

Defining Feminine Roles: A ‘Gendered’ Depiction of Women through Zulu Proverbs

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Abstract

In most African societies language reflects the subordination of women to men and the respect they must show to men and their elders. This paper is a preliminary investigation which aims to examine how women are portrayed in selected Zulu proverbs. The proverbs discussed in this article reflect how Zulu society perceives men as intelligent in conflict resolution and skilled in societal disputes. Proverbs discussed in this paper are informed by the way Zulu men are socialised and the manner in which young girls are brought up. Men are socialised into thinking that women need to start preparing themselves for marriage from a young age. Female behaviour needs to be socially acceptable, as every person encountered by an unmarried female is a potential husband and potential in-law. This grooming is evident in the proverbs frequently used in Zulu society. This article uses the African womanism theory which argues for a feminist critique of gender that draws from the experiences of African women, and also rejects the male dominance in African societies.

Keywords: Proverbs, Women, African womanism, Subordination, Patriarchy, Culture

Introduction

There is a perception within African cultures that African women have to behave in a manner which makes them eligible for marriage. They have to show respect to their elders while at home, and respect their in-laws when they are married. The proverbs in this paper demonstrate the way in which

traditional societies think of women's behaviour in terms of preparation and sustainability for marriage. These proverbs are employed in a manner which paints men as providers and women as nurturers. The aim of this paper is to highlight the perception of women's gendered roles within traditional societies. It argues that women's choices are limited, when it comes to issues of marriage, to being a wife and a mother. This is in no way saying that Zulu culture is static; it has evolved immensely over the years owing to culture contact and globalisation. This paper is a preliminary investigation which aims to examine how women are portrayed in selected Zulu proverbs. The proverbs discussed in this article reflect how Zulu society perceives men as intelligent in conflict resolution, and skilled in societal disputes. These proverbs are informed by the way in which Zulu men are socialised, and the manner in which young girls are brought up. Proverbs portray women not only as nurturers, as mentioned above, but also as protectors of their families. They warn men against weakness in their dealings with women.

This paper looks at how women's choices are limited when it comes to polygynous, sororate and levirate marriages. This may sound somewhat bizarre in a modern society, but in rural traditional societies women have limited say about their fate in terms of ending a marriage through death of their spouse, or their husbands' taking on more wives. There is also an emphasis on men being providers in their households, and having the intelligence to come up with solutions to any problems that may arise within them. The language people speak informs and shapes the way they think or reason. This paper aims to 'help the reader discover the impact of the language used in African proverbs on the thinking of Africans about their women' (Dickson & Mbosowo 2014:633). Proverbs are intelligent, metaphorical sayings passed from generation to generation. They are a well of knowledge which sheds light on the Zulu way of life. They give reasons for why people do what they do. Ogbalu (1956:2) comments thus on the Igbo proverbs:

Proverbs constitute a language of diplomacy among the Igbos ... the language of settling disputes among towns ... settling bride price, commerce and short oracy ... Igbo proverbs are the accumulation of Igbo experience throughout the history of the Igbos.

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (Wilson 1970), proverbs are a crystallised summary of popular wisdom. Medier, cited in John-

son and Ekpenyong (2013:62), defines a proverb as:

A short, generally known sentence of the folk, which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorically fixed and memorisable form ... handed down from generation to generation.

The proverbs were harvested randomly from existing literature, mainly *Inqolobane Yesizwe*, by C.L.S. Nyembezi and O.E.H.M. Nxumalo (1966). The selection focused on proverbs defining women's gendered roles as wives and mothers. Through these proverbs women are depicted as creatures that must be respectful and submissive in preparation for marriage. The proverbs also warn women about difficult situations they will encounter in marriage, and advise them to persevere. The sample of the proverbs used in this paper involves only proverbs relating to marriage and what the society perceives as suitable behaviour for women of marriageable age.

Theoretical Frameworks

This paper employs two important theories for the analysis of the proverbs chosen. It adopts a feminist approach for data analysis purposes. Feminism as a movement 'aims to eradicate sexist domination' (Masuku 2005:5), and thereby change the way most patriarchal societies view women. Billington (cited in Kramarea & Treichler 1985:158) defines feminism as 'A movement seeking the reorganisation of the world upon a basis of sex-equality in all human relations'.

