms and limits for women in different areas of society'.

This further suggests that patriarchal power should be understood beyond day to day women oppression due to males being providers. Maiguru, I might add, was in a worse situation than her female counterparts; education was not equivalent to liberation—a phenomenon that must have killed her inside as she broke down one time and voiced her internal discontentment. In terms of postmodern thought, social construction strives to comprehend the processes by which people describe and come to terms with themselves as well as the world in which they find themselves (Freeman & Couchonnal 2006). According to this hypothesis, individuals' past experiences, backgrounds, historical contexts and social relations impact on their ability to grasp meaning and to interpret the world around them. By extension and drawing on some feminist discourse Khau (2007) observes that central to feminism is the assumption that realities are socially created and that there is a close relationship between oppression and practices of the individual and society in general. Educated as Babamukuru's family was, everybody failed to meaningfully work towards changing the mentality which was entrenched in their society that male superiority could be effectively challenged.

The mission house was very different to what Tambu had been used to. The description of the homestead in which Tambu grew up with Nyamarira River where she would fetch water as one of the features, makes a

clear case for her desire to escape the constraints thereof. It is also a motivation for her to pursue her education. On the contrary the mission house was a symbol of status. The following selected phrases attest to that:

‘a fitted carpet of deep green pile, tastefully mottled’ page 68.

the dining room with ‘shiny new linoleum covering every inch of the floor’ page 68.

‘sleek bookcases full of leather-bound and hard-covered volumes of erudition’ page 68.

a display cabinet ‘displayed on its greenish glass shelves the daintiest, most delicate china’ page 69

Despite the splashy lifestyle of the mission house which Tambu perceives as the place of heavenly plenty she feels alienated from her childhood home. Having gone to the mission house Tambu went to the mission in order to attend school, Tambu also recounts substantial experiences that did not take place in the school room but in an extremely domestic setting; the home of her relatives. A considerable part of her education as a female character in other words occurred in ways other than formal education. Engendering had thus been something she had been exposed to long before she became conscious of what was happening around her. As maintained by Talbot (1998:7) ‘[p]eople are ‘gendered’ and actively involved in the process of their own gendering’. In addition communities learn to cope with their day to day experiences, making sense out of them and negotiating power relationships, both within and outside their families (Sheafor & Horejsi 2006).

Central Themes in the Two Novels

The fundamental perception overriding the story line in the first narrative is the abuse of women in the system of patriarchy by traditional and uneducated men within a Zulu society. On the other hand, there are two central themes to Dangarembga’s novel within the focus of this article: the oppression of the Shona women in general as a result of the patriarchal authority forced on them by the practices and beliefs of this group as well as the oppression of

women irrespective of and despite their assumed educational status in the same society. The premise adopted by the two authors situated in two different countries, therefore offers the influence of patriarchal authority to both the educated and uneducated women in society. The first argument by Ngubane presents patriarchal authority as it relates to uneducated Zulu society while Dangarembga addresses both scenarios: the uneducated as well as educated Shona society. It is Dangarembga's conscious distinction that I find significant since it is representative of most African societies including Zulu people. In this sense Dangarembga's comprehensive approach enlightens on issues that are sometimes taken for granted; in this case that patriarchal oppression is not restricted to uneducated traditional African cultures but rather that at one time or other African women are prone to patriarchal domination regardless of their educational status- a notion that will be explored as the article unfolds.

Comparative Analysis of the Two Novels

In harmonising the two novels under examination I find a statement by Anderson and Zinnser (1990:xiii) appropriate even though it relates to a different context. Recounting European patriarchy and what it means to be a woman in such society they maintain:

[A]ll European women, whether queens or nuns, aristocrats or peasants, craftswomen or artists, were subject to yet another constraining factor; ... culture's largely negative views on women. Considered innately flawed, less valuable and thus inferior to men, all women were supposed to be subordinate to men. This subordination seemed part of the natural order.

In the following section I present some characters in the two novels with a view to establishing what is common in them and the manner in which they respond to their different environments.

Response to patriarchal domination by girl children in the two novels
The key girl-children in the novels show similar oppressive mentalities. The novel about Zulu society presents **Bajwayele** being forced into a marriage that she doesn't want. Thereafter she rebels against the marriage but is still trapped within the same patriarchal society that she is trying to escape. On the

other hand in the novel about the Shona society, **Tambu** thought that the death of a male figure would liberate her. However, as it turns out it is the continuation of her entrapment albeit in other ways that awakens in her a need to uphold her newly acquired beliefs; that of fighting domination irrespective of the consequences. Prior to that by virtue of being a female she had been trapped. After the death of her brother education opens her mind and she realises that the death of her brother has not made things any easier for her. As the English saying goes; ignorance is bliss-she was not fully aware that she was being ‘robbed’ of so much as a woman but education opened her eyes to a lot more than she had been aware of. Tambu words: ‘I was not sorry when my brother died’ is the first step of admitting her entrapment. Her vocalising and endorsing of something that is not heard of culturally- that you should rejoice over someone’s death, let alone your family’ is an indication of a feeling of severe entrapment. But even though she tries to rebel the entire novel traces this tension between her rebellion and entrapment. Tambu’s most conspicuous rebellion pertains to her parents’ marriage. She rebels against being a bridesmaid to the Christian marriage of her own parents which her uncle forces upon them. The turmoil in her soul suggests that if she participates in her parents’ coerced marriage she must be admitting that she was a product of sin; a notion that she did not embrace. Maiguru’s daughter, **Nyasha** rebels against her father’s authority. She refuses to and rebels against seeing the world through his eyes. To this effect she gets into a physical confrontation with her father. Does it really need to get to this bitter end before men recognize that enough is enough? Are there even lessons learned from experiences such as these?

