

**AN AMAZON IMAGE VERSUS PATRIARCHAL CONSTRUCTS:
REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN SELECTED WORKS OF MATLWA AND
MDA**

**BY
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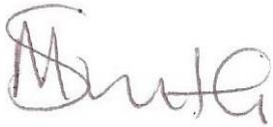
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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis - **AN AMAZON IMAGE VERSUS PATRIARCHAL CONSTRUCTS: REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN SELECTED WORKS OF MATLWA AND MDA** - hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Literary Studies has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university; that it is my work in design and in creation, and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

Signed.....



Date: March 2023

Gugu Marie Mthetwa

DEDICATION

For my beloved and supportive family.

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ABSTRACT

The “images of women” school of feminist critics is particularly concerned with how women are represented in fictional texts. Feminists are generally not satisfied with stereotyping of women as done in traditional fictional texts as a way of sustaining patriarchy. In their fight for women emancipation, feminists have taken up an “Amazon image” to construct female characters that resemble the ancient Amazons. The Amazonian characters are constructed for women empowerment as a means of achieving the feminist goal of gender equality.

The present study locates itself within the “images of women” school to determine from which perspective female characters are portrayed in selected texts. It employs a corpus of feminist theories that include Amazon feminism, to critically analyse purposively sampled texts by two South African writers, Kopano Matlwa and Zakes Mda. The aim of the study is to determine if female characters in selected texts are constructed from an Amazonian perspective or from a patriarchal view which dominates androcentric texts. The study thus juxtaposes stereotypically constructed female characters with female characters constructed from an Amazonian perspective. Amazonian characters are constructed as subjects, and are empowered while patriarchal constructs are objectified, and are negatively portrayed.

A major finding is that Matlwa has constructed female characters from an Amazonian perspective and that Mda has constructed female characters from a patriarchal view. The conclusion is that the Amazonian character is an alternative representation of women than the traditional patriarchal view of women.

Key words: Kopano Matlwa, Zakes Mda, Feminist theory, Amazon feminism, patriarchy, images of women, stereotypes.

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CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The depiction of women in literature, particularly fictional texts, cannot and should not be ignored. Rojas (2020) argues that despite many transformations that purport women's equality as a principle, women continue to be humiliated, raped, murdered, rendered invisible and erased from historical memory. Fictional texts can protract this dilemma by representing women as secondary and subjugated beings in relation to their male counterparts; hence, Rojas (2020) proffers that literature needs to do its part in contributing to gender equity. Indeed, critics such as Felski (2008) are hopeful in literature's contribution to equality by arguing that literature can be a rich source of personal meaning; and that literature might give us direction in our struggle to find out what we are in this world for.

In lieu of the foregoing, the current study selected and analysed seven literary texts in search of their representation(s) of women. The selected texts are Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007); *Spilt Milk* (2010); and *Period Pain* (2017); and Zakes Mda's *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* (1993); *Ways of Dying* (1995); *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995) and *Little Suns* (2015). Among the leading reasons for selecting these texts were: (a) the necessity of juxtaposing a female writer with a male writer and reflect on their thematisations of women and womanhood; (b) the desire to investigate the argument that androcentric texts depict women as subhuman in relation men and to challenge such as an ideological stance from an Amazonian perspective; (c) the need to situate the selected texts within an ongoing discourse on gender studies, politics and discourse in hopes of contributing to women's liberation and empowerment.

This first chapter of the study outlines the aim and objectives of the study; the research approach and methodology adopted to navigate the study to its logical and hypothesised conclusion. Furthermore, key terms and concepts are defined. The

chapter also introduces the feminist theory that underpins the study by reviewing several extant literatures of feminist critics pertaining to the representation of women in fictional texts. In tandem with the school of feminist scholars and critics, this study is based on the delineation of “women’s images”, with particular interest in how women are depicted in literature. Through the feminist theory, the study determines if female characters are constructed from a patriarchal view or from an Amazonian perspective in the selected texts. The study juxtaposes patriarchal constructs with female characters constructed from an Amazonian image.

The Amazonian Feminism, a strand of feminist theory, underpinned the study. The feminist theory enables the researcher to determine whether female characters in the selected texts are constructed as a strategy for maintaining patriarchal and consequently repressive ideologies or whether the writer’s mode(s) of representing female characters in fictional texts are utilised as a means of achieving gender equality. For the present study, female characters that promote a sexist ideology are deemed to be patriarchal constructs whereas empowered female characters are seen as constructed from an Amazonian perspective.

Furthermore, Amazonian Feminism undergirds this study because the Amazonian character features prominently in feminist literary critics’ discourse or what they characterise as “images of women” (Meeder, 2008). Exemplary images of women such as the Amazonian character are mostly presented in contemporary fictional literary texts to showcase that there is a positive portrayal of women other than the usual negative portrayals of women in fictional texts which, according to Ibinga (2007), lead to negative perceptions of and attitudes towards women in societies. Amazonian characters in fictional texts are thus presented to oppose and counteract female stereotypes. Engaging the feminist theory, the study determines whether female characters are constructed from the Amazonian perspective or from a traditional perspective of patriarchy.

The feminist theory is a tool for feminism as a movement. Various feminisms engaged for the study are: western feminisms, which include Amazon feminism, post-colonial feminism, African feminisms, and South African feminisms. Western feminism and African feminism are used together in the study because their ideas intersect in challenging stereotypes and enforcing a discourse of empowering women. Feminisms have a common goal of fighting the oppression of women in their various cultural spaces. For Africans, western feminism cannot work alone as affirmed by Lockett (1989:16) who argues that western feminism has failed “to go beyond the limits of the white middle-class text”. Thus, this study adopts a transcultural feminist lens which draws insights from both African and western feminisms to analyse the selected literary texts. As Pucherová (2022:2) argues, transcultural feminism “suggests mutuality, coimplication, and the interweaving of histories and struggles”.

McAfee (2018) defines feminism as both an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all forms. Considering McAfee’s (2018) definition of “feminism” suggests that literature also has a duty to contribute towards seeking justice for women. How women are represented in literature is crucial. Ibinga (2007:8) argues that negative depictions of women can be seen to contribute to the persistence of damaging cultural stereotypes of women in the social world, which, in turn “implicitly but detrimentally” influence women’s circumstances.

The call by feminist critics for a positive or fair portrayal of women in fictional texts is not new. Decades ago, Daiches (1963:149) pointed out that literary critics believe that the function of literature is to provide “a just and lively image of human nature.” Likewise, Donovan (1983) argues that the negative portrayal of women in fictional texts functions as furthering a sexist ideology; and that sometimes the suffering that female characters are made to go through cannot be justified. Still on the negative representation of women in fictional texts, Gaidzanwa (1985:8) notes that “the struggle for justice can be handicapped if women have a negative image in society”. The critic argues that a negative image delegitimises women’s struggle for fundamental rights and freedoms such as the right to jobs, education, health, and other valued goods and

services in society. The 21st century has seen similar interventions. Murray's (2010) article, "Gender and Violence in Cape slave narratives and post-narrative", focusses on the ways in which bodies of slave women become sites on which both physical and discursive violence is enacted. Murray's article resonates with Kiguwa's (2019) theoretisations of bodies out of place, where the phenomenological and psychosocial dimensions of lived experience extend to the representations of the human body as a subjugated and alienated space. In these representations, the female body, is typified as a site of colonisation and commodification (Nkealah, 2008).

This study considers female characters that are negatively delineated in the selected texts as stereotypes constructed in perpetuation of patriarchy. According to Ashton and Whitting (1987), feminist theorists define patriarchy as a universal system of male domination that has pervaded all aspects of culture throughout history. Undergirding such an ideology are often patriarchy and phallogocentrism. According to Lockett (1989), the concepts 'patriarchy' and 'phallogocentrism' are intertwined in that both foreground the primacy of the male over the female (see also Mogoboya & Sebola, 2022). Hence, feminists generally perceive patriarchy as a repressive phallogocentric ideology, doctrine, and practice. Androcentric texts therefore present female characters that are portrayed negatively in the texts for the purpose of serving patriarchy. On the other hand, feminist writers present not only a positive but also a complex or more rounded portrayal of women in fictional texts as a way of fighting patriarchy.

On the representation of women in fictional texts, Ibinga (2007) argues that a positive portrayal of fictitious female characters can frame societal perceptions and attitudes towards women in a positive manner. Positive imaging of female characters could also contribute to changing societies' mores of regarding women as of lesser value than men. A female character constructed with a positive image is one that is empowered and is self-reliant, amongst other things. According to Gramstad (1999), the common pattern of female victimhood and Othering works against the feminists' broader enterprise for women's empowerment. This gives rise to a need to challenge a

stereotyped female character with an exemplary female character to give hope to women in society.

As a counter to the stereotypical view of women, feminists have taken up the Amazon image from the twentieth century as the *de rigueur* icon of a strong, independent woman. Amazon feminism uses the women warriors of ancient Greece as a symbol of female empowerment, emphasising women's agency and capacity for power. An Amazon character is described as strong, courageous, and independent. Amazon warrior women of ancient Greece had freedom of choice; they even chose to live without men. Amazon feminism thus vanguards images and voices of an Amazon female character (Meeder, 2008).

Amazon feminism is essentially concerned with gender equality and opposes all forms of gender stereotypes and discrimination against women based on assumptions of what women are supposed to be, look, or behave as if they are passive, weak, and physically helpless beings (Gramstad, 1999). The Amazon female character shores up as a plausible role model for women who aim to take leadership roles, stand their ground against patriarchy, and refuse to be dictated to by patriarchal societies. For this study, an Amazonian character counteracts a stereotypically constructed female character.

A close analysis of the selected texts through the lens of the branches of the feminist theory in general, and the Amazonian feminist theory in particular, aims to determine whether or not female characters defy traditional archetypes and social stereotypes. For the present study, if female characters defy stereotypes, it would mean that they are constructed from an Amazonian point of view. If, on the other hand, female characters are constructed in a stereotypical manner, it would mean that they are constructed from an androcentric perspective, further implying that a sexist ideology controls the text. The implications of each type of representation for feminist advancement in South Africa is what is at the heart of this project.

On African feminism, the study discusses South Africa separately from African feminisms, under the subheading “South African feminism”, whilst considering that South African literature often focused more on the long political struggle against the apartheid regime than it did with feminism. Although there were South African women writers such as Sindiwe Magona and Miriam Tlali who were already dealing with gender politics in their writings very early on, the goal foregrounded in their works was always political freedom rather than gender equality (Lockett, 1989; Rafapa, 2017; Montle, 2018). However, for feminists in South Africa, the struggle continued even after the fall of apartheid. Trout (2021) argues that the struggle continued against capitalism and patriarchy after the fall of apartheid because the transfer of power was amongst men. In addition, South Africa gets special attention in this study because the chosen primary texts are written within a South African context.

The historical background of South Africa has an impact on how fictional texts are thematically conceived and constructed, particularly about the representation of women. Boswell (2010) talks of a triple oppression of Black women, looking at race, gender, and class as the common tenets of these women’s alienation, suppression, and exclusion. In other words, Black women are denied access to varied opportunities of self-empowerment such as education, work, and leadership on account of their being Black, female and probably low or middle class. Shah (2008) discusses Black people’s colonisation for hundreds of years, and the subsequent tyranny and exploitation of Blacks by the nefarious apartheid rule. Fick (2008) mentions the traditional Black patriarchy which stands against Black women. In lieu of this, the study proffers that the patriarchal background of writers largely influenced how they wrote fiction.

Lewis and Baderoon (2021) talk of the influence of contemporary Black South African feminist writing on today’s scholars and radical thinkers. They submit that this type of writing illuminates the dynamics of gender and its implications on liberation and empowerment. Boswell (2020) notes that if South African Black women’s fiction is read as theory, then their works produce a feminist criticism that speaks forcefully back to racism and patriarchal power. On radical thinking, Masenya (2009), a South African

feminist critic, refers to a strong woman or a strong female character as a *Mosadi* (woman) from her coined *Bosadi* (Womanhood) perspective. According to the *Bosadi* perspective, a *Mosadi* can stand on her own while respecting the communal mentality of African people. Victimhood-defying female characters in imaginative literature are significant agents to Amazon feminists in the fight against patriarchy. The present study is set to determine if Matlwa and Mda have constructed female characters from an Amazon perspective, or from a patriarchal view.

One other factor that the study uses for analysis is the patriarchal issue of violence against women. If female characters in the selected texts are subjected to violence, the study assumes it to be for the perpetuation of male power. In *Patriarchy and Women Abuse*, Ademiluka (2018) argues that there is a correlation between patriarchy and the problem of women abuse. Moffett (2006) argues that in democratic South Africa, sexual violence has become a socially endorsed punitive measure for maintaining patriarchal order. About the rape of women, Gqola (2015) argues that patriarchy does not respect national boundaries; it is unashamedly promiscuous, with rape taking place, be it in an empty street at night, a crowded bus, or a lecture hall. These are sites of fear for women.

The seriousness of violence against women in South Africa has been highlighted by the President of South Africa, Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa. On National Women's Day in 2018, the President delivered a live speech on television in which he said that a war is being waged against the women of South Africa. It is a war against women's bodies, their dignity, their right to freedom, their right to security and equality. It is an affront to our common humanity and a betrayal to the values of our constitution. On the same issue of abuse and violence against women, the Deputy President David Mabuza said in his speech that patriarchy lies at the root of the problem, and that men need to confront themselves. According to Samuelson (2002), rape in the South African society of the transition was an endemic social disorder. She argues that there is a disjuncture between literary plots and social reality and that the metaphorical use of women's bodies distorts the social and political realities women inhabit (Samuelson, 2002).

The prevalence of violence against women in South Africa is also captured in Nduna et al.'s (2021) research on violence against women and girls during the Covid-19 lockdown. The researchers argue that the Covid-19 lockdown rules prevented movement which women used to escape from abusive situations in their places of abode. Nduna et al. (2021) further aver that public life for most women and girls has become a coping mechanism. If violence against women in South Africa is prevalent and normalised in society, it is likely that female characters in selected texts are also presented as abused. The feminist theory upon which this study is premised rejects sexism and the abuse of women. In contrast, it promotes gender equality and women's agency.

Sathiparsad et al. (2008) argue that men often use violence as a means of control over women and children. Russell (1992) defines femicide as a sex-based term to define the intentional killing of females because they are females. Femicide applies to all forms of sexist killing, whether motivated by misogyny, by a sense of superiority over females, by sexual pleasure, or by assumption of ownership over women (Russell, 1992). Femicide accounts for 40–50% of all deaths of American women killed. Each day in the United States results in the death of an average of four women. In South Africa, 2930 were murdered in 2018 and 30 of these women were murdered by their partners (Malekane, 2018).

Russell (1992) expatiates that femicide is on the extreme end of a continuum of anti-female terror includes a wide variety of verbal and physical abuse. This abuse entails atrocities such as rape, torture, sexual slavery, incestuous and extra familial child sexual abuse, physical and emotional battery, sexual harassment, genital mutilation, unnecessary gynaecological operations, forced heterosexuality, forced sterilisation, forced motherhood, psychosurgery, denial of food to women in some cultures, and cosmetic surgery (Russell, 1992). Whenever these forms of terrorism result in death, they become femicide. If female characters in the texts under scrutiny are subjected to what Russell (1992) refers to as forms of terrorism against women, the study counts it as one other way of stereotypically constructing female characters. Sathiparsad et.

al's (2008) argument that men often use violence as a means of control over women and children confirms that violence against women is perpetrated to maintain male control in perpetuation of patriarchy.