Hudson-Weems (2007: 289) has observed that 'African Women, documented their reality, and refined a paradigm relative to who they are, what they do, and what they believe in as a people'. The African womanist is a self-definer, is family oriented and also promotes positive male-female relationships as one of the vehicles to ensure the survival of people of African descent and humanity in general (Aldridge 2004, cited in Mangena 2013). Mangena (2013:2) comments thus on the applicability of the theory:

The theory does not only isolate African women from the rest of the woman category, it also allows women of African descent an

opportunity to link with each other and build strength from their shared conditions in exploring the link that binds them, leading into international solidarity. This is the case because the theory refers to the realities of African women in the continent as well as in its diaspora.

Commenting on Zulu proverbs, Masuku (2005:3) says that they ‘reflect the philosophy of life of the people, especially when it relates to women and young girls’. In the light of what Masuku is arguing, this paper recognises the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Whorf 1939:57), which in this context shapes the way the proverbs are interpreted within the society. This is a linguistic relativity principle which theorises that thought and behaviour are determined and partially influenced by language. It is founded on two main ideas: the first is a theory of determinism that states that the language you speak determines the way you will interpret the world around you. The second states that language influences your thoughts about the real world. Whorf saw a clear connection between language, culture and psychology, and he expresses this as follows (Whorf 1939:75):

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for the society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the ‘real’ world is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.

The feminist movement worldwide came as a result of the patriarchal nature of global societies, African womanism is specifically created for African women, and takes into cognisance their experiences as opposed to Western feminism. Ongunyemi (1985:64) defines womanism as:

a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom. It concerns itself

as much with the black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates blacks. A womanist will recognise that along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national economic and political considerations into her philosophy.

The focus of the paper is on the perception of proverbs through womanism and the emphasis is on the attitude of the speaker and listener. Mokitimi (1991:18) mentions that:

Proverbs reveal the feelings, emotions and attitude of the speaker. They are later used in situations bearing relevance to the original one. At this stage, there is a speaker and listener and if these expressions make an impact on the listener, he too uses them in other situations. In this manner, the use of these statements, as expressions of observation and experiences, moves from speaker to speaker until the society accepts them as part and parcel of its collective lore.

Proverbs discussed here reflect and demonstrate the mindset, feelings, beliefs and important views in African societies. Most African societies either support or condone patriarchy through the socialisation of the population from a young age. This is depicted in the language spoken. Through the selection of proverbs discussed here the paper will show how women are positioned as inferior to men. The proverbs depict women as creatures that must be respectful and submissive in preparation for marriage.

Meaning of Proverbs and their Function in the Society

Proverbs are the core of the Zulu society's language, thought-pattern and interpretation of the world. According to Msimang (1991:79), a proverb in isiZulu:

Siqondene nokwethulwa kwamaqiniso athile ngolimi olugigiyelayo, ulimi olungathekisayo luzekelise ... Uma sizihlolisisa izaga lezi, okokuqala ngqa esikuphawulayo ngazo wukuthi ziyinkulumo

engumphumela wezinto ezenzeka empilweni yethu. ... Izaga zingamaqiniso athile empilweni yethu.

is related to the introduction of certain facts in an ambiguous language, metaphorical language. When we analyse these proverbs the first thing we notice is that they are a result of things that are happening in our lives. Proverbs are truths in our lives.

The following proverbs paint a vivid picture of what Zulu society expects from women. They also warn women about difficult situations they will encounter in marriage.

Umendo ngumkhumulansika (Marriage is not for the faint-hearted).

Ukwenda wukuzilahla (Getting married is throwing one's life away).

Akuqhalaqhala lahlula isidwaba (Even the most assertive woman surrenders in marriage).

The above examples attest to the fact that women need to expect radical changes in their lives after their marriage. They have to change their behaviour from an assertive stance to a more submissive one. Proverbs are a big part of the language people speak and the culture they believe in. African religion provides regulations for daily life through language. One has access to many hints and advice about getting on with fellow humans and the community at large in the form of sayings and proverbs (e.g. *kuhlonishwana kabili*, meaning, respect is a two-way process). Another category of proverbs warn against bad behaviour – proverbs like '*Ukwesutha kwakhumbuza uNoshinga ukuthakatha*' (When a person has everything they become ungrateful).