Response to Patriarchal Domination by Married Women in the Two Novels

As married women and mothers to the girl children above, the following women also have their own compounded challenges. **KaMemunce, Bajwayele’s mother** has not been consulted about the handing over of her daughter to a man she doesn’t want. Furthermore she has no power to contradict what the father wants irrespective of her feeling about the matter. She actually finds herself an accomplice in the deed as she is helpless within the system. Moreover her status as an uneducated woman – despite the fact

that education does not free any woman in this context anyway-disempowers her from fighting for her daughter.

The same can be said of **Ma'Shingayi, Tambu's mother**. She is not consulted about her daughter, Tambu's imminent educational prospects. Hence she looks on powerlessly as her Tambu is 'dragged' into the same situation that she claims 'robbed' her of her son, Nhamo. As an uneducated woman within the homestead her plight is even worse since in her context she cannot challenge men, let alone educated men. While she displays her discontentment openly no one pays attention to her tantrums.

Maiguru is quite an interesting character in the context of this discussion. As a woman she epitomises the emancipation of women. Yet her depiction in the novel undermines the very essence and value that is placed on education globally. Maiguru is a highly educated and well travelled woman. Just by virtue of that, one would expect that the world view that she has been exposed to –both through education and travel, would put her in a very unique position when compared to all the other women in her midst. Instead she has no control over her finances yet she works hard to earn whatever she gets. Despite her high level of education her fundamental role as a woman does not seem to have changed in terms of societal and patriarchal expectation. That is why she breaks down at some point and tells Babamukuru off. 'I am tired of my house being a hotel for your family. I am tired of being a house keeper for them. I am tired of being nothing in a home I am working myself sick to support...Let me tell you I have had enough' (page 172).

Women's Escapist Forms

When you lack the language which is the main tool of communication you know that your powers are limited. At such times your last resort could then be an outlet through violence. The language or lack thereof binds and confines all the women portrayed in the novel together in their subservient roles. Uttering a word against such an oppressive regime can at most instances be a futile exercise. As a sign of the lack of expression women sometimes resort to different escapist forms. And for this reason certain behaviours that they opt for become their statement of protest. Some of these actions are highly visible while others are passive. The girl children in the

selected texts resort to various means to demonstrate their frustrations with the system of male domination.

Bajwayele *runs* away from the husband his father has chosen for her against her will. Nyasha *punches* her father after a fight about being out late at night when her brother Chido could be outdoors as long as he wished. Tambu *boycots* her parents' wedding ceremony against an instruction from her Babamukuru to be a bridesmaid at their wedding which she disapproves of.

The mothers to the girl children above also supplement their 'unheard' supplications by adopting alternative routes. KaMemunce, *gives up* on her husband and *sees* her daughter being married off to a man she does not love. Ma'Shingai *watches* helplessly as her daughter's educational likelihood is negotiated. Maiguru temporarily *leaves* Babamukuru when she feels she cannot take his authoritative ways any longer.

Curbed in their individual ordeals, daughters and mothers in the novels selected represent day to day afflictions experienced by women in patriarchal societies. As it was revealed earlier on, while gender matters are a universal concern some societies, in this context African societies, are far deeply affected by them than others.

Conclusion

Patriarchy seems to have had a similar effect the world over; that of the subjugation of women where male and female are seen as evaluative categories, even though there is no factual or inherent reason why the male should be valued more than the female. In both novels the inferiority of women, their subordination and the authority of males over women's lives run through almost all the chapters of the novels. In the novels investigated all women irrespective of their status have not been charged with power. From the analysis presented it is apparent that academics as researchers have not taken a conscious effort to critically analyse this thin line of oppression between the educated and the uneducated as far as women are concerned. What exactly are we doing as educated women to emancipate ourselves first so that we can remove those uneducated fellow women from the web of double oppression?

Having indicated that literature mirrors societies it has been illustrated through this article that women oppression still has no boundaries

be it class, place or time. Even though the literary texts in question were written in the 70's and 80's respectively in the twenty first century, as a study I conducted a year ago also illustrates, not much has been achieved in terms of correcting gender parity (Zondi 2010). The critical analysis of the subservient position of women in the Zulu and Shona societies investigated in this article challenges veteran and emerging authors to embark on literature, both in indigenous and English languages to address long term focus on gender equity matters with specific reference to African societies. Correspondingly, one of the goals of institutions of learning, both at lower and higher ranks, should be promotion of literature that advocates gender equity so that gender as a social construct inculcated through the years, may be replaced by power shifts of women as equally empowered sectors of society.

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Nompumelelo B. Zondi

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