The perpetuation of violence against women, as explicated above, often finds expression in some literary outputs. Bertens (2014) argues that female characters stereotypically constructed are put together not necessarily by the writers who presented them themselves, but by the culture to which they belong. An Amazonian female character is a counter representation to female characters that are constructed from a phallogocentric perspective to maintain male power. Meeder (2008) argues that among other character traits, an Amazonian character is expected to be strong, self-reliant; independent, and capable of taking action. According to Hurwit (1999), ancient amazons in Greek mythology engaged in battles against men. This study analyses selected texts of the two writers to determine if female characters are constructed from a patriarchal view or from an Amazonian viewpoint.

1.2. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

1.2.1. Afrocentrism

The study is premised on the feminist theory. The theory is used as a lens to expose the patriarchal propensities of texts. However, the study goes beyond western feminist theory to include African feminisms to cater for the selected texts, which are set in African contexts. Adherents of the Afrocentric view believe that their worldview should positively reflect traditional African values. Rafapa (2006:10) refers to Afrocentrism as “an attitude that directly combats European hegemonic discourse in order to negate its inherent Eurocentrism as a pole diametrically opposed to that associated with Africans.” As the selected texts are set in Africa, specifically South Africa, and written by Africans residing in Africa and in the diaspora, it is logical that the Afrocentric view be applied in analysing the texts. The study scrutinises and analyses female characters in the selected texts from the perspective of Afrocentrism to determine if there are patriarchal elements that are oppressive to women usually under the veneer of African cultural practices.

1.2.2. Agency

Agency refers to the ability to act either in the domestic or social and political spheres. In the individualistic model of the person, agency is defined as a feature of each sane, adult human being which, sadly, excludes women, children, and those “Othered”, who are viewed as not fully human by a society which acts forcefully upon them and against which they can only pity themselves. However, adherents of feminism celebrate women who are seen to stand out from the collective and assert their presence in the world. Feminism celebrates women engaging in specific tasks and conquering the hurdles that the world puts in their way (Davies, 1991). Agency is one of the concepts applied in this study to ascertain if female characters in the selected texts are able to take action or take charge of their lives regardless of the situations they find themselves in. Women’s agency for power is in reference to those female characters defying the supposed logic of phallogocentric societies about women (Davies, 1991).

1.2.3. Amazon image

An Amazon is a member of a legendary race of female warriors who fought against men in ancient Greece. From the twentieth century, feminists have taken up the legendary female warrior as a symbol in Amazon feminism for women empowerment in the stead of the common pattern of female victimhood in fictional literary texts. In defiance of stereotypes, qualities bestowed to Amazonian characters are, amongst other character traits, independence, taking action, and the ability to take leadership roles (Meeder, 2008). At the basic level, adherents of Amazon feminism are dedicated to the image of the female hero in fiction as well as in real life – as expressed in the physiques and feats of female athletes, martial artists and other powerfully built women in society, art, and literature (Basow, 1986). The study explores the Amazon image versus patriarchal constructs in the selected texts.

1.2.4. Constructs

According to Bertens (2014), constructs are characters in fictional texts that are portrayed in a way that does not have much in common with how people see and experience themselves. Constructs can, for instance, be put together and advanced to promote patriarchal ideology. The study scrutinises the texts of both Matlwa and Mda to determine if their female characters are merely constructs for promoting patriarchy or if they represent real women who may have their own aspirations other than serving men's interests.

1.2.5. Apartheid

Minh-Ha (1995) defines apartheid as an oppressive Bantustan system that condemned Blacks to a life of misery in their own country. Minh-Ha (1995:232) further refers to apartheid as a perverted logic which worked towards the erasure of Blacks while urging them to keep their way of life and ethnic values within the borders of their homelands "as long as [they] (Blacks) and [their] kind are careful not to step beyond the assigned limits." The selected texts for this study are written by South Africans in a post-apartheid context. One of the primary tasks of the study is to determine if, amongst other oppressions, female characters are subjected to institutionalised oppression and exploitation such as those suffered by African women under the nefarious apartheid system within which patriarchy was also entrenched. According to Little (1980), apartheid forms part of what has come to be known as triple oppression of black women in South Africa, namely, race, gender, and class.

1.2.6. African cultural tradition

According to Zulu (1998), culture refers to the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society. African cultural tradition is predominantly patriarchal, as women are subordinates of men in most African societies. Suppressive, unwritten rules which are carried from one generation to another are meted out to women. Zulu (1998) expresses astonishment upon noting that compounding the problem is that

women themselves are the main monitors of this system to ensure that all women in that society adhere to the rules. The study scrutinises female characters in the chosen texts to determine if the characters are constructed according to the oppressive African cultural traditions.

1.2.7. Othering

Othering refers to viewing or treating a person or group of people as intrinsically different from and alien to oneself. Turksma (2001) argues that the identity of females is constructed by men to serve their own interests by presenting women as what Simone de Beauvoir (1949) calls “the other”. In *Feminist as Other*, Bordo (1996) argues that to be “the other” is to be a non-subject, a non-agent, and a mere thing. Women’s selfhood has been systematically subordinated. The study scrutinises the selected texts to determine if othering has played a role in the construction of female characters. As the primary texts are in South African settings, othering may possibly have been applied by the two writers in the construction of female characters fictitiously belonging to different tribes, ethnicities, or nationalities. Othering in this study may also relate to racial discrimination stemming from the now defunct apartheid regime.

1.2.8. Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a system of society or government in which the father or the eldest male is head of the family, and in a patriarchal system men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it. Mudau and Obadire (2017) argue that at the core of the debates on the system of patriarchy are notions that perpetuate women’s suppression around the world and outdated practices that suggest that a woman’s role in the family is subordinate to that of a man. The relevance of this concept to the study is that the feminist theory upon which this study is premised challenges patriarchy. The aim of the study is to scrutinise if one of the two or both writers have managed to defy patriarchy by constructing female characters in the Amazon image vis-à-vis

stereotypes. Amazonian characters can, according to Meeder (2008), hold their own in their sometimes harsh world.

1.2.9. Phallocentrism

Phallocentrism concentrates on the idea that masculinity is the central focus and source of power and authority. All male interests and needs are exalted while females are made subservient to male desires. Phallocentrism has similar foci with patriarchy (Rine, 2010). The study thus scrutinises the chosen texts to determine if phallocentrism has played a role in the construction of female characters. Female characters in phallogentric texts are stereotyped. Having studied various feminist critical texts, the researcher believes that stereotyping is “a thorn in the flesh” for feminists. If, however, female characters in the chosen texts are accorded power similar to their male counterparts in the social, political or economic spheres, the study deems such female characters as confirming the notion of Amazonism.

1.2.10. Stereotype

A stereotype refers to person or character that conforms to a widely held but oversimplified image of the class or gender to which they belong. Patriarchy almost always stereotypes women and men’s roles; stereotypical expectations not only reflect existing differences, but also impact the way men and women define themselves and are treated by others (Ellemers, 2018). The study scrutinises roles assigned to female characters to ascertain if they are stereotypical. Stereotyping in this study would be, for example, of female characters in a work situation where they are employed only as “kitchen girls”, a derogatory reference to house maids in South Africa or if female characters are ever cooking or ever selling tomatoes in the streets. Stereotyping is thus one of the aspects used in the study to determine if female characters are either Amazonians or patriarchal constructs.

1.3. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The starting point of this study is that a negative portrayal of women in fictional literary works has consequences for society, particularly women. Negative delineations of women perpetuate patriarchy – a system that works against the attainment of equality between men and women. Basow (1992:12) affirms that gender stereotypes are powerful forces of social control; people can either conform to them, and be socially acceptable but restricted, or they can rebel and face the consequences of being socially unacceptable. Of concern is that negative perceptions of women may in the end look normal or be acceptable to society. If society accepts women's plight as normal, it suggests that negative behaviour towards women has become part of the matrix upon which that society is built. Children, especially male children, may grow up "knowing" such negative societal behaviours as the status quo, which would then promote and sustain inequality between the sexes. Inequality may even propound the ongoing vicious cycle of violence against women.

In literary fiction, a problem arises when studies that expose the oppression and exploitation of female patriarchal characters do not depict female characters that can counteract the stereotypical female constructs. On studying literary representations of female characters in South African fiction, Machaba (2011) concluded that male writers project biased perceptions of women by constructing stereotypical female characters. Makgato (2010) studied the way in which selected novels portray various forms of sexual abuses of women in South Africa. Farfan's (1988) study of Ibsen's female characters, concluded that female characters in Ibsen's texts do not stand as exemplary figures in the struggle for women's emancipation in literature and society. The studies mentioned exposes the misogynistic status quo and existing paradigms of power but do not bring in an alternative female character that can counteract the stereotypes.

For the present study, a problem arises in literary fiction when only patriarchal female constructs are analysed and presented in studies on the portrayal of women. The study regards it as a gap in knowledge on the representation of women in fictional

texts if only patriarchal female characters are presented in critical studies. Patriarchal constructs do not contribute to the emancipation of women as they are constructed in perpetuation of patriarchy. The present study aims to bring together both female patriarchal constructs with female characters that are constructed from an Amazonian perspective as a way of demonstrating the affordances and problematics of each representation. Amazonian characters are convention-defying and empowered female characters constructed as a means of promoting the feminist goal of gender equality. Feminists have taken up the Amazon image as an icon for women emancipation and empowerment to attain their feminist goal of gender equality (Meeder, 2008).

The present study juxtaposes empowered female characters with female patriarchal constructs. Female writers that are cognisant of women's misrepresentation in traditional fictional texts and consequently write back to such phallogocentric texts and societies ought to be brought to the fore so that their texts could be scrutinised and analysed to determine how their depiction of women advances the feminist cause. This study's discussion of the need for the construction of female characters that exhibit the Amazon image in fictional texts adds an important dimension to the feminist discourse. Texts with Amazonian characters counteract what Lockett (1989) describes as masculine texts that have degraded, vilified, and depicted women as "the other" to play out their own neuroses and fantasies. The Amazon image offers a contrastive dimension to this norm in that its authorial vision thematises the empowerment and emancipation of women.

Literature then has a significant role to play in the emancipation and empowerment of women. Fialho (2019) argues that the purpose of literature lies in the experience itself, and that this experience is informative. According to Donovan (1983: 215), "literature on its most profound level is a form of learning. We learn and we grow from the knowledge of life, of psychology, human behaviour and relationships that we discover in works of art." Donovan's view is supported by an advertisement on racial prejudice aired on a South African television channel (eNCA) in October 2017, which purported that "we are what we learn." It follows then that if literature provides opportunities for societies to learn, phallogocentric fictional texts also can perpetuate societies'

normalisation of derogations, abuse, rape, and killings of women. Emanating from Donovan's (1983) view that in literature people learn, a question such as the following can be asked: "What is the role of South African fictional texts in teaching the public, young and old, boys and men, to treat women with respect and as equals?" The phallogocentric literary order has to be challenged. Feminists call for the centering of acceptable and positive representations of females in literature.

1.4. AIM OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.4.1. Aim

The aim of the study is to explore the notion of the Amazon image versus patriarchal constructs on the representation of women in selected texts by two South African writers, Kopano Matlwa and Zakes Mda, a female writer and a male writer, respectively. Matlwa is a young female contemporary writer, while Mda is a seasoned older male writer. Both Matlwa's and Mda's female characters are scrutinised and analysed to determine if they are constructed from an Amazonian perspective or from a patriarchal point of view.

As mentioned earlier, feminist theory underpins the present study. Arinder (2021) argues that feminist theory falls under the umbrella of critical theory, which has the purpose of destabilising systems of power and oppression. Feminist theory often focuses on analysing gender inequality. In using feminist theory, the study is able to determine from which perspective female characters in the selected texts are constructed. The struggle faced by feminists in South Africa is highlighted by Thorpe (2018) who argues that feminists in South Africa explore their often vastly different experiences and perspectives in accessible and engaging voices. Her book on South African feminism affirms that even after more than two decades of democracy, there is a necessity of feminism in South Africa to challenge patriarchal ideologies and inspire women to action.

Lewis and Baderoon (2021) acknowledge the presence of problems around feminism in South Africa. One such problem cited is that young feminists sense that their elders have not produced enough theory or activism to help them make sense of and challenge the new. However, Lewis and Baderoon (2021) boast that their book, *Surfacing: On Being Black and Feminist in South Africa* (2021), is dedicated to contemporary Black South African feminist writing influential to today's scholars and radical thinkers.

Ibinga (2007:6) argues that, in the context of the current "intense debate about human rights and principles of freedom in newly democratised South Africa, the redefinition of gender relations cannot be put aside: a critical analysis of the portrayal of female characters in noteworthy novels is needed in so far as it can highlight significant ways in which women are seen in this transforming society." Lockett (1989) says South African women writers were concerned about South Africa's delay in addressing gender issues vis-à-vis other African countries, due to its political climate of racial discrimination by the nefarious apartheid regime. As a result, women used their literary texts to contribute to the discourse on gender, equality, liberation, and women's empowerment. The "new" struggle after apartheid is confirmed in Lewis and Baderoon's (2021) work which has contributions from scholars addressing post-apartheid challenges confronting black women.

The present study explores the notion of the Amazon image *vis-à-vis* female characters who may be perceived as patriarchal constructs in Mda's and Matlwa's selected texts. Although several studies (Hegemann, 2005; Ibinga, 2007; Crous, 2010; Mahasha, 2014; Montle, 2018) have scrutinised Mda's literary works, these studies have not intensively explored the juxtaposition of female characters in Mda's texts with Matlwa's female characters. Furthermore, the foregoing studies have not reflected on the Amazon image as a contrastive characterisation of a female created from a patriarchal perspective. Therefore, this study sought to foreground the Amazon image as a character worth popularising in postcolonial fiction. An Amazon image is radical in its construction as a subject while a patriarchal construct languishes in objecthood which may include violence 'perpetrated' against female characters. Moffett (2006)

argues that cruelty against women could be a social conditioning rather than ordinary criminality. Negative social attitudes and perceptions towards women could be lying at the root of the evil deeds against women. Studies that intend to show that it is possible, desirable, and appreciated, that female characters be given roles that are traditionally reserved for men in androcentric texts are encouraged as a contribution to the feminist goal of gender equality. A project that investigates the ideological differences between constructing female characters from the traditional patriarchal perspective and constructing female characters from a radical Amazonian view is a worthwhile project in determining if there is progression in how women are portrayed in fictional texts. Mixing the gender of the writers whose works are scrutinised further opens up possibilities for checking if writers' gender has a bearing on how they write women.

1.4.2. Research questions

In order to achieve the aim of the study, the following research questions guided the study:

- How are female characters represented in Matlwa's texts from a feminist perspective?
- How are female characters represented in Mda's works from a feminist perspective?
- In contrasting the representations of women in the two writers' texts, what unique insights emerge from the feminist perspective?