Background and Contextualisation

There are some peculiarities that are unique to the proverbs discussed in this paper; for instance, proverbs which reflect patriarchy and male chauvinism. There is an obvious reference to the power of men over women; and how men place themselves above women in these proverbs brings to mind a socio-cultural pattern in Zulu society. This paper will demonstrate that most of the proverbs that relate to human behaviour, the attributes verging on power and accomplishments, are reserved for men.

The extension of the male chauvinism in these proverbs pertains to the 'gendering' of proverbs, resulting in a situation in which females are regarded with limited respect, more specifically in terms of assigning negative traits. The gender issues (demeaning females) are represented by the following proverbs: **Insakavukela umchilo wesidwaba** (Irritating thing that you do on a daily basis) – this proverb refers to a woman's attire (a skirt made out of cowhide) with which, each and every time she puts it on, she has to use a particular belt made out of grass, failing which it may fall from her body. This becomes a tedious task to women because they have to cover themselves appropriately each time they go out in public. In some communities, beautiful women are perceived to have a loose character. Women have to tame their beauty. The proverb, **ikhiwane elihle ligcwala izimpethu** – *ubukeka emuhle ngaphandle kanti unesimilo esibi* (referring to a ripe, eye-catching fruit of a fig tree that is usually infested with maggots) is a warning that beautiful women usually have a loose character. It can be argued that this proverb also cautions people not to judge each other on the basis of external beauty, but to consider their character. What is of interest for the purposes of this paper, however, is the association between women's beauty, and loose character. Zulu society sanctions promiscuity but this is directed at women, and not men. In the proverb, **indlebe yisifebe** – *indlebe icosha konke nokungafanele ikuzwe* (an ear hears everything), the ear is likened to a loose woman. The question is, why woman? In Zulu culture men are never regarded as promiscuous, they are called *amasoka* (someone with a lot of girlfriends), yet a woman is labelled a slut or a whore if she has a lot of boyfriends. The polygamous nature of Zulu society allows men to date and marry as many women as they possibly can afford, but women are not given the same latitude.

Men's Socialisation as a Cultural Phenomenon

The language people speak within the Zulu community shows that men are always depicted as the binding agent within the society (e.g. **Okwehlula amadoda kuyabikwa** – men never fail). Men are depicted as decision-makers (e.g. **Injobo ithungelwa ebandla** – one can get a solution in the presence of council). They are depicted as the intelligent species (**izwi lendoda liyabhekwa** – you must heed a man's advice). It is also a common utterance that men in this society must be respected at all costs (e.g. **ikhanda**

elixegaxegayo lofulela abafazi – a man must put his foot down when it comes to women). This is a reflection of day-to-day socialisation and teachings given to young men and how they are ‘placed by society in a position that uses features of the formal culture, which mobilises around a number of sociocultural constructs such as control’ (Hadebe 2010:14). The above proverbs are about men, but they refer to women and their position in a Zulu cultural context. As heads of their households men are perceived to be providers and good advisers.

Socialisation of both men and women in Zulu communities emphasises the preparation of women for marriage and men to assume their position of authority within the family and the community at large. This type of socialisation is deeply rooted in traditional Zulu society¹. Culture is ‘something shared by a group of people and learned by an individual from the society. It is made out of patterns which guide behaviour and which are transmitted in tradition’ (Bate 1995:220). According to Cowan, Dembour and Wilson (2001:41):

Culture is now understood as historically produced rather than static; unbounded rather than bounded and integrated; contested rather than consensual, incorporated within structures of power such as the construction of hegemony; rooted in practices; symbols, habits, patterns of practical mastery and practical rationality within cultural categories of meaning rather than any simple dichotomy between ideas and behaviour; and negotiated and constructed through human action rather than super-organic forces.

Patriarchy is a large part of the Zulu culture and has been perceived by many as a gendered power system. It is a network of social, political and economic relationships through which men dominate and control female labour, reproduction and sexuality as well as define women’s status, privileges and rights in a society. It is a successful system because those that gain this privilege are often unaware of it, and therefore inadvertently perpetuate the ill

¹ This is in no way saying that Zulu culture is static, **but** it highlights the fact that in traditional societies the thinking still revolves around preparing women for marriage.

treatment of the people in this society whose suffering is the fulcrum upon which this society turns (Hadebe 2010).