The above questions guided the study and its interest in the "images of women" from a feminist perspective, which, *inter alia*, is concerned with how women are portrayed in fictional literature. The study used textual analysis to discuss the representation and depiction of female characters in the selected texts. As already stated, the study specifically juxtaposes the notion of the Amazon female character with the patriarchal constructs in the selected fictional works of Matlwa and Mda, both of which are set in South Africa. Since the setting is South Africa, the researcher deemed it fit to adopt African feminism, in addition to other strands of feminism, including western feminism, as a tool for analysing the fictional characters in view of the foregoing research questions.

1.5. RESEARCH APPROACHES AND METHODOLOGY

1.5.1. Research Method

The research problem identified above required a systematic approach to address it. Such an approach is the identification and utilisation of a relevant research methodology. Research methodology refers to the scientific procedures by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining, and predicting phenomena; it is a systematic way to solve a problem (Rajasekar, Philominathan & Chinnathambi, 2013). Ryan and Van Zyl (1982:12) proffer that “literary study, like any other fields of inquiry, needs a theoretical foundation, that is, an articulation of its basic paradigms, methods, assumptions, and the like.”

The study is a qualitative research primarily because textual study locates itself within the diverse approaches of qualitative research. Blaikie (2010) avers that approaches to qualitative research consist of a variety of philosophical paradigms, such as interpretivism, phenomenology, semiotic, ethnography, ethnomethodology, feminism, constructivism, social realism, contemporary hermeneutics and critical theory, as well as symbolic interactionism and others. The present study was premised upon the feminist approach, which encompasses Amazon feminism, Western feminism, Postcolonial feminism, African feminisms, and South African feminism.

As the texts in focus thematise (South) African settings, it is necessary to include feminisms of formerly colonised countries to account for the exclusive experiences unknown to western feminism. Ibrahim’s (1996:900) observation is that “feminisms informed by colonial experience suggest a very fundamental departure from western feminisms and are defined by a need to resist but not reject the world we are given, phallogocentric though it is.” This is a view of postcolonial feminists, not only in African countries, but also in other continents that were subjugated by imperial conquests. Consequently, a qualitative feminist research method was deemed appropriate for this study.

1.5.2. Research design

Literary inquiry is selected for the purpose of determining how women are represented in the selected texts from a feminist perspective; whether the female characters are constructed from an Amazonian or patriarchal point of view. According to Frey, Botan and Kreps (1999), considerations to be taken in textual analysis include selecting types of texts to be studied, acquiring appropriate texts, and determining which particular approach to employ in analysing them.

1.5.3. Sampling

Matlwa and Mda's texts were purposively selected to answer the research questions posed to guide the study. Teddlie and Yu (2007:77) define purposive sampling as "selecting units based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study's questions." Two South African writers were purposively selected: a seasoned male writer, Zakes Mda (born 1948), and a young female contemporary writer, Kopano Matlwa (born 1985). The generational gap between the two writers signals a need to study their writing to determine whether change is taking place in the representation of women in literary fiction.

Primary sources chosen from Mda's multiple works are *Ways of Days* (1991), *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* (1993), *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995), and *Little Suns* (2010). Matlwa's texts are *Coconut* (2007), *Spilt Milk* (2010), and *Period Pain* (2016). From Mda's works, four texts with different genres were chosen because of the vast production behind his name. The choice of a drama text and three novels was for the purpose of checking if there was a transformation in the way he constructs female characters in different genres. Only three novels by Matlwa were analysed for the study because at the time of this study, only three novels were available as published texts. Matlwa's writing is contemporary, which makes it possible to see if there is a difference in the representation of women between her texts and those by Mda. Secondary sources used for the study were books, dissertations, theses, scholarly journal articles and websites.

1.5.4. Data collection and analysis

Patton (2002) states that the distinctive features of qualitative data collection methods are also reflected in the methods used to analyse data. This study used textual analysis to collect data from the texts selected. The tool employed to determine which data to collect was the feminist theory. Krippendorff (2007) argues that textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world. Tannen (1996) argues that by applying feminist theory, a text is analysed on its representation of the biological differences between sexes as contrasted with the social and historical constructs of gender roles and stereotypes. The study employs feminist literary theory to determine how women are portrayed in both writers' works.

This study compared, and contrasted how women are depicted in Matlwa's and Mda's texts to determine whether their female characters are constructed from an Amazonian perspective or from an androcentric view. Social, political, and economic aspects in the texts are scrutinised to determine the specific roles women play. On issues of labour, the focus is on whether men and women are treated equally at work, or if there is segregation of roles based on gender where women do not feature in leadership roles. The institution of marriage is scrutinised for signs, however subtle, of domination of women or if marriage is used as a weapon of women subjugation. The study also considered the role of African cultural tradition and religion in the lives of Black women.

Furthermore, to scrutinise power relations in the selected texts, Tannen's (1996) questions in this regard were found to be helpful:

Is the protagonist male or female? Are female characters in power or powerful positions? How many female characters are represented in the narrative and how important are they to the narrative, and in what way? Who is powerful in the narrative, how and why? Are there any shifts of power, and if so, how do they occur, are they sustained? If the speaker or protagonist is female, what is her point of view? How are her experiences different from other females and males? How does she treat others? Does she celebrate femininity and the roles of mothers, wives, and independent women? Are there assumptions that men behave or talk in a particular way, as opposed to how women talk, look, do or behave?

These questions enabled the researcher to delve deep into the chosen texts to unearth problematic female representations. The aspect of 'dualism' was explored to determine if female characters were stereotyped based on "bad woman" and "good woman" caricatures. Significantly, in African literary criticism, dualism does not seem to be applied to male characters. It is argued in this study that the "good woman" categories objectify female characters in the texts so serve the interests of men or male protagonist(s). An example of a "good wife" would be an ever-working, patient and silent wife. The "evil woman" category is reserved for female characters considered deviants by not marrying or professionals accused by patriarchal societies of not serving men properly by working outside the home. On the other hand, female characters that are Amazonians are educated, career-oriented and even occupy leadership roles. They can take action and take charge of their lives. Amazonian characters thus assume positions that can be perceived as exhibiting deviant behaviour in patriarchal terms. Amazonian characters defy stereotypes that perpetuate women's objectification and victimisation. An Amazonian character is a "self", not an "other".

Other aspects for analysis in such a feminist project are language, voice, and silence (Ibinga, 2007). According to Ibinga (2007), language issues call for the interpretation of novelistic discourse to determine if language is used as a weapon for women subjugation. Analysing discourse enabled the researcher to interpret 'silences' and 'voices' to discern their different connotations as ascribed to female characters in varied spheres. Ibinga (2007:11) asserts that through the interpretation of silence and voice, oppressive codes are read between the lines, and women's resistance to various forms of oppression is discerned. People's attitudes and perceptions of women are exposed as discourses emerge.

Characters' responses to situations and events around them are crucial in determining if characters are merely constructed to cater for male characters' interest in texts under scrutiny or if female characters appearing in the texts serve their own needs. Characters' responses determine if they have a self-defined critical consciousness or if they have a stereotypical/stereotyped identity. Female characters with a stereotypical/stereotyped identity are denied feelings. Female characters in androcentric texts are simply there for the growth and salvation of the male

protagonist; they have no identity of their own, they display neither feelings nor emotions, and they do not share their experiences with the reader.

On the other hand, characters with a critical or reflective consciousness, delineated as Amazonians in the study, carry the reader along with them in their emotional journey throughout the narrative. Characters with a critical consciousness are capable of forming projects of their own as opposed to being used for facilitating or redeeming projects of men. Culture's moral view of women was also scrutinised. Texts were scrutinised for cruelty, evil, or suffering that might be meted to female characters to the point where boundaries of appropriateness and moral context of the narrative are broken. According to Donovan (1983), there can be no separation between the aesthetic and the moral aspects of literary texts.

Another literary aspect considered for analysis is *setting*. Setting has played a crucial role in the study from the beginning because of the Africanness of texts selected, which informed the inclusion of African feminisms and South African feminism for analysing the texts. Ibinga (2017) argues that the dichotomy between rural and urban settings plays a role in influencing characters' actions. Interpretation of settings enables researchers to establish distinctions between women depicted in terms of their domestic activities and those represented in social activities or public sector. Analysing images in different settings enables researchers to uncover cultural archetypes and stereotypes. For the study, portrayals of women in rural and urban settings were scrutinised and analysed in both domestic and public contexts to determine whether, or not female characters in both settings are subjected to African cultural tradition and other social pressures.

1.5.5. Quality Criteria

Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007) state that the onus lies on the researcher to ensure that the research findings are trustworthy. The trustworthiness criteria to ensure the rigour of qualitative findings are: dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability. Qualitative researchers ensure that dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability as trustworthiness criteria account for the rigour of

qualitative findings. Babbie and Mouton (2001) stress that a qualitative study cannot be called transferrable unless it is credible, and it cannot be deemed credible unless it is dependable. The researcher thus strives for trustworthiness of the findings of the study by applying what each criterion demands.

In striving for the trustworthiness of the research findings, the researcher prolonged time to extensively study the feminist theory on which the study is premised to enable the researcher to analyse collected data correctly. Sampling relevant texts was a daunting task because the researcher had to go through various writers and narratives to get to texts which would be relevant for Amazon feminism.

The research project was under the guidance of the allotted supervisors. Support was also sought from professionals willing to offer scholarly guidance. Peers were also invited to give feedback. Description of the study detailing methodology, data analysis, and context was provided to “allow comparison of this context to other possible contexts to which transfer might be contemplated” (Shenton, 2004:69). For dependability, help was sought from some researchers to engage in data evaluation procedure by analysing the same data separately and compare results. According to Tobin and Begley (2004:392), confirmability is “concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer’s imagination but are clearly derived from the data.” In collecting data and in its analysis, the researcher desisted from bias by following the precepts of feminist critical theory.

The researcher applied relevant methodology and theory to arrive at scientific resolutions. Marshall and Rossman (1999) assert that qualitative research provides enough freedom for researchers to explain in their own words, phrases, sentences, language and style, and experiences the problem under investigation. Therefore, the researcher freely explained the findings after scrutinising chosen texts to determine whether female characters subscribed to patriarchal constructs or assumed positions of Amazonian characters.

1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the present study lies in its deployment of a comparative literary feminist approach in understanding the representation of women in South Africa. This approach brings to the existing body of knowledge valuable information in the field of literary studies, in particular representations of women in fictional texts. In contrasting the (stereotypical) patriarchal image with the Amazon image (a convention-defying character), this study encourages an ideological metamorphosis from the portrayal of women negatively to positive depictions of women in fictional texts. The study is also significant in that it highlights that there is an alternative to the traditional stereotypical representation of women. The study juxtaposes “negative” portrayals of women with “positive” delineations of women.

Previous studies on works of Mda and Matlwa have been done in isolation of each other or independently. It is, however, of necessity to analyse the two authors’ works in conjunction with each other. The study encourages the idea of an Amazonian image. The study may stimulate debates on feminist theory in general and varied representations of women in fictional texts. The study could also trigger further research in the academic arena. It can be useful to students interested in doing research on issues pertaining to gender. If the study could ever find its way to the social sphere, it could probably influence men and boys to value their women in societies by “unlearning” patriarchal tendencies imbibed through socialisation. In the literary world, writers may improve their ways of writing from a “negative imaging” of women to a “positive imaging” of women. Women themselves may be empowered by Amazonian characters in fictional texts.

Language boards in the Department of Education could be challenged to conscientiously select for learners fictional literary texts that are motivating and empowering. At a political level, modern politicians, including all spheres of governance in the country, might take the call for gender equality more seriously. This

should be done considering the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa which advocates equal rights for its citizens.

1.7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The scope of study is limited to two South African writers, a female and a male. Seven texts produced by these writers were selected for scrutiny and analysis. The selection of the two writers and their seven texts limits the study in that other writers, and even other texts by the same writers, were excluded from the study. It is possible that the texts the selected writers produce later will portray female characters in a different light, thus implying the authors' ideological shifts in gender constructions. The study is also limited in that the texts were analysed from the perspective of feminist criticism where only the portrayal of women was the focus. Viewed from other theoretical perspectives, findings might be different from the ones presented in this study.

1.8. CONCLUSION

The introductory chapter has covered the following aspects: the aim, background of the study and its relevance; research methodology and design, and data analysis technique(s). Chapter one contextualises the researcher's understanding of women's images in literary works from a feminist perspective. Justifications for undertaking the study on the representation of women in fictional texts were provided. Texts that form the primary focus of the study were also listed. The study's significance and limitations were also discussed in this chapter.

1.9. ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

The thesis comprises seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study as summarised in 1.8 above. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical framework of the study, including the history of feminism as a movement and its theoretical apparatus, the feminist critical theory comprising western feminism, post-colonial feminism, Amazon feminism,

African feminism, and South African feminism. The relevance of the various feminisms to the study are also discussed in the chapter.

Chapter 3 is a review of existing literature on the topic of female representation. It looks at how patriarchy constructs women in the African context and the western context, and also engages with the Amazonian character in fiction.

Chapter 4 deals with the portrayal of women in Zakes Mda's texts. A critical analysis of female characters is done to establish if there is, *inter alia*, bias, stereotyping, or domination of female characters or if the characters emerge as Amazonian characters.

In Chapter 5, Kopano Matlwa's texts are scrutinised. Female characters are critically analysed to ascertain if they are constructed from an Amazonian point of view, that is, if female characters are, amongst others, in leadership roles, are independent, and capable of decision-making.

Chapter 6 presents a comparison between Mda and Matlwa's female characters as analysed in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively. Matlwa's and Mda's female characters are juxtaposed to discuss their differences and similarities, if any.

Chapter 7 contains the conclusion, observations and findings of the study. Suggestions for further research are also included.

CHAPTER TWO

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The present study is premised on Amazon Feminism as a strand of Feminist Theory. However, since feminist theory has varied strands, it is imperative to discuss some of those strands to elucidate their stance on issues related to gender equality and empowerment. The various branches of feminism discussed in the study are African Feminism with its variants, Western Feminism and its branches, Amazon Feminism, and Post-colonial Feminism. To explicate the multi-dimensionality of feminist theory, Eagleton (1991:2) argues as follows:

Feminist theory is a broad church with a number of co-operating and competing approaches. It is probably more appropriate to talk of feminist theories rather than feminist theory. For those who are looking for a consolidated political position, or a uniform feminist practice, or even simply for clarity, such diversity is distressing. For others, pluralism is an indication of feminism's creativity and flexibility.

The study concurs with Eagleton's (1991) argument that feminist theory is looked at from various angles by people with different experiences, taking into account geographical spaces and cultural practices of peoples of the world. I think a "straight jacket" approach to feminism can hardly work. The study is comfortable with feminist theories which allow the use of some aspects of western feminisms for analysis together with the African and South African variants of feminisms. Thus, it appropriates a transcultural feminist lens (Pucherová 2022) as earlier indicated.

I chose to draw from both western feminism and African feminism because the basic precepts of analysis are the same. An example could be a female character constructed as an object for patriarchal purposes or she may be constructed as a subject; be it in Africa or the West. Secondly, feminisms may vary in continents, but they have a common goal of attempting to liberate women from the oppression of patriarchy. Bayu (2019) argues that, internationally, feminism aims at realising the liberation of women from all types of oppression and providing

solidarity among women of all countries. An insightful argument in Pucherová (2022) may assist in understanding why we may need to use other feminisms from outside our continent. This feminist critic argues that contemporary South African feminist writing cannot be seen in isolation from American feminism, which should not be seen as imperialist but as enabling. Similarly, the trope of the New South African Woman must not be read as an isolated phenomenon, but in continuity with first-wave feminists and as part of a transitional feminist consciousness. Agreeing with Pucherová's views, I adopt a feminist theoretical approach that is multivalent and dynamic in outlook rather than insular and parochial.

2.2 FEMINISMS AND THE FEMINIST THEORY

Feminism is both a movement and a literary theory. Feminist theories are tools for the feminist movement. According to Walters (2005), the term "feminism" can be used to describe a political, cultural, or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights and interests. Over the years, feminists have campaigned: for women's legal rights: for women's right to bodily integrity and autonomy: for abortion rights and reproductive rights; for protection of women and girls from domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape; for workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay; against misogyny; and against other forms of gender-specific discrimination against women.

Feminist theory is described as an extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical fields. It aims to understand gender inequality and focus on gender politics, power relations and sexuality. While providing a critique of these social and political relations, feminist theory largely focuses on the promotion of women's rights and interests. Themes explored in feminist theory include discrimination, stereotyping, sexual objectification, oppression, and patriarchy (Walters, 2005). In this study, precepts of the feminist theory are used to scrutinise and analyse female characters in the selected texts to determine if the characters were depicted in a stereotypical

manner or if the tenets of Amazon feminism were deployed to bring about gender equality.

2.2.1 Historical background of feminism: Towards a theory of the Amazon

The term “feminism” is used to refer to the women’s movement whose political history began in the late eighteenth century. American and French Revolutions inspired women to demand a larger share of human rights. In 1789, a French woman, Olympe de Gauges, issued a *Declaration of the Rights of Women*, and in 1792, an English woman, Mary Wollstonecraft, published *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Both works had a profound effect on women’s perspective of themselves. The result was the formation of the first movement for women’s rights. In 1848 at a convention organised by Lucretia Mott, the first women’s rights movement was formed, and the Woman’s Suffrage Organisation of the United States and Europe was inaugurated (Eagleton, 1991).

The movement was based on the notion that society did not treat women fairly; that men benefited from this gender inequality, socially, economically, and politically; and that men were seen by society as superior and women inferior and subservient. Friedman’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) criticised the idea that women could only find fulfilment through childrearing and homemaking. The writer hypothesises that women are victims of a false belief system that requires them to find identity and meaning in their lives through their husbands and children. Such a system causes women to completely lose their identity (Eagleton, 1991). The relevance of feminism to this study is that even today, in the 21st century, some writers are still guilty of writing women as inferior and their male counterparts as superior. In other words, some writers still perpetuate traditional archetypes and social stereotypes in imaginative writing regardless of some strides made by the feminist movement towards women emancipation globally.

The feminist movement, the feminist theory, and female writers who, according to Showalter (1977), have tried to adhere to male values in their writing have progressed.

From the inception of the feminist movement in the nineteenth century (Humm, 1986), activities of the movement have led to a formation of variants of feminism that include Amazon feminism. According to Meeder (2008), feminists in the twentieth century adopted the Amazon image to celebrate women's achievements and for women empowerment. Meeder (2008) goes on to say that the Amazon image is also used in the construction of acceptable female characters in fictional texts and is for promoting the feminist goal of gender equality, thus challenging patriarchy.

Feminist theory was a useful tool to this study because it enabled the researcher to determine if female characters in both Matlwa's and Mda's texts were constructed to delineate women empowerment or to perpetuate patriarchal stereotypes. To the researchers whose thematic interests are similar to those of the present study, Grosz (1995:280) says:

Any form of commitment to feminist principles and politics involves some degree of challenge to phallocentrism; the relations between a text and the prevailing norms and ideals which govern its milieu must be explored. Feminist texts must render the patriarchal or phallogentric presumptions governing its contexts and commitment visible. It must question, in one way or another, the power of these presumptions in the production, reception, and assessment of texts.... a text's having a female author in itself carries in itself a certain probability of shaking up or unsettling the phallogentric equation of masculinity and humanity. Moreover, it implies that where men's occupation of the authoritative position of knower is challenged, there must also be a feminist subversion of the patronym.

Grosz's (1995:280) argument is that a feminist text must not only be critical of the patriarchal norms governing it; it must also help. This help comes "in whatever way, to facilitate the production of new and perhaps unknown and unthought discursive spaces – new styles, modes of analysis and argument, new genres and forms – that contest the limits and constraints currently at work in the regulation of textual production and reception" (Grosz, *ibid*). Feminist theory, and one of its branches, Amazon feminism, were relevant to this study in that they helped the researcher to identify phallogentric inclinations in the selected texts. In this manner, feminist theory brought to my mind an image of how a magnet attracts nails onto itself; thus, coining the phrase "magnet on nails" refers to how feminist theory extracts gender stereotypes in patriarchal texts with ease.

My preference for a feminist analytical tool evokes Barthes' (1977) argument that many feminists would readily accept the notion of "death of the *author*" and would even celebrate the demise of textual integrity and the abandonment of the search for a singular meaning or received interpretation, and revel in the multiplicity and ambiguity of texts as well as their openness to re-interpretation. In place of the singular meaning of a text assumed to be the author's property, plural meanings are desired by feminist critics. In light of the above, Grosz (1995:275) argues as follows:

The elevation of multiple readers to the position of textual creator has had a number of liberating effects for feminist theory. For one thing, it has opened up a whole history of patriarchal discourses to feminist appropriations and recontextualisations. Any text, however patriarchal it may have been at its outset and its author's intentions, can be read from a feminist point of view. This may explain why, over the last two decades or more, the most privileged and analysed texts were those written by men – and often recognized as phallogentric by feminists working with them. Any text can be read from a feminist point of view, that is, from the point of view that brings out a text's alignment with participation in, and subversion of patriarchal norms.

Thus, the usage of feminist theory for the study enabled the researcher to forge a different direction other than that which the writers of the chosen texts might have intended. The focus and contribution of the study is to bring in an Amazon image in the representation of women in fictional texts that defies the androcentric literary tradition. The researcher concurs with Farfan's (1988) observation on the power of feminist theory when arguing that some texts can be actively situated within the parameters of an affirmative feminist discourse despite the fundamental patriarchal bias with which they are created.

According to Walters (2005), several sub movements of feminism have developed over the years and often overlap, which means that some feminists identify themselves with several types of feminist thought. Consequently, the following feminisms are discussed and adopted in different ways to read the selected texts: radical feminism, liberal feminism, socialist feminism, African feminisms, Postcolonial feminism, and Amazon feminism.

2.2.1 Radical feminism

In radical feminism, the male-controlled capitalist hierarchy is described as sexist and considered to be the defining feature of women's oppression. Feminists generally agree that the present system is male dominated, and that this forms the foundation of women's oppression. Radical feminists are adamant that women can free themselves only when they have done away with what they consider an inherently oppressive and dominating patriarchal system. Radical feminists feel that the male-based authority and power structure are responsible for oppression and inequality. They also feel that if the system and its values are in place, society will not be reformed in any significant way (Humm, 1986).

Some radical feminists, probably the most radical, believe in the total uprooting and reconstruction of society in order to achieve their goals (Ruthven, 1984). Regarding the marriage institution, radical feminist Cronan (1970) argues that since marriage constitutes slavery for women, it is clear that the women's movement must concentrate on attacking this institution since freedom for women cannot be won without the abolition of marriage. However, critics such as Shibles (1989) points to the fact that feminists themselves characterise radical feminism as involving sexism because it advocates the superiority of women over men and the goal to establish a separate world without men. This is seen as gynocracy (Shibles 1989). In this view, radical feminism is contrasted with humanism and seen as antihumanistic.

African feminists do not seem to align themselves with the western radical view of the abolition of marriage and uprooting family units because their societies are based on communalism. One feminist, Aidoo (2001:13), derides western feminism as an "embarrassing western philosophy, which is imported from America to ruin nice African homes." This implies that African women did not need a borrowed feminism because they have never been complacent about women's oppression. They have always spoken out against what is wrong with their societies. One such critic is Ade (2000) who argues that polygamy is a bane of society, and it is a vice to be dealt with, not by

procrastination but by divorce. The point Ade (2000) is making is that African men have a tendency of hiding behind claims that their culture allows them to do so. The result is that men horde women as wives in the name of culture. Ade (2000) seems to be taking a radical stance in her reaction to polygamous relationships, while feminists argue against patriarchy, irrespective of whether they are radical or liberal, as Farfan (1988:21) argues as follows:

The present patriarchal system is harsh, authoritarian, vengeful and inhumane, and modern society has become progressively more dehumanized as patriarchal peoples place more importance in property rights than in human rights and more emphasis on rigid conformity than on concepts of justice and mercy.

Radical feminist thought has a basic relevance for this study, as its concern is the liberation of women. The present study focused on the unjust representation of women in patriarchal literary fiction on the one hand, and on the other hand it scrutinised female characters to determine if they were represented according to the tenets of Amazon feminism.

In accordance with Frye's (1983) argument, another form of radical feminism is separatist feminism, which does not support heterosexual relationships. Its proponents argue that the sexual disparities between men and women are unresolvable. They also feel that men cannot make positive contributions to the feminist movement and that even well intentioned men replicate patriarchal dynamics. Separatist feminism is described as separation of various modes from men and from institutions, relationships, roles, and activities that are male-defined, male-dominated, and operating for the benefit of males and the maintenance of male privilege – this separation being initiated or maintained, at will, by women (Frye, 1983).

However, some African feminists such as Acholonu (1995) are in favour of the inclusion of men in their programmes on women emancipation. The inclusion of African men is informed by the fact that the majority of policymakers in many African countries are men, and women believe that inclusivity is important if women are to gain ground in policy changes that affect them. Furthermore, the importance that many women place on communalism and family results in their desire to work with men to

develop an inclusive approach to solving gender issues. The developer of *Motherism*, Acholonu (1995) explicates that for *Motherism* to work, there has to be a male-female complementarity that ensures the wholeness of human existence in a balanced ecosystem.

The study concurs with the suggestion of inclusivity to solve problems of Africa, be it gender, political or economic issues, taking into cognisance Africa's history of colonialism and the communal nature of African societies. However, warnings are sounded against the inclusivity approach. Adimora-Ezeigbo (2012), herself an African feminist critic and the proposer of *Snail-sense Feminism*, warns women to work slowly when dealing with men in the tough and very difficult patriarchal society they live in. On the question of language, Lorde (1981) argues that it is futile for women to use the discourse such as that of the male establishment in power because it leads to some women sinking into oblivion. In *For the Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*, Lorde (1981:232), a postcolonial feminist, warns women: "they (men) may allow us (women) temporarily to beat [them] at [their] own game, but they will never enable us to bring genuine change." Lorde's (1981) argument is similar to Frye's (1983) warning against inclusivity on arguing that even well intentioned men replicate patriarchal dynamics. Feminists and feminist critics in Africa are thus warned. Ruthven (1984) clarifies that feminists are primarily concerned with the oppression of women in an androcentric society, and a feminist critic is one who considers gender as the crucial determinant in the production, circulation, and consumption of literary discourses.

2.2.2 Liberal feminism

While some feminists have chosen a radical path, others, according to Bryson (1999), are liberal in their approach. The latter opt to transform society using personal interactions between women and men. Liberal feminism focuses on women's ability to show and maintain their equality through their own actions and choices. According to liberal feminists, all women can assert their ability to achieve equality, and therefore it is possible for change to happen without altering the structure of society. Issues

important to liberal feminists include reproductive and abortion rights, sexual harassment, voting rights, education, equal pay for equal work, affordable childcare, affordable health care, and bringing to light the frequency of sexual and domestic violence against women (Bryson, 1999).

Liberal feminism is mostly welcome in African feminisms and in postcolonial feminism involving other formerly colonised countries such as India. On discussing modes of African feminisms, Nkealah (2016), for example, reveals several commonalities that African feminisms share: African feminisms incorporate gender inclusion, collaboration, and accommodation to ensure that both women and men contribute, although not equally, to improving the material conditions of women. On postcolonial feminism in India, Mishra (2013:133) concluded that heterogeneity is the key theme of postcolonial feminism, and that postcolonial feminine writers are not interested in dismantling family order, custom, and tradition; rather, they seek for balance, mutual respect, and harmony. According to Davis-Kimball (2002:46), Amazons lived a nomadic life in which men, women, and children work side-by-side, “often at the same tasks with little of the type of role playing that is often associated with patriarchal cultures.” Thus, liberal feminism speaks to both Amazon feminism and African feminism included in this study.

2.2.3 Socialist feminism

Critics such as Bryson (1999) have noted that a common element in the various schools of thought is the liberation of women. That which makes them different is what its proponents believe is not covered in the other schools of thought. Socialist feminism connects the oppression of women to Marxist ideas about exploitation, oppression, and labour. Socialist feminists argue that unequal standing in both the workplace and the domestic sphere holds women down. Socialists see prostitution, domestic work, childcare, and marriage as ways in which women are exploited by a patriarchal system that devalues women and the substantial work they do.

The uniqueness of socialist feminism is that it focusses its energy on broad change that affects society as a whole, rather than on individuals. They see the need to work alongside not just men, but also all other groups, as they see the oppression of women as part of a larger pattern that affects everyone involved in the capitalist system (Bryson, 1999). African feminisms have some common views with socialist feminism in that they concentrate completely on all people instead of individuals. Masenya (2009) regards socialist feminism as akin to the African mentality of communality.

The socialist version of feminism was relevant to the study because socialist feminists' efforts are targeted at freeing women from exploitation and oppression by phallogocentric systems (Bryson, 1999). As a branch of feminist theory upon which the study is premised, socialist feminism's focus is on fighting patriarchy. This study examines the representation of women with the aim of scrutinising female characters in Matlwa's and Mda's selected texts. Though it is yet to be proven for this study, Grosz (1985) argues that a female writer's text often carries the potency of shaking up the phallogocentric equation of masculinity and humanity.

2.2.4 Black feminism

Black feminism is included as a subheading of western feminism, and not under African feminism, for the reason that feminists who felt mostly excluded by western feminism are African women in the diaspora. American black feminists such as Davis (1981) argue that sexism, class oppression, and racism are inextricably bound together. She argues that forms of feminism that strive to overcome sexism and class oppression but ignore race can discriminate against many people, including women through racial bias. A movement called *The Combahee River Collective* argued in 1974 that the liberation of Black women entails freedom for all people, since it would require the end of racism, sexism, and class oppression. One of the theories that evolved out of this movement was Walker's *Womanism* (1983). The theory emerged after early feminist movements that were led by white middle class women advocated social changes, such as woman's suffrage (Davis, 1981).