The language we speak affects our perception and interpretation of situations, and 'we see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation' (Sapir 1929:210). Language and culture are interdependent entities. 'Culture' for African people is deeply embedded in the language they speak, which means that culture is part of language. Culture is transmitted to future generations through use of language. In addition language allows one to teach other people the results of experiences they might never undergo themselves. Similarly, proverbs are good examples to showcase this relationship between language and culture.

Women's Subordination

In Zulu culture, the society puts great emphasis on women demonstrating respectful behaviour towards any male and elders within the clan. Sennett (2002:3) mentions that:

Lack of respect, though less aggressive than an outright insult, can take an equally wounding form. No insult is offered another person, but neither is recognition extended; he or she is not seen as a full being whose presence matters.

Words like *indoda(kazi)* and *inkosi(kazi)* ('kazi' meaning that which is great) are femininity markers in the Zulu and other Nguni languages. Women in traditional societies are more respected within their families, but they seem to lose that respect when they get married. There is usually a shift in gender relations as soon as the woman gets married and moves into her husband's homestead.

Rudwick (2008:153) argues that:

a certain standard of respect is laid down in the nuclear family, while more general principles of respectful social and linguistic behaviour are acquired in the immediate environment, the larger society and in private and public interaction. Hence, the understanding of what

constitutes respectful behaviour is embedded in one's culture, but also significantly in one's personal upbringing and socialisation.

Theories of patriarchy by Walby (1990:24) show 'two distinct forms of patriarchy – private and public patriarchy'. In a Zulu context, patriarchy is something that happens in the public domain because it is endorsed by the community as part of culture. This paper is in no way saying that women have had no prominent role to play in Zulu traditional society. In Zulu traditional society certain women took important roles of leadership. Ntombazi, the mother of the Chief of the Ndwandwe clan, Zwide, was micro-managing Zwide's reign. Similarly, Princess Mkabayi of the Zulu royal family played a huge role in keeping the monarchy within her family by organising for Mthaniya (a woman from the Sibiya clan) to marry her father. This act of bravery saw her father married in his old age, and bearing a son (Senzangakhona). When Jama died, Mkabayi took over as Queen Regent because Senzangakhona was too young to ascend the throne. She ruled with an iron fist, which was unheard of for a woman of the time. She was also the mastermind behind the plot to assassinate King Shaka. She was a powerful, strategising woman and feared by most men. Evidently, in traditional Zulu society women have had some prominent positions, although it was largely patriarchal. Sultana (2011: 7) mentions that,

Patriarchal society gives absolute priority to men and to some extent limits women's human rights also. Patriarchy refers to the male domination both in public and private spheres. In this way, feminists use the term 'patriarchy' to describe the power relationship between men and women as well as to find out the root cause of women's subordination.

On the other hand, the term 'women's subordination' refers to the inferior position of women, their lack of access to resources and decision making, etc., and to the patriarchal domination that women are subjected to in most traditional societies. So women's subordination means the inferior position of women. The feeling of powerlessness, discrimination and experience of limited self-esteem and self-confidence jointly contribute to the subordination of women. Both housework and wage labour are important sites of women's exploitation by men. Within the field of paid work, occupational

segregation in capitalist society is used by male managers to keep access to the best paid jobs for themselves at the expense of women. In traditional societies women ploughed the land, and looked after livestock, which belonged solely to women without their husbands' authority or intervention. Within the household women did more work than men, even if they also had paid employment (Hartmann 1981).

Women end up belonging to the husband's family as soon as they are married. It is worth noting that, in Zulu culture, *ilobolo* was not as commercialised as it has become in recent times. It used to be what a man could afford to get married until Theophilus Shepstone² decided to fix it at eleven cows. Shepstone distorted a rather noble practice. This was viewed as part of a bigger and nefarious agenda of depleting the cattle herds of Zulu men who were then forced to pay various demeaning taxes and to later submit to the demands for cheap labour. This interfered with what was a flexible custom, and changed it to a rigid and unaffordable practice. The new and commercialised payment of *ilobolo* as a business transaction does not give the husband unlimited rights over his wife: she may claim divorce for ill-treatment. In many African communities, women are very independent; but marriage is a permanent phenomenon in Zulu culture: the woman, with the support and intervention of her family, has to protect her marriage at all costs because,

divorce is a stigma in many African societies. If the marriage fails, the woman is often perceived as the culprit. She is looked down upon by friends and family. Therefore, there is societal pressure on the woman to hang in there and make her marriage succeed (Dickson & Mbosowo 2014:636).