Adherents of Black feminism argue that feminist movements, which are predominantly White, had generally ignored oppression based on racism and classism. Womanists argue that Black women experienced a different and more intense kind of oppression from that of White women. They believe that race, class, and sex oppression are all distinctive yet interwoven forces that work simultaneously, producing multiple intersections of discrimination (Davis, 1981). The oppression of Black Americans based on racism and classism could be relevant to a South African context where Black women had to face a combination of racism, classism, patriarchy, and Black men with oppressive cultural practices. The vices against women in societies often “spill” over to fictional literature, as writers are products of their societies. In South Africa, feminisms for Blacks, according to Thorpe (2018), touches on issues as wide-ranging as motherhood, anger, sex, race, inclusions and exclusions, the protests, and the quiet struggles.

2.3 AMAZON FEMINISM

Amazon feminism is the main branch of feminism that is employed in this study. Amazon feminism, as a variant of feminism, emphasises female prowess as a means to achieve the goal of gender equality (Gramstad, 1999). Mishra (2013) proffers that feminism as a reactive discipline seeks to answer the question of why women are treated as second-class citizens, are oppressed, and enjoy lesser opportunities than men. Fisher (2013) argues that Amazon feminism rejects the idea that certain characteristics or interests are inherently masculine or feminine, upholds and explores a vision of heroic womanhood. Amazon feminism supports and celebrates female potential and ability in a wide spectrum of strengths, which includes being athletes, martial artists, soldiers (women) in combat, firefighters, lumberjacks, astronauts, and powerlifters. According to Fisher (2013), Amazon feminism is ultimately about the ability to view oneself as the captain of one’s own soul. It entails viewing oneself as a person willing to face and resolve any conflict. A woman ought to refuse to see herself as a victim of fabricated or biological circumstances and to distinguish herself as a warrior from ordinary people, male or female, who are willing to drift with the current and bend with every breeze.

Fisher (2013) further argues that Amazon feminism embodies the idea that through hard work and discipline, women can become strong and independent and free themselves from their economic and psychological dependency on men. Amazon feminism empowers women to find their own female strengths and magnify it, be it flexibility or speed. The critic believes that this is one way to break down patriarchy.

Spencer (2009) argues that emerging female writers in post-apartheid South Africa are using narrative as a tool to construct new and different ways of being female and thus presenting alternative ways of looking at self and society. Spencer (2009) argues that the value of the representation of the middle-class, urban, professional, and financially independent black woman should not be underestimated in the context of South African literature where this type of heroine had never existed. For the present study, female characters as described by Spencer are an alternative to female stereotypes; they are Amazonian characters.

Consequently, the present study employs variants of feminist theory to scrutinise and analyse Matlwa's and Mda's female characters in the sampled fictional texts to determine if the female characters were constructed from an Amazonian point of view or from a patriarchal literary tradition. Female characters whose capabilities and agency for power are revealed through roles allotted them are deemed authentic, according to the precepts of Amazon feminism. On the other hand, if female characters are dehumanised or stereotyped, as it is usually the case in traditional fictional texts, those female characters are patriarchal constructs.

2.3.1. Historical background of the Amazons

Bamberger (1967) avers that Johann Jakob Bachofen (1861), a Swiss jurist and classical scholar, published in Stuttgart in 1861 a study on matriarchy titled *Das Mutterrecht (Mother Right: An investigation of the religious and juridical character of matriarchy in the ancient world)*. According to Bachofen (1861), as quoted in

Bamberger (1967:264), matriarchy (mother power) or the dominion of the mother “over family and state” was a later development generated by woman’s dissatisfaction with the unregulated sexuality that man had forced upon her.

Georgoudi (1994:453) states that in Bachofen’s (1861) view, primitive man, on becoming restive under maternal constraint, used his physical superiority over woman to abuse her sexually. Rebelling against the violation of her rights, primitive woman had a need to evolve toward a purer civility and became an Amazon, resisting the male by force of arms. A simultaneous publication with Bachofen’s *Das Mutterrecht* was Maine’s *Ancient Law* (1861) which sought to establish that all human groups were originally organised on the patriarchal model. The two publications launched a contest between the matriarchists and the patriarchists in the intellectual circles of Western Europe (Bamberger, 1967:264).

On highlighting the freedom enjoyed by Amazons against Athenian women, Hurwit (1999:239) refers to Athens (Greece) as a “bastion of male privilege” where women were passive and submissive. They had no political rights or freedoms, they could not own property or vote, and they possessed little or no legal rights. Women in Athens were thought not to have the cognitive powers of men and were not even recognised as life-givers – that role was owned by men. The Woman was simply a fertile ground to be sown, acting as a vessel to hold a developing life but who took no actual part in its creation. Women were expected to subjugate themselves to the city-state, producing male children capable of becoming proper Athenian soldiers who could protect Athens and safeguard it for future generations. Athenian men were expected to defend women in their servitude – any other role outside of those narrow confines became a threat to their society (Lagerlof, 2000).

In contrast to the Athenian women, the Amazons appeared to possess the same rights and freedoms that men enjoyed. They rode horses, hunted, waged war against men, lived as they chose and, more to the point, chose to live without men (Hurwit, 1999). According to Kirk (1987), during the twentieth century the idea of an Amazonian way

of life was revived and entwined with an idea of matriarchy, mainly by feminists. It has been part of a broader enterprise of discovering powerful women in history or in other cultures in order to prove that male dominance is not an inevitable social order, but that there are alternatives.

Meeder (2008:2) argues that the story of the women of antiquity should be told now, not only because it is a legitimate aspect of social history, but because the past illuminates contemporary problems in relationships between women and men. Stone (1978: xv) argues that the ancient past is not so far removed as people might imagine or prefer to believe and that “if history can teach us anything at all, then we should be glad to know of other cultures that did not see women as natural inferior to their brothers.” Davis-Kimball (2002:240) regards warrior women as the underlying foundation that held ancient societies together: “They are our heritage, our role models. They deserve to come out of the shadows of history and be celebrated.”

Critics such as Meeder (2008) argue that the past could positively influence relationships between men and women of contemporary times. Stone (1978) argues that from the past, people could learn that some cultures practised gender equality. Davis-Kimball (2002) argues that ancient warrior women are worth emulating. The arguments by critics justify this study’s adoption of the Amazon image versus stereotypical constructs. For the study, the Amazon image would encourage present day women in their fight against patriarchy.

Bachofen quoted in Farfan (1988:25) sees Amazonism as an extreme form of matriarchy. He states that after being degraded by men’s abuse under patriarchy, some women began to yearn for a more secure position and a purer life. The sense of degradation and the fury of despair spurred women on to armed resistance, exalting themselves to that warlike grandeur which, though it seems to exceed the bounds of womanhood, is rooted simply in their need for a higher life. For an Athenian citizen (the patriarch), Amazons were the ultimate paradox, “symbols of a world stood on its head; a permanent menace to the civilized world” (Pantel, 1994: 226-27). Even though

Amazons were mostly warrior women, Bachofen (1861) acknowledged Amazons' loving character, which is quoted in Farfan (1988:13) as follows:

The woman, as nurturer, learned much earlier than man to extend her loving care beyond the limits of the ego to another, and to direct whatever gift of invention she possessed to the preservation and improvement of this other's existence. Woman at this stage was the repository of all culture, of all benevolence, of all devotion, of all concern for the living and grief for the dead.

During the twentieth century, the ideology of an Amazon was revived and entwined with an idea of matriarchy or mother-right by feminists. The Amazon has become the *de rigueur* icon of the strong, independent woman during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In Amazon feminism, according to Meeder (2008), the ancient women warriors have been taken up as a symbol for feminist empowerment, emphasising women's agency and capacity for power. Meeder (2008:53) argues as follows: "In my search for the real Amazons I discovered much more than a myth of bellicose females in rebellion against the male world; I discovered an unimagined realm of strong and self-reliant women who held their own in a sometimes brutal and savage world".

According to Gramstad (1999), Amazon feminism is concerned with equality across various societal spheres such as political, economic, social spaces, and is opposed to gender role stereotypes and discrimination against women based on assumptions that women are supposed to be or look as if they are passive, weak, and physically helpless. The present study juxtaposes empowered female characters constructed from an Amazonian perspective with stereotyped female characters constructed from a patriarchal view to demonstrate the possibilities Amazon feminism holds for contemporary feminist criticism.

Kirk (1987) exposes Bachofen (1861) as a patriarchist even though his stance seems to side with women's plights. Bachofen (1861) had documented that the advance of patriarchy and its domination had forced the angry priestesses of the Goddess, the Amazons, to become warriors and that motherhood is the source of human society, religion, morality, and decency. Also, Farfan (1988) refers to Bachofen (1861) as a

philosopher whose woman-centred work *Das Mutterrecht* initially seems to take women's side on gender debates but is oriented by a persistent patriarchal ideology in which women are important primarily for their contribution to the production of better and superior men. Bachofen's (1861) sexist ideology is quoted in Farfan (1988:5) as follows:

Women are clearly essential to patriarchal greatness in that they stimulate in man his initial inclinations towards civilisation while relieving him of the earthly responsibilities and cares that would deprive him of the freedom to explore and build upon those inclinations. The restitution of women's rights will ensure that they will once again competently and inspirationally serve as wives and mothers of men who border on the divine.

In comparing Bachofen (1861) and Mill (1869), Farfan (1988) sees Mill (1869) as a progressive social philosopher who viewed changes that characterised the nineteenth century as changes for the better, including the feminist movement. On the other hand, Bachofen regarded ancient Greece as the apex in the history of civilisation and saw the passage of time as a movement away from greatness and into decline. Feminists may choose to embrace Mill's (1869) statement, quoted in Farfan (1988:11), as follows:

The moral regeneration of mankind will only really commence when the most fundamental of the social relations is placed under the rule of equal justice, and when human beings learn to cultivate their strongest sympathy with an equal rights and cultivation. The emancipation of women is more desirable for the benefits it promises to effect on a society that is patriarchally controlled than it is desirable in its own right.

Stone (1978: 15) supports the adoption of the Amazon image by arguing that the ancient past is not so far removed from the present and that history can teach people that some bygone cultures did not see women as natural inferiors to men. Davis-Kimball (2002) regards warrior women as the underlying foundation that held the ancient world together, which is in contrast to Bachofen's view that matriarchy represents a world upside down. In comparison to freedoms enjoyed by the Amazons, Hurwit (1999: 239) refers to Athens (Greece) as a "bastion of male privilege" where women were passive and submissive. They had no political rights or freedoms, could not own property or vote, and possessed little or no legal rights. They were thought not to have the cognitive powers of men and were not even recognised as life givers

– that role was owned by men. In contrast to the Athenian women, the Amazons appeared to possess the same rights and freedoms that men enjoyed.

Wilde (1999) argues that the Amazons may have been nomadic or semi-nomadic as horses were central to their ways of life. For nomads, tribal decisions are made by consensus and every adult has some say in the way they are governed. Division of labour into strict roles is avoided in a nomadic way of life because it could impede their work and jeopardise the welfare of the tribe. Meeder (2008:2) argues that the story of the women of antiquity should be told now, not only because it is a legitimate aspect of social history, but also because the past illuminates contemporary problems in relationships between men and women.

Davis-Kimball (2002:240) refers to the ancient warrior women as “our heritage, our role models. They deserve to come out of the shadows of history and be celebrated.” According to Meeder (2008), an Amazon is the icon of a strong, independent woman who is able to take action, is in charge and can even choose to be independent of men. Female characters that are not constructed in the Amazon image are, amongst other things, not independent but are indoctrinated and groomed for marriage at a young age.

Kirk (1987), in *Images of the Amazon: Marriage and Matriarchy*, argues that Bachofen (1861) developed an evolutionary history in which he argues that social life had passed from a state of primitive communal marriage (hetaerism) through mother-right, matriarchy or mother-power (*Das Mutterrecht*) to the patriarchy of his own time, which he considered ideal. Bachofen (1861) presented an Amazon stage of development as an extreme form of mother-right. Farfan (1988:13-14) quotes what Bachofen (1861) has argued in *Das Mutterrecht* as follows:

The establishment of matriarchy represents a step forward toward civilization. It represents emancipation from the bonds of crudely sensual animal life. Woman counters man’s abuse of his superior strength by the dignity of her enthroned motherhood. The more savage the men of the first period, the more necessary becomes the restraining force of women. As

long as mankind is immersed in purely material life, woman must rule. Matriarchy is necessary to the education of mankind and particularly of men. Just as the child is first disciplined by his mother so are the races of men first disciplined by woman. It is woman's vocation to tame man's primordial strength, to guide it into benign channels.

The entwined ideas of the Amazons and the matriarchs were adopted in this study to scrutinise and analyse female characters in the chosen fictional texts. In line with Afrocentrism, the researcher notes satisfactorily that traces of Amazons or courageous warrior women were also found in the continent of Africa, for example, in Libya and Ethiopia (Meeder 2008). The "Dahomey Amazons" of the African Kingdom of Dahomey, present-day Benin, ruled the territory before its colonisation by France in the 1890s. The Dahomey Amazons were women soldiers who worked side by side with male soldiers in the Dahomean army since the 1600s. Dahomey Amazons are said to have been wealthy and to have held high statuses (Alpern, 1999). The Amazon image is thus not alien to the African continent. One can argue that it is indigenous to Africa, which makes it resonate with African feminisms.

The Greeks regarded Amazons as rebels who endangered patriarchal states like Athens because they threatened the status quo by introducing the concept of individual freedom to Athenian women. Amazons had the freedom not to marry if they so choose (Meeder, 2008). Rich's (1977) argument affirms Amazonism, which propagates women's freedom of choice in all aspects of life. From this study, present-day women can learn that in some ancient cultures, women had the freedom not to marry if they so choose. That way, present-day women would realise that patriarchy has no right to force them into marriages if they are not ready. On the issue of "forced" heterosexuality, Masenya (1996:156), a South African feminist critic, argues that not every woman in society is a wife; therefore, girls as well as boys, should be freed from marrying if they choose not to marry. For the present study, if marriage is used as an institution of suppression of female characters, then such female characters are deemed patriarchal constructs.

In *The First Sex*, Davis (1971) argues that while for Bachofen (1861) the matriarchal epoch was a silver age leading up to the golden age of civilisation, it is matriarchy that represents humanity's highest achievement. Davis (1971), in Farfan (1988:22), argues that most of the problems in the world can be attributed to the fact that for the last fifteen hundred to three thousand years, "mankind has been worshipping the wrong deity and pursuing the wrong ideals. Matriarchal societies are characterised by a real democracy in which the happiness and fulfilment of the individual supersede all other objectives of society".

Farfan (1988) argues that Davis (1971) seeks to teach women that their own sex was once and for a very long time the superior and dominant sex, and to restore them to their ancient dignity and pride. Davis (1971) takes the power that Bachofen has allocated to women for the revitalisation of a patriarchal system gone stale and uses it to promote a new matriarchal age. Davis (1971) argues that a matriarchal counter-revolution to the patriarchal revolution is the only hope for survival of the human race. The matriarchal counter-revolution to the patriarchal revolution is relevant for the study in that, according to Hurwit (1999), the Amazonian way of life is intertwined with the idea of matriarchs for women empowerment.

Stewart (1995) argues that Amazons challenged the stereotype of docile femininity by exhibiting a vigorous and resourceful courage in battle; they had high courage and excelled in war. Davis-Kimball (2002) argues that the Greeks, who normally saw women as delicate and submissive creatures, viewed Amazons as a tribe of militant females fully capable of engaging men in combat on horseback. According to Davis-Kimball (2002), Amazons are associated with Nomads and horses were central to their nomadic way of life. Modern nomads are traditionally egalitarian – men, women, and children work side by side, often at the same tasks with little role-playing that is often associated with patriarchal cultures. Thus, the Amazon character in the study is expected to be courageous enough to assume leadership roles usually denied stereotypical female characters.

According to Stone (1978:34), “all authority was vested in the woman, who discharged every kind of public duty” in the ancient African state of Libya. For the present study, female characters that are constructed in the Amazon image are expected to assume public roles other than those in their private lives. Even though Tyrell (1986: xiii) points out that “the existence of the Amazons remains moot”, the researcher is encouraged by critics such as Susan Langdon (2001: 1) who argues that the image of the Amazon is adaptable, adjusting to changing historical and social circumstances in both ancient and modern uses. Moreover, Meeder (2008:53) allayed the researcher’s fears on treading on an unfamiliar, “virgin” territory. Meeder argues as follows: “In my search for the real Amazons, I discovered much more than a myth of bellicose females in rebellion against the male world; I discovered an unimagined realm of strong and self-reliant women who held their own in a sometimes brutal and savage world.” Hence, such a calibre of women is worth exploring, including in literary outputs, to determine if these women can be accorded the space and freedom to express their strengths and capabilities, which are often suppressed by patriarchal ideologies and practices.

In this section on Amazonism, a perspective propagated by a South African feminist critic, Masenya (2009) is included. Masenya (2009:144) argues that “*Bosadi Critical Perspective*” caters for South African Black women who were triply oppressed: first by colonialism and imperialism, second by the apartheid regime of the Afrikaners, and thirdly, by their culture of African tradition which is patriarchal”. Masenya (2009:144) explains that in her home language (Sesotho), the word *mosadi* means woman, and *bosadi* means womanhood. According to the critic, there are limiting notions underlying the words “*mosadi*” and “*bosadi*”. Masenya (2009:144) defines the noun *Mosadi* as a female African person who, though conscious of the corporeal mentality of Africans and respecting it, can stand on her own to affirm her full humanity as a creature in God’s image.” This definition positions *mosadi* as an Amazon.

2.4 POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM

According to Khanal (2012), the primary contribution of postcolonial theory is to challenge the traditional value system and epistemology that fuels Western

philosophy, politics, education, and social-economic theory. Such traditional thought is embedded in the sense of superiority demonstrated historically by Europe and the United States in encountering the people of other countries. It also tends to portray other cultures as an undifferentiated mass of “Other” people; setting forth an “us-them” dichotomy that arises from the interaction of the coloniser and the colonised – the generalised “Other”.

Young (2003) argues that postcolonialism is concerned with the deplorable plight of women in postcolonial environment. Quoted in Mishra (2013:130), Young (2003) enumerates key issues of postcolonial feminists’ endeavours as follows:

Postcolonial feminism comprises non-western feminisms which negotiate the political demands of nationalism, socialist feminism, liberalism, and eco-feminism, alongside the social challenge of everyday patriarchy, typically supported by its institutional and legal discrimination; of domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, honour killings, dowry deaths, female foeticide and child abuse. Postcolonial feminism highlights the degree to which women are still working against a colonial legacy that was itself powerfully patriarchal – institutional, economic, political, and ideological.

Mishra (2013) argues that the long history of prejudices and inhuman remarks against females that prevailed over countless social and cultural texts ultimately led to the emergence of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s in the West, which prompted feminists to start calling for social justice and equal opportunities for women. In the course of development and with the fall of European colonies in Africa, South-East Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean islands, feminists belonging to once-colonised territories felt that it is nonsensical to continue to be represented by “aliens”. In the 1980s, these feminists decided to represent themselves and in their own terms in postcolonial feminism.

Mohanty (1995:229), a prominent postcolonial feminist critic who constructs a fictitious subject called the “The Third World Woman”, takes western feminism to task. Mohanty (1995) argues that research into non-western cultures done by western feminists is patronising and tends to ignore the differences between women who live in the “Third World” and those living in the so-called First World. The critic argues that instead of

investigating conditions in the cultures they describe, western feminists tend to assume that there is a monolithic category called “woman” of which the ‘Third World Woman’ is an equally monolithic sub-category (Mohanty, 1995).

Mohanty (1995:229) further criticises western feminists for the uncritical use of particular methodologies in providing “proof” of universality and cross-cultural validity which only result in a homogeneous notion of women as a group is assumed. This, in turn, produces the image of an “average third world woman” who leads an essentially truncated life and is seen, in the eyes of the west, as sexually constrained, ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domesticated, family-oriented, and victimised (Mohanty, 1995). Such discourse does not do justice to the particularity of conditions in any “Third World”, much less to the subjects it purports to be assisting (Mohanty, 1995). This contrasts with the self-representation of western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions; these distinctions are made based on privileging of a particular group, in this case themselves, as the norm or referent (Mohanty, 1995).

Another postcolonial scholar Ashcroft (2001) argues that in any given piece of feminist analysis, women are characterised as a singular group based on shared oppression. Thus, the discursively consensual homogeneity of ‘women’ as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women (Ashcroft, 2001). This results in an assumption of women as an always-ready constituted group, one that has been labelled powerless, exploited, or sexually harassed by feminist scientific discourses – economic, legal, or sociological discourses. These diversities are further expounded by Rosaldo (1980:400) who points out that “women mother” in a variety of societies is not as significant as the value attached to the act of mothering and the status attached to it in these societies.

Grosz (1995:274) argues that perhaps most striking is the assumption that women are a largely homogeneous group who share several experiences and perspectives that they make the basis for representations. Grosz (1995) further argues that, on the other

hand, it seems unlikely that women as culturally, geographically, politically, and historically diverse as they are, do in fact share common experiences; whether based on early childhood or any other life stage, women's experiences are as varied as men's. To Davis (1981), many western feminists believe that they share a bond of sisterhood with black women, yet black women's triple oppression by class, race, and gender places them in a far worse situation than that experienced by white women.

Butler (1990) asks questions about the political assumption that there must be a universal basis for feminism, one that must be found in an identity assumed to exist cross-culturally, often accompanying the notion that the oppression of women has some singular form discernible in the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination. The questions Butler (1990:22) poses are as follows:

Is there some commonality among "women" that pre-exists their oppression, or do "women" have a bond by virtue of their oppression alone? Is there a specificity to women's cultures that is independent of their subordination by hegemonic, masculinist cultures? Are the specificities and integrity of women's cultural or linguistic practices always specified against and, hence, within the terms of some more dominant cultural formation? If there is a region of the "specifically feminine," one that is both differentiated from the masculine as such and recognizable in its difference by an unmarked and, hence, presumed universality of "women"? Do the exclusionary practices that ground feminist theory in a notion of "women" as subject paradoxically undercut feminist goals to extend its claim to "representation"? To what extent does the category of women achieve stability and coherence only in context of the heterosexual matrix?

Having posed the above questions, Butler (1990:23) makes an argument that the presumed universality and unity of feminism is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions. The fragmentation within feminism and the paradoxical opposition to feminism from "women" whom feminism purports to represent suggest the necessary limits of identity politics (Butler, 1990). If a stable of gender no longer proves to be the foundational premise of feminist politics, perhaps a new sort of feminist politics is now desirable to contest the very reification of gender and identity (Butler, 1990).

Consequently, the arguments of various critics above provide reasons for the present study to apply more than one theory for the study. The chosen texts for the study are written by Africans living in the African continent, whose experiences are vastly different from those of women in the west. Western feminism alone would not be ideal to analyse African literary texts; hence, the inclusion of African feminism, together with postcolonial feminism and Amazon feminism.

The notion by western feminists that all formerly colonised women have similar experiences and are thus a homogenous group is also a generalisation that sometimes drives feminists like Mohanty (1995) to react in opposition. Some African feminists, such as Aidoo (2001:13), have lashed out at western feminism as “an embarrassing western philosophy, which is imported from America to ruin nice African homes.”

Young (2003) in Mishra (2013: 131) talks of “feminists in western clothing” who are “home-family-man haters”. However, Young says postcolonial feminists argue for women emancipation that are subalternised by social, cultural, or economic structures across the world. Furthermore, postcolonial female writers are not interested in dismantling the family order but instead seek balance, mutual respect, and harmony; and that women in postcolonial settings want to rear family but not at the behest of their counterparts or co-partners (Young, 2003). Western scholars’ attempt at a civilising mission by projecting negative images of orientals to inculcate inferiority and meanness in oriental minds is an over-vaulting dream of the west, an aim to prepare defective robots (Young, 2003). Indigenous culture, language, and tradition never found scant attention and respect in the eyes of the west. In colonial hands, language purposefully wreaked havoc on Orientals (Young, 2003). During colonial rule, Orientals were victims of cruelty, brutality and the so-called “civilising mission” of the west; postcolonialism therefore seeks to counter all kinds of oppression, injustice, and traces left by the west (Young, 2003).

Boehmer (2005) indicates that she abhors using the nomenclature “Third World Feminism”, which is sometimes a reference to postcolonial feminism and no better than the term “Commonwealth”, because in western discourses the term is used pejoratively and connotes at once social, cultural, and economic backwardness. Boehmer (2005) argues that the history of colonialism is largely that of exploitation of non-white, non-western “Others”. Colonised countries have been deeply affected by the exploitative racist nature of colonialism; hence, postcolonial feminism counteracts colonialism.

According to Mishra (2013), there are two issues that function as areas of arguments for postcolonial feminists, namely, representation and the questions of setting or locale. Schwarz and Ray (2005), postcolonial feminist critics, argue that questions of location, their own and those of their subjects, are historicised and politicised as they enter the terrain of theory. The investigators’ identities and places of speaking are marked by hybridity and hyphenation; pure and authentic “origins” are rendered dubious, and their intellectual trajectories are crossed histories of arrival in the First World (Schwarz and Ray, 2005). When “Third World Women” speak in the voices of these feminists, it is to repudiate otherness, tokenism, stereotyping, exceptionalism, and the role of native informant.

Similarly, Mohanty (1995) criticises western feminism on the grounds that western feminism does not pay attention to the unique experiences of women residing in postcolonial nations and that it regards all women as a homogeneous group, without having any sense of difference pertaining to race, class, and circumstance. Spivak (1985) believes the question of voice is a moot point in postcolonial feminism; the question of voice is about who speaks for whom and whose voices are being heard in discussions on postcolonial women’s issues. Spivak’s (1985) essay *Can the Subaltern Speak* explores possibilities to recover the long silenced voices of subaltern women, highlighting that it is the duty of postcolonial feminists to represent the subalterns because when western women speak for others, they only displace the subalterns, replacing the subalterns’ voices with their own. In her work, *In Other Worlds* (1987), Spivak argues that pioneering books that bring First World feminists news from the

Third World are written by privileged informants and can only be deciphered by a trained readership.

Another aspect in postcolonial feminism is the question of language, the questioning of which is seen as a necessity in strengthening postcolonial feminism. By formulating a new postcolonial feminine literature, postcolonial feminists feel it can provide new energy and authenticity to their project of transforming society (Rao, 2011). Rao (2011:133) argues as follows:

The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own and the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. English is not really an alien language. It is the language of our intellectual make-up. We are all "instinctively" bilingual. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have to look at the large world as part of us.

On the issue of language, Said (1994) refers to Chinua Achebe (1968), a Nigerian writer and critic, who suggests that an African writer should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience.

In Daymond (1990), reference is made to a French radical thinker Helene Cixous (1980) who proposed that in order to make a novel "*écriture féminine*", novelists should write that which is typically and characteristically feminine in style, language, tone and feeling, and completely different from male language and discourse. Mishra (2013:29) commented that Cixous' (1980) proposal is important because even critical thinkers "puzzle and fumble" due to lack of vocabulary to catch the spirit of women's actual lives and experiences. In support of the French feminist, Mishra (2013) added that Cixous (1980) argues that in order to resist phallogentrism or male dominance of culture, women have to find their own linguistic space.

Cixous' (1980) explication is that *écriture féminine*, drawing on the mother-child relationship that exists within the unconscious but remains repressed as a result of the domination of male-centred language, subverts fixity and closure in language and celebrates free-play of signification. She argues that since the feminine body is

different and that language is a translation that “speaks through the body”, feminine language gives women “another universe of expression from men” (Mishra, 2013). However, some feminist critics such as Lockett (1989: 5) have misgivings about *écriture féminine* because they think its proposition bases the concept of femininity on the female body and the female libido, linking her theory with woman’s experience of her body, and thus effectively reinforcing patriarchal definitions of a woman’s essence.

The argument above on the issue of language usage where women are encouraged to find their own linguistic space in writing is relevant for the present study. It is through language that writers construct characters and such constructions reflect perceptions of and ideologies surrounding what women and womanhood should be. For instance, if a writer constructs a female character from a patriarchal perspective, the likelihood is that they either want to contest such a construct or to perpetuate it. The same is true of an Amazon construct. Hence, this study sought to determine how the selected writers constructed their female characters and from which perspective in lieu of androcentricity and Amazon feminism. For this research, that one writer is female, and the other is male is only coincidental. The focus is on the content of the selected texts and not writers themselves. The female writer has, for example, entitled one of her novels *Period Pain* in which she details woman’s menstrual cycle which men could have knowledge of but could never have a lived experience of. And that makes a significant difference in how they would use language to inscribe women’s menstruating bodies.

Still on the question of how language should be used on the part of female writers, postcolonial feminist Minh-Ha (1995) mobilises a comment made by Lorde (1981) that *the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house*. Minh-Ha (1995:232) argues as follows:

In trying to tell something, a woman is told, shredding herself into opaque words while her voice dissolves on the walls of silence. Writing: a commitment of language, she has been warned of the risk she incurs by letting words run off the rails, time and again tempted by the desire to gear herself to the accepted norms. But where has her obedience led her? At best, to the satisfaction of a “made-woman,” capable of achieving as high mastery of discourse as that of the male establishment in power.

Immediately gratified, she will, as years go by, sink into oblivion, a fate she inescapably shares with her fore sisters. How many, already, have been condemned to premature deaths for having borrowed the master's tools and thereby played into his hands? Solitude is a common prerequisite, even though this may only mean solitude in the immediate surroundings. Elsewhere, in every corner of the world, there exist women who, despite the threat of rejection, resolutely work toward the unlearning of institutionalised language, while staying alert to every deflection of their body compass needles.

With these words, Minh-Ha supports the project of women creating their own language to write about their experiences rather than borrowing a masculine language. For postcolonial feminists, this means creating a new language to write about the experiences of women from formerly colonised countries as adopting a colonial masculine language will not serve women's best interest. Feminist theory as conceptualised in this study therefore recognises the importance of this feminine language in constructing Amazon characters in fiction.

Feminist theory was used in this study as a tool to enable the researcher to analyse the texts according to the precepts of feminism, branched into African feminism, Amazon feminism and post-colonial feminism. Armed with the feminist theory, what the authors' original intention of writing was, does not count. In reinterpreting the text based on feminism, the researcher could be as good as writing a "different" text from what the writer intended, according to Barthes' (1977) in *The Death of the Author*.

2.5 FEMINISM IN AFRICA

African settings in the selected fictional texts informed the decision to include African feminism in the study to analyse how women are represented in the texts. African feminism is conceptualised as a type of feminism designed by African women to address the conditions and needs of African women who reside in the African continent, and thus excludes African women in the diaspora (Nkealah, 2006). There are variants of African feminism which include the following: Motherism, Snail-Sense feminism, Womanism, Femalism, Nego-feminism, Stiwanism, African Womanism (Arndt, 2001), and *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Critical Perspective (Masenya, 1996).

However, Nkealah (2006) argues that the various African feminisms as mentioned above are not all reflective of the experiences African women have because Africa is not a monolith as western feminists seem to believe. Only the variants of African feminism enumerated above are discussed in the study. Scholars such as Lockett (1990) thinks it advantageous to have multiple feminisms by arguing that the distinction of the different types of feminisms indicates that feminist ideologies are capable of adaptation to suit the cultural needs of different groups of women.

In comparing feminism of the occident with African feminism, it may be argued that Africa has come up with a number of feminisms in a short space of time than feminism of the occident. However, African scholars have proffered reasons in favour of the variants of African feminism. Ahikire (2008) argues that feminism in Africa has been a boiling pot of diverse discourses and courses of action. Ahikire (2008) argues that far from being constructed in simple opposition to western feminism, feminism on the African continent constitutes a myriad of heterogeneous experiences and points of departure. The critic defines feminism as a mirror of the different material conditions and identities of women and is informed by the many diverse and creative ways in which women contest power in their private and public lives (Ahikire, 2008).

The general notion of western feminism is to free women politically, socially, and economically. Other than this ultimate goal of women emancipation, African feminists seem to part ways with western feminism because their narratives and experiences as Africans are excluded. Acholonu (1995) argues that the exclusivity approach of western feminism created a space for the formation of various African feminisms that are informed by different patriarchal systems and their traditions which African women are subjected to in their different countries. This then dispels the notion that the African continent is a monolith with blanket experiences for all African women. Nkealah (2006) calls for the re-conceptualisation of African feminism as an ideological force that questions patriarchal orthodoxies of all kinds. According to Nkealah (2006), the point of departure is that the feminist struggle on the African continent represents a critical stance against the mainstream of patriarchal power.

According to Stratton (1994), the African struggle is different from the western feminist struggle in that it includes the survival of both women and men as it accommodates a mutual understanding between the sexes. Stratton (1994) argues that the way African feminism is structured could be the reason why some postcolonial writers like Aidoo (2001) and Emecheta (1984) prefer using the term “Womanism” which is used as a critique of and a response to a white-dominated western feminism, where the focus is on the balancing of power between men and women.

The concept of Womanism is communally oriented and therefore addresses the destiny of people who have been oppressed by colonialism, seeking the survival and progress of all African people, including women. Mama (1995) is in agreement with Stratton (1994) in having an African feminism that is different from western feminism. Mama (1995) argues that the experiences of women of those groups excluded from western feminism means that they are different and should thus structure their specific experiences according to their own socio-cultural contexts. The critic, however, acknowledges the groundwork done by western feminism, stating that the pioneering work of western feminists has afforded postcolonial feminists a perspective and a platform to develop and voice their views (Mama, 1995).

In *Women as the Subject of Feminism*, Butler (1990:22) affirms the need for various branches of feminism as follows:

The political assumption that there must be a universal basis for feminism, one which must be found in an identity assumed to exist cross-culturally, often accompanies the notion that oppression of women has some singular form discernible in the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination. The notion of a universal patriarchy has been widely criticised for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists. That form of feminist theorising has come under criticism for its efforts to colonise and appropriate non-western cultures to support highly western notions of oppression, but because they tend as well to construct a “Third World” or even an “Orient” in which gender oppression is subtly explained as symptomatic of an essential, non-western barbarism.

Butler’s words point to the diverse cultural terrains of feminism, which is equally applicable to African feminism. Arndt (2001) opines that there is and there must be a

diversity of feminisms that are responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women defined by them for themselves.

A Nigerian writer, Emecheta (1984), advances her reasons for criticising western feminism by arguing that she is a feminist with a small “f”; that she loves men and that good men are the salt of the earth. Emecheta (1984) argues against what she calls capital “F” feminists (western) who lobby for the abolishment of heterosexual marriages while calling for women to live together. She argues that she would like to see an ideal happy marriage; but if the marriage does not work, it should be called off. Her ideas resonate with many African feminisms which do not demonise marriage but rather oppose practices that oppress women in marriage.

Ahikire (2008: 7) presents a preamble to a Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists, developed by over two hundred African feminists sitting in Accra, Ghana, in 2006, which is crafted as follows:

We define and name ourselves publicly as feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics. We recognise that the work of fighting for women’s rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is political too. Choosing to name ourselves feminists places us in a clear ideological position. By naming ourselves as feminists we politicise the struggle for women’s rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. We have multiple and varied identities as African feminists. We are African women – we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent. Our feminist identity is not qualified with “its”, “buts” or “however”. We are feminists. Full stop.”

The above excerpt indicates women’s agentic assertion of their desire to self-identify and represent themselves. In the process of self-identification and representation, these women also consider their recognition in domains of power and authority, such as politics and the economy, as being crucial to their liberation and empowerment. Their identification also entails unapologetically acknowledging and celebrating their feminist stance. In her discussion of African feminisms, Nkealah (2016) has made the

following observations: that all African feminisms challenge western feminism because they bring to the fore the experiences of the African woman which are ignored by western feminism; that African feminisms take from the histories and cultures of African peoples to create the necessary tools needed to embolden women and educate men; and that African feminisms incorporate gender inclusion, collaboration and accommodation to ensure that both women and men contribute, even if not equally, to improving the material conditions of women. Nkealah (2016) argues that Nego-feminism and Snail-Sense feminism call for the inclusion of men in discussions and advocacy for feminism, and that both argue that the inclusion of men is necessary to the freedom of women.

Ebunoluwa (2009) defines African feminism as a type of feminism innovated by African women that specifically addresses the conditions and needs of continental African women who reside on the African continent that is exclusive of African women of the diaspora. African feminism became necessary partly because of western feminism's exclusion of the experiences of the black woman and the continental black woman. In creating African feminism, African women were not only reacting to their being excluded by western feminism, but also because they wanted a feminism that would embrace their backgrounds and experiences. The varying cultures of African women alter the way African women experience the world. The argument is that one cannot simply merge all women under an unrealistic expectation of sisterhood, but instead to recognise and respect the differences that exist because of these diversities.

According to Nkealah (2006), there is a commonality to the struggles women face across the world since the common factor is male privilege perpetuated by patriarchal system. Nkealah (2006) details aims of African feminisms as striving to create a new, liberal, productive and self-reliant African woman within the heterogeneous cultures of Africa. The feminist critic argues that feminisms in Africa ultimately aim at modifying culture as it affects women in different societies. Proponents of African feminism have seen the necessity to clarify their stand with regard to the misconception that to some people "feminism" came to mean a movement that is anti-male, anti-culture and anti-religion. African feminists emphasise that the aim of feminism is to empower women

while ensuring their equality to men. Feminism is not meant to denigrate men but rather to attack the system that places the woman in a role that is secondary and subservient to the man, simply because of her gender. Because of the importance African women place on communalism and family, they opt to work with men to develop an inclusive approach to solving gender problems.

However, Kolawole (2011) argues that the need for African women to work with men is a patriarchal dimension peculiar to Africa that gives African women little room to manoeuvre in other directions than to negotiate with men. Aidoo (1992:77) describes the complex situation for African women as follows:

This shared oppression and the resulting national struggle, first for independence and then against the neo-colonial foreigner, has added complications and ambiguities to the woman's opposition to her exploitation at the hands of African men. There is, in other words, pressure on women to stand shoulder to shoulder with their men against the foreign oppressor and not to bring in divisive issues of gender to cut across and weaken the national struggle.

To the bleak situation for African women painted above by Aidoo (1992), Ahikire (2008:11) ushers in hope when she notes that "today there is broader, albeit tacit, agreement in political and educational arenas that gender can no longer be ignored".

African feminist critic, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), argues that the struggle for African women is a result of colonial and neo-colonial structures that often place African males at the apex of social stratification, and that the struggles African women face are also due to the way they have internalised patriarchy and have come to endorse the system themselves. Rojas (2020) raises a similar argument that women in a tribe in Latin America have a different concept of equality between men and women; to them, the concept of equality does not denounce the suppression of women in social and productive processes because they say it has been the way they know it for centuries. Ogundipe-Leslie's (1994) view is corroborated by Aidoo (1992) who does not shy away from mentioning directly that African women are exploited at the hands of African men. In women's fight against oppression and injustices, careful attention should also be

given to oppressive traditional practices which African women are subjected to in the name of preservation of culture.

2.5.1 Motherism

Acholonu (1995) argues that Motherism is an alternative gender theory to western feminism. Motherism is composed of motherhood, nature, and nurturing. It is defined as a multidimensional theory that involves the dynamics of ordering, reordering, creating structures, building, and rebuilding in cooperation with Mother Nature at all levels of human endeavour. A Motherist is someone committed to the survival of mother earth as well as embraces the human struggle. Ezenwa-Ohaeto's (2015) observation is that Acholonu (1995) embraces the African feminism principle of gender inclusion, collaboration, and accommodation to ensure that both women and men contribute to improving the material conditions of women.

According to its proponent, a Motherist can be a woman or a man; Motherism has no sex barriers because at its core is partnership, cooperation, tolerance, love, understanding, and patience (Acholonu, 1995). The critic cautions that for Motherism to work there must be a male-female complementarity that ensures the wholeness of human existence in a balanced ecosystem (Acholonu, 1995). Because the selected texts are in African settings, principles such as those of Motherism were engaged in, to determine if female characters were constructed from an Amazonian point of view or from a patriarchal view.

2.5.2. Femalism

Femalism was developed by Chioma Opara as a hue of African feminism; it has a softer tone than liberal feminism and is highly polarised from radical feminism (Opara, 2004). At its core, Femalism is African and accentuates the African woman's body. The polarity between Femalism and radical feminism makes Femalism to adhere to the principles of African feminism like the other variants of African feminism. Ezenwa-

Ohaeto (2015) notes that the theoriser of Femalism describes the female body as a site of patriarchal abuse and violence on the African continent and as the bearer of European colonialism and exploitation. Femalism likens what its developer calls the socioculturally battered female body to the politically scarred African nation (Opara 2004). In drawing these parallels, Femalism effects a nexus between the freedom of a woman and that of an African continent. The nurturing body of a female is considered analogous to Mother Africa – an embodiment of Mother Nature.

2.5.3. Snail-sense feminism

Snail-sense Feminism is a concept proposed by Adimora-Ezeigbo (2012), and is meant to encourage Nigerian women to work slowly, like a snail's movement, in their dealings with men in the patriarchal Nigerian society they live in. The feminist critic proposes that women must learn survival strategies to be able to overcome the impediments placed before them and live a good life. According to Nkealah (2016), Snail-sense feminism advances the necessity of negotiation, collaboration, tolerance, and accommodation in the feminist fight against gender inequities and injustices.

2.5.4. (American) Womanism

Feminism, dominated by mostly white western women, has been criticised as excluding the narratives and experiences of women of colour, especially black women. Because of this exclusion, Womanism has emerged as the African-American and African variant. Walker (1983), an African-American novelist and activist, introduced "Womanism" in 1983 as an alternative to western feminism for African women in the diaspora. The feminist activist advances the concept "Womanism" as Black women's identity and commitment to gender issues and attests that a Womanist is committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, female, and male. This socialist's argument implies that womanists are concerned with not only sexist discrimination, but also discrimination based on people's racial or socio-economic identity. For Walker (1983), while emphasising feminism as a white movement, a Womanist is a Black feminist or a feminist of colour. The argument is that only Black women can be womanists.

The aim of Walker's (1983) *Womanism* is to identify the problems relating to male dominance in society while seeking solutions to black women's marginalisation by looking inward and outward. However, Nkealah (2016) argues that Walker's *Womanism* is not part of African feminism as it pertains to African women of the diaspora and not continental African women. Ogunyemi (1985:63) argues for *Womanism* as follows:

Womanism is compelling because of its focus on images of strong black women. But the frequent evidence of black women's strengths and central roles can be misinterpreted where women participate in public struggles, and assumptions about their passivity and inferiority appear to be subverted while an inferior and supportive status is prescribed for them and their independence is strictly policed.

Therefore, this study sought to determine how the construction of women characters in the selected texts gravitated towards the portrayal of black women as strong or weak characters. Determining this has a significant bearing on how the discourse on the representation of women in varied spheres aids or thwarts women's struggle towards liberation and empowerment.

2.5.5. African Womanism

Ogunyemi (1985), a Nigerian literary critic, coined the term "Womanism" independently of Walker (1983); thus, her *Womanism* is referred to as "African Womanism." Unlike Walker (1983), Ogunyemi (1985:71) sees African *Womanism* as "expanded feminism":

A womanist will recognise that along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must additionally incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic and political considerations into her philosophy...unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand. It is interested in communal well-being, thus extending its ideology towards a Marxist praxis.

Ogunyemi (1985) not only excludes white women but also African-American women from her ideology and dissociates herself from Walker (1983), arguing that her African

Womanism, unlike Walker's (1983) Womanism, rejects lesbian love. She reiterates that Womanist praxis in Africa has never totally identified with all the original Walkerian precepts. Busby (1993), one West African writer from Nigeria, refers to Nwapa (1966), who was part of a wave of female African writers whose novels defied the traditional depiction of African women, as passive. According to Busby (1993), Nwapa's (1966) debut novel *Efuru* was the first by an African woman to be published in English. Busby (1993) raises the point that Nwapa (1966) once said that she could identify with Alice Walker's (1983) Womanism but not feminism. However, in an interview in Frankfurt in 1980, Nwapa (1966) is said to have retracted her statement on feminism saying that she would go out and say that she is a feminist with a big "f" because Nnaemeka Obioma said that feminism is about possibilities; there are possibilities, and there are choices. Nwapa called on women not to be afraid to say that they are feminists because they need one another globally (Busby, 1993).

According to Acholonu (1995) and Nkealah (2016), African Womanism addresses feminism from an African perspective, an African geopolitical location, and an African ideological viewpoint. To Acholonu (1995), womanism is important because it places the feminist vision within black women's experiences with culture, colonialism and other forms of domination and subjugation that impact African women's lives.

2.5.6. Nego-feminism

According to Nnaemeka (2004), Nego-feminism is a feminism of negotiation. Nego-feminism stands for "no ego" feminism, and it is structured by cultural imperatives and modulated by ever shifting local and global exigencies. The scholar claims that most African cultures use negotiation and compromise to reach agreements. The founder of this concept advances that African feminism works by knowing when, where, and how to detonate and go around patriarchal land mines. Nnaemeka (2004) recommends that African feminism exponents must negotiate and sometimes compromise to gain freedoms. According to Nnaemeka (2004), this means that Nego-feminism knows how to utilise the culture of negotiation to deconstruct patriarchy for the woman's benefit.

However, my concern is that it seems that the need for African feminists to work with men may prevent some feminists from condemning outright the patriarchal traditional cultural practices that are maintained for women's subjugation. I consider patriarchal traditional cultural practices as "a thorn in the flesh" for African women in the continent. Glorifying African culture, probably as a reactive instinct to protect one's own against western feminism, may be hindering feminists' cause to liberate African women.

While most African feminists denounce western feminism, Mama (2001) argues that western feminists' pioneering work has afforded postcolonial feminists a perspective and a platform to develop and voice their views. The critic, however, concurs with post-colonial feminists that the experiences of women excluded from western feminism are different according to their own social-cultural contexts; thus, African women's experiences are not monolithic. Ahikire (2008), for example, is concerned about a marked upsurge of efforts by some African states such as Namibia, Kenya, and Uganda, which are creating alternative routes within state structures to re-legalise discrimination against African women, which is otherwise outlawed by international instruments and national constitutions. Ahikire (2008:19) argues that "a climate of misogynist reaction has formed, justifying itself by defining African culture according to the interests articulated by influential but sadly conservative men."

Langa (2000), a South African critic, says that there are two oppressions meted out to black women. Black women share with their male counterparts the first type of oppression that is dictated by an institutionalised, segregation system denying them their fundamental rights because of their skin colour. The second form of domination black women endure is the form of patriarchal tyranny under which they live in black communities. That African men in African culture ever had any element of negotiation with their women folk is debatable. This researcher is of the opinion that African feminists must come out strongly against the tyranny of African cultural tradition.

2.5.7. Stiwanism

Stiwanism is an African theory, which focuses on the structures that oppress women, and the way women react to these institutionalised structures. Its founder, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), a Nigerian Feminist and Marxist literary critic, argues that the struggle for African women is a result of colonial and neo-colonial structures that often place African males at the apex of social stratification. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:10) explicates her concept as follows:

STIWA is my acronym for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa. This new term allows me to discuss the needs of African women today in the tradition of the spaces and strategies provided in our indigenous cultures for the social being of women. STIWA is about the inclusion of African women in contemporary social and political transformation in Africa. Women have to participate as co-partners in social transformation.

Stiwanism, like African Womanism, is a concept that relates to African women only and thus excludes white and African American women. The critic gives a reason for proposing the concept: she states that the concept describes her agenda for women in Africa without having to answer charges of imitateness or having constantly to define their agenda on the African continent in relation to other feminisms, in particular Euro-American feminisms (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994:10). I consider it almost an apology to men when Ogundipe-Leslie comments that she is sure that there will be few African men who will oppose the concept of including women in the social transformation of Africa.

The variants of African feminism seem to be the result of the inability of African gender theorists to agree on how to define a feminism that suits all African women. Perhaps African women may converge ideologies if they can consider the words of postcolonial feminist Minh-Ha (1995:231) who, borrowing from Lorde (1981), argues that survival is not an academic skill; it is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. Most of the concepts of feminisms in Africa tend to opt for cooperating with men to bring about change for women. In *For the Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*, Lorde (1981), quoted in Minh-Ha (1995:232), conscientises women of the danger of including men in their struggle for emancipation against

patriarchy. She does this by arguing that “the more one depends on the master’s house for support, the less one hears what he doesn’t want to hear.” The warning against men’s participation in bringing change for women might suggest that men may stall or even sabotage women’s efforts at transformation.

One other problem which African women face is that of accepting the oppressive status quo. In this regard, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) argues that the struggle African women face is also related to the way they have internalised patriarchy and have come to endorse the system themselves. Davies and Graves (1986), quoted in Shah (2008:15), argue that women are shackled by their own negative self-image and by their interiorisation of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy.

2.5.8. Africana Womanism

One of the many voices against Western feminism comes from Hudson-Weems (2001), an African American author and academic, who introduced “Africana Womanism” in the 1980s. It is an ideology created and designed for women of African descent. Hudson-Weems (2001:186) argues as follows:

Africana women and men dismiss the primacy of gender issues in their reality, and thus dismiss the feminist movement as a viable framework for their chief concerns. Instead they hold to the opinion that those Africana women who embrace the feminist movement are mere assimilationists or sell-outs who, in the final analysis, have no true commitment to their culture or their people, particularly as it relates to the historical and current collective struggle of Africana women and men.

Hudson-Weems (2001:24) indicates that the term “Africana” identifies the ethnicity of the woman being considered. The reference to a woman’s ethnicity relates directly to her ancestry and land base. To strengthen her concept, Hudson-Weems (2001) argues that Africana Womanist characteristics are: self-namer; self-definer; family centred; role flexibility; genuine sisterhood; strength; male compatible; respected and recognised; whole and authentic; spirituality; mothering and nurturing; respectful of elders; adaptable; and ambitious.

A supporter of Africana feminism, Asante (2007) argues that Hudson-Weems' (2001) Africana Womanism has a perfect approach to gender issues in Africa compared to American feminism. He argues that Africana feminism has its fair share of critics in Africa, especially those who reject the theory because of what they perceive as its association with white women from western nations, particularly America. Kolawole (2011) argues that African women, in trying to solve gender issues, respect and adhere to the importance Africans place on communalism and family. Zulu (1998) argues that there are similarities between Ogunyemi's (1985) Womanism and Hudson-Weems' (2001) Africana Womanism. The critic's argument is based on the premise that both are family-centred approaches. Okure (2003:85) explicates the reason behind the inclusivity of African feminisms as follows:

More so than others, African women believe that cumulatively patriarchy and androcentrism have affected both women and men. Both sexes have been socialised into the same sinful system. Because of this socialisation, both men and women have suffered from the total human worldview built on and sustained by patriarchy. African women's hermeneutics, therefore seeks as much the full liberation of men as of women, from patriarchy.

Family, mothering, and nurturing seem to be at the heart of Africana women's lives.

2.6. FEMINISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

This study explores the representation of women in texts written by two Black South African writers, namely, Kopano Matlwa and Zakes Mda. Geographically, South Africa is situated at the southern tip of the African continent. The study is premised on feminist theory which necessitates engaging feminism of the occident, followed by colonial feminism from countries such as India, and then feminisms from the African continent. Only a part of the African continent, South Africa, receives particular attention as the primary texts present South African settings.

According to Lockett (1989), South Africa is a latecomer on addressing issues pertaining to gender inequality, unlike its sister countries which responded to western

feminism's exclusivity by constructing their own feminisms. South Africa's absence in gender debates could be tied to its history of a long political struggle. Lockett (1989:3) argues that South Africa entered discussions of women's issues only eight years before the 1994 democratic government when in 1986 a conference began its entry on feminist literature with a terse "not yet a definable mode" in South Africa. Arndt (2001) affirms that due to their focus on racial oppression, South African women were not concerned with women's rights and they did not formulate demands or express women's positionality that might destabilise the underlying patriarchal structures and discourses in both colonial and indigenous spaces. However, Ramphela (1996) argues that black women mistakenly believed that they would be rewarded after independence was won for their struggle with social and political equity, but this did not happen because there was no programme of transforming gender relations. Putuma (2017) bluntly puts it that the anti-apartheid struggle depended on the suppression of gender equality and women's interests. Pucherová (2022) argues that the failure of the anti-apartheid struggle to incorporate issues of gender in the national liberation discourse resulted in a post-apartheid situation where women had to once again stand up for their rights that were not automatically given to them.

Akhuemokhan and Okolocha (2015:80) describe the South African political struggle as a "prolonged and agonising war" that black South Africans waged against the apartheid regime until the democratic elections in 1994, while Ghana, for instance, gained independence in 1957, and Nigeria in 1960, respectively. Attridge and Jolly (1998) aptly describe South Africa's delay in entering gender politics as the result of an overwhelming preoccupation with the evils of the apartheid regime during the height of the nationalist power struggle.

Spencer's (2006) observation is that spaces are opening up for previously muffled female voices to emerge in post-apartheid South Africa. These emerging voices are concerned with reinterpreting their experiences from a female perspective through prose narratives. Spencer (2006) argues that the emerging female writers address wide-ranging topics which include revealing the complexities of the female experience in both public and private spaces. They are using narrative as a tool to construct new

and different ways of being female, and in the process presenting alternative ways of looking self and society in post-apartheid South Africa. Pucherova (2022) states that black women's voices are becoming audible, thus widening the literary range of South African female characters and experiences.

Bosadi is a perspective coined by the South African feminist critic Masenya (1996). The feminist critic argues that her concept is premised on Thiselton's (1992:377) socio-critical hermeneutics as an approach to texts, traditions, and institutions that "aims at penetrating their surface-function with a view to exposing their role as instruments of power, domination or social manipulation." Masenya (1996) argues that feminism as socio-critical theory acknowledges that society is characterised by pain and suffering caused by the domination of some human beings, in particular women, by others. It aims at unmasking ideological biases that society as well as the biblical texts have against women with a view to achieving their liberation. Feminist hermeneutics is considered as a hermeneutics of suspicion because it suspects traditions and texts of being instruments of power for the dominant tradition (Masenya, 1996).

The scholar calls her critical concept *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Perspective. The critic points to her awareness of the limiting notions underlying the word *mosadi* (woman) or *bosadi* (womanhood) because of their construction by men speaking her primary language. In *For Better or for Worse*, Masenya (2009:144) redefined the word *mosadi* as follows: "A *mosadi* (woman) is a female African person who, though conscious of the corporeal mentality of Africans and also respecting it, can stand on her own to affirm her full humanity as a creature in God's image." Masenya (2009) argues that though her perspective has points of resemblance with both feminism (western) and Womanism (by African-American feminist Mary Walker), it is neither of the two. Masenya (2009) argues that she has a different agenda, and that her philosophy has a different context, a South African context as opposed to the African-American and Euro-American contexts of Womanism and western feminism. In *Bosadi (womanhood) Critical Perspective*, Masenya (1996:20) argues that her approach is committed to the African-ness of an African woman in South Africa and that her approach focusses on

several aspects. First, it focuses on *Bosadi* and the positive elements of African culture. Second, it looks at *Bosadi* and *Ubuntu/Botho*. *Ubuntu* or “humanness” implies a fundamental respect for human nature (Teffo, 1995:14). *Ubuntu* is a South African social ethic, which means that a person is a person through others. Third, it centres on *Bosadi* and the significance of the family. This perspective acknowledges that family has played and still plays a significant role in Africa. However, the perspective is at the same time aware that the family has been used to subordinate women.

Bosadi approach criticises the oppressive elements of the African culture. It identifies other oppressive elements in texts such as marginalisation of people by their otherness – otherness of race, tribe, sex, and class. The approach considers the African-ness of an African woman in South Africa. The feminist critic insists that this is necessary in a setting where the African culture has been denigrated with the introduction of Christianity, which demonised African culture and idolised western culture. Through her approach, Masenya (1996) hopes to revive those elements of African culture which elevate the status of women and to criticise the oppressive elements embedded in African culture. Masenya (1996:158) argues that if communality is incorporated in women’s liberation approaches, it might neutralise the individualism of western feminist approaches. Communality implies that the struggle for the liberation of African women should be a joint effort by both men and women because if a part of humanity is oppressed, all of humanity is oppressed.

Masenya’s (1996) view is that African men in South Africa, more than anyone else, should be more understanding and sympathetic towards the plight of fellow African women, for they know what it means to be marginalised because of something God has given them, something they cannot change – race. Likewise, women cannot change their femaleness; their full rights as persons in their own right have to be acknowledged. In a South African context, Masenya (1996:152) doubts if sisterhood across colour line will ever happen and she argues as follows: “In South African society with its apartheid ideology, one wonders whether it will be possible for the ‘madams’ (white women) to practice genuine feminism with the ‘maids’ (black women) given our past history.”

The various shades of African feminisms seem to call for women's cooperation with men for them to succeed in their struggle against patriarchy. Pertaining to the call made by some African feminists for cooperation with men, Modupe (2011) argues that the inclusive approaches of most African feminisms stem from the importance which African women place on communality and family. The various shades of African feminism also seem to be in unison on the importance of motherhood. Bachofen (1861) defines motherhood in Farfan (1988:13) as follows: "The relationship that stands at the origin of all culture, of every virtue, of every nobler aspect of existence, is that between mother and child; it operates in a world of violence as divine principle of love, of union, of peace."

Feminism in Africa has various shades that are created as feminists in Africa attempt to come up with an approach that will be relevant for their particular region. South Africa is not different from other African countries in that reaching what would be a conclusive feminism in South Africa has not yet been achieved. Feminist critics of the former colonised countries are adamant that sisterhood between former colonisers and the colonised will not work because of the vast differences in experiences and correctly arguing that Africa is not a monolith (Nkealah, 2006) as western feminists think in their quest for sisterhood.

In African countries themselves, sisterhood is not yet achieved as each region has its own different challenges faced by its women. In view of the different races in South Africa, Masenya (1996:152) rightly wonders whether it will ever be possible for white and black women to practice genuine sisterhood given South Africa's history of white oppression of blacks. Thorpe (2018) argues that South African feminists explore their often vastly different experiences and perspectives in accessible and engaging voices. Feminism in South Africa touches on issues as wide-ranging as motherhood, anger, sex, race, inclusions and exclusions, the noisy protests and the quiet struggles. Thorpe (2018) argues for an urgent necessity of feminism in South Africa.

For this study, feminist theory comprising western feminism, the various African feminisms, South African feminisms, Amazon feminism, and postcolonial feminism are tools used for analysis. Feminisms in Africa are still evolving, but the study nevertheless uses what is available at present in Africa. As the texts for the study are set in the African continent, in general and in South Africa, specifically, the various feminisms discussed in the study are utilised to critically analyse the chosen fictional texts to determine if female characters are constructed from an Amazonian perspective or from a patriarchal view.

CHAPTER THREE

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews literature that bears relevance to the study. The study employs feminist theory as lens to synthesise its aim and objectives. The feminist theory concerns itself mostly with how women are represented in fictional and other texts. The study analyses selected texts to determine if female characters are constructed from an Amazonian point of view or from a patriarchal viewpoint.

Goldman (1977:83) argues that an artist's cultural background, social class, and the mores of her society all influence her art in different ways. This signifies that literary works cannot exist in isolation from the society that produces them. The struggle for women's emancipation needs to be fought from all fronts: politically, economically, socially, and in the fictional literary world. Part of the fight should include female writers' writing back to the phallogocentric literary tradition. It is time for writers, female writers specifically, to break the traditional patriarchal mould of stereotyping women representation by constructing female characters to the contrary. This writing back entails constructing inspirational female characters who depict the Amazonian image.

3.2. PATRIARCHAL VIEW OF WOMEN IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT

The South African situation regarding gender inequality becomes a point of focus for Daymond (1990) as she argues that the prolonged oppressive regime of apartheid could have delayed South African women to concentrate on issues of gender equality. To affirm her observation that apartheid may have caused delays for South African women to address gender issues, particularly black women, Daymond (1990) refers to one white South African female writer, Nadine Gordimer, who in her writings had chosen to give conscious priority to the ugliness of racial oppression. Racial oppression in South Africa made feminist concerns seem irrelevant to the real political problems facing the country.

However, the stories of the same writer at times depict the full burden of black women's oppression – firstly, that which derives from sexuality