The practice of levirate and sororate marriages is still prevalent in Zulu society. In Zulu culture a marriage is a permanent contract between the couple and their families. The proverb, **ukwenda wukuzilahla** (getting married equals throwing away one's life), recognises that when a woman gets married her life changes completely. She leaves her own home to go and live with strangers who may or may not like her, and sometimes make her life a living hell.

² Theophilus Shepstone was born in 1817 in England. He later became the Diplomatic Agent to the Native Tribes in Natal.

Levirate Marriage (*Ukungena*)

In African communities, including Zulu communities, death does not constitute an end to a marriage. The paying of *ilobolo* and the slaughtering of a goat to accept the wife into the family is an eternal binding bond between the surviving spouse and the in-laws' family. When a husband dies, his brother has to take over all his wives and bear the responsibilities of a husband, taking care of his late brother's wives and children. *Ukungena* is when the man moves into his late brother's house and becomes the husband to the widows. Radcliffe-Brown and Farole (1950:183) argues that when the husband dies and an approved relative of his lives with the widow and the children, he begets more children for the dead man. This is the leviratic family. The pro-husband does not pay *ilobolo*. According to Krige and Comaroff (1981:4), marriage, for a Zulu woman, is a long-drawn-out process, whereby she is detached from her native *umndeni* and incorporated gradually into the family of her husband. According to Radcliffe-Brown and Farole (1950:185), Zulu marriage thus constitutes a long-enduring union between the spouses, which extends to their kin, above all their agnatic lineages. Parrinder (1954:97) says that marriage in Africa is a social affair, concerned as much with the contracting families as with the man and wife.

Sororate Marriage (*ukuvus' amabele*)

When the wife dies, her husband can, and does, in many cases, marry his late wife's younger sister or cousin to take care of the children³. It is believed that the children's aunt treats them better than a total stranger whom the man can marry on his own without the intervention of the family. Mbiti (1969:141) says:

Fewer societies have sororate marriages, i.e. when a wife dies the husband marries one of her sisters. . . . The 'sister' in this case must be understood in the wider usage of that term, within the kinship system. If the wife does not bear children, it is occasionally arranged that the husband takes her sister to be his wife whether or not the first is dead. In still fewer societies, two sisters are married to the same man. These are other meanings and practices of sororate marriages.

³ The evolution of the Zulu social system makes this unlikely to be true in the society as a whole. It still holds true only in deep rural traditional societies.

Polygyny

Polygyny⁴ is one of the customs which enforce the subordination of women in African societies. Although it can be argued that some women choose to enter into polygynous marriages of their own accord, for most it is not up to them to decide, but to the husband, who is usually a breadwinner. The argument that polygamy kerbs a man's appetite and prevents him from having extramarital affairs is still used in all African societies to defend plural marriages. Harris (1988:311) argues that polygamy overlooks the fact that plural marriages create domestic situations that are behaviourally and mentally very different from those created by monogamous (one husband, one wife) marriages. Mbiti (1969:139) mentions that:

Polygamy also raises the social status of the family concerned. It is instilled in the minds of African peoples that a big family earns its head great respect in the eyes of the community. ... If the first wife has no children or only daughters, it follows almost without exception that her husband will add another wife, partly to remedy the immediate concern of childlessness, and partly to remove the shame and anxiety of apparent unproductivity. To be productive, in terms of having children, is one of the essential attributes of being a mature being.

Marriage and the Depiction of Women through Proverbs

There are a lot of proverbs which refer to marriage and women's behaviour towards their in-laws in Zulu culture. The argument regarding marriage seems to lean towards the fact that women need to get married not only to fulfil the requirement of procreation, but also to make sure that the family name is carried down through giving birth to a son.

When a woman gets married, she marries the whole clan, and she becomes part of the family she is marrying into. From *ukukhonga* (lobola negotiations) to *umgcagco* (the wedding), things are done for the whole family,

⁴ It must be noted that in a Zulu cultural context, only polygyny is accepted as a form of plural marriage; polyandry (a women taking more than one husband) is unheard of.

and not solely for the couple. Hence, you would hear the groom saying ‘*ngivusa umuzi kababa*’ (I am rebuilding my father’s household), or ‘*ngifuna umuntu ozophekela umama*’ (I want someone who will cook for my mother). The slaughtering of a goat to report the arrival of the bride is a sign that she is part of the family from then onwards. Mbiti (1969:144) says:

Marriage then, is a religious responsibility for everyone. It forms the focal point where departed, present and coming members of society meet. It is the point of hope and expectation for the unmarried and their relatives, once it has been reached and procreation takes place.

I concur with Mbiti’s reasoning here, because in most African societies people who fail to secure a partner to marry them are given nicknames, as in the name *Zendazamshiya* (everybody is getting married and you are left behind), *Mjendevu* (an old maid) or *Mpohlo* (an unmarried man). In most African societies it is a shame for women of marriageable age to be in a relationship, or not to get married. It is said, for example, that **ingungu yale ntombi kayikhali** – *intombi eneshwa lokuba yisaliwa*, which means the woman is unfortunate in the love department. The proverb, **inja yabuyela ebuhlanzweni bayo** (*uphindele entweni abese eyilahlile njengentombi eyala isoka kodwa ibuye iphindele kulo*), refers to a woman who dumps a man and goes back to him, having failed to attract other suitors. Another proverb, **yayithi iyokwendela eNkosini** (*wakweya okwakumlingene*) is used when a woman thinks she is marrying a rich man, and discovers he is a pauper. On the other hand, the proverb, **akukho okungebele lantombi** (*umuntu wesifazane noma emubi uba nabo abamkhulumisayo*), means that even the ugliest of women have courters. The above proverb gives hope to women who are not lucky in the love department that even if they are ugly, they will get married as long as they have the qualities of a good wife.

Most proverbs about women deal with stereotypical issues directed at women, which include: respect, submission, nurturing children and getting married. In African societies marriage is a religious occurrence where the clan and the community meet. Every member has a role to play and it becomes their focus of existence. Mbiti (1969:130) mentions that marriage,

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 revitalised. 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 law-breaker, he is not only abnormal but also 'underhuman'.

Proverbs are used in everyday life, and even in African fiction. 'Like stories and legends, proverbs have been a source of literary inspiration for modern African writers' (Wautheir, in Jaradat 2007:84). These proverbs 'depict gender bias and discrimination prevalent in African societies' (Dickson & Mbosowo 2014:634). For instance, women are taught to be respectful to everyone they meet because they might end up marrying into that particular family. The following proverbs are good examples:

Ihlonipha nala ingeyukwendela khona – (Women must always be respectful to strangers because they do not know the family they are going to end up marrying into).

Igeja lithengwa ngokubonwa – (The groom-to-be must get to know his bride before marriage).

The emphasis is on women being respectful to everybody, but the same principle does not apply to men because they do not leave their families when they get married. It is the man's privilege to get to know the person he is about to marry, but the woman does not enjoy the same. Women have to make sure that they are able to integrate into their husband's family.

Some proverbs reflect the way marriages treat women, which is usually unfairly. Women need to be strong and endure the hardships.

Indololwane yaxosha umakoti egoyile (A new bride left because of ill-treatment). Women are expected to endure any difficulty they encounter in their married lives. It is impossible to predict how a woman will be treated by her husband and her in-laws. She therefore needs to prepare herself to persevere and make her marriage work. The way in which women behave drastically changes after getting married.

Umendo awuthunyelwa gundane (No woman knows how she will be treated by her in-laws after marriage). This is evident in the following examples:

Umlobokazi uhamba esagcobile (A married woman must leave before she outstays her welcome).

Zala abantu ziye ebantwini; akuntombi yagana inyambazane (A woman dumps a man for another). This proverb demonstrates that a woman must always have a man or be in a relationship because each relationship may lead to marriage.

Intombi kayedlulwa (A man must propose to every girl he meets). This proverb gives men permission to court many women and marry them if they so wish.

Inhlwanyelo yethekelwa kubangane (When arranging a marriage for his/her children the parent must consider friends' children as potential spouses).

Umswani wembabala awungeniswa ekhaya (A man should never marry a woman from the wrong family). Women must come from a good family in order to be married. If she comes from a family of sorcerers she cannot be married by anyone.

Women and Parenting

Parenting is regarded solely as a woman's job as women are always considered better parents than men. Their nurturing nature enables them to be better caregivers to their children. Below are a number of proverbs that illustrate attitudes towards women and parenting:

Intandane enhle umakhothwa ngunina – *Kungcono umntwana oyintandane asale nonina kunokuba asale noyise. Unina unothando olujulile kunolukayise futhi ukwazi kangcono ukubheka abantwana* (An orphaned child is better off left with the mother). A mother's love cannot be compared to anything on earth. Children left with their mothers owing to a husband dying or relationships ending are better off, as a mother will do everything in her power to provide for her children.

Unina ngunina maZulu (Nobody compares to a mother).

Ingane igaba ngonina (A child can behave anyhow when it has the mother's protection).

Inkonyane yenye iyayiqhubusha, eyayo iyayikhotha (The mother treats her children better than anyone else's).

Imbuzi ilele phezu kwezinyane (The parent is protecting his/her child).

The above proverbs praise the way in which women love and care for their children. This is the reason why most women in traditional societies end up being stuck at home taking care of their children. There are those who want to further their education and build careers, but are discouraged by their family members. These proverbs are sometimes used against women to persuade them to submit.

The paper has shown that indeed proverbs, 'reveal feelings, emotions and attitudes of the speaker' (Guma 1967:65). The didactic nature of the proverbs is what causes them to be taken as uncontested truths, and they have contributed a great deal in the socialisation of both male and female. Proverbs have succinctly defined gender roles in Zulu society of men as providers (e.g. **Umkhwenyana yisigodo sokuqhuzula** – *umkhwenyana yilapho bezikhalela khona abakubo kankosikazi lapho behluphekile*). This proverb means that the groom provides for her inlaws during the times of difficulty (e.g. hunger or famine). This proverb takes into cognisance the fact that before *ilobolo* was introduced and set at eleven cows by Shepstone, the groom only paid what he could afford, and then the marriage process would follow. This was done in order to embrace the groom and to establish and maintain the good mutual relationship between the two families. Hence, in times of draught and hardship the bride's family could appeal to *umkhwenyana* (the husband) for help at any time. In contrast to viewing men as providers, women are portrayed as nurturers. In Zulu culture they are always under the control of the men in their families, such as their fathers, uncles, brothers and later their husbands. The role of men renders women unable to take decisions on their own. In traditional tribal societies a woman is still not allowed to buy land unless they are married or have grown sons. The rationale behind these proverbs is that women need men to survive and gain recognition in society (e.g. **Ikhanda elixegaxegayo lofulela abafazi**: A man's law must be adhered to at this house). This example reinforces the patriarchal beliefs regarding women, such as seeing them as subordinates to their male counterparts. Some proverbs appear to be about

men, but they are, in fact, reflecting women's inability to stand up for themselves, thus depicting women as people who rely on men for provision and advice in life. For instance, the proverb, **okwehlula amadoda kuyabikwa**, means that men are capable of fixing anything and everything in life..

Assertive women are always warned that their assertiveness (which is sometimes perceived as stubbornness and disrespect) will be their downfall. They are always warned that their behaviour will have to be toned down, or else marriage will do that for them (e.g. **Uyofika kwamkhathali isidwaba siyokuhaqa**: When you get married things change, sometimes for the worse). The proverbs do not refer to a state of affairs that used to exist in the past, as Dickson and Mbosowo (2014) mention that gender inequality remains prevalent in villages and communities.

Conclusion

From this discussion it is clear that in Zulu proverbs, and traditional societies, women are subordinated through male domination, exploitation through chores and generally unequal treatment. Zulu proverbs reflect the importance of getting married for women of marriageable age. Men are put on a pedestal, and are treated as providers rather than equal partners in a marriage. Polygyny and the importance of bearing a male child have always been the two main contributors in suppressing women in traditional African societies. These imbalances clearly define the gendered roles women are expected to fulfil in these societies.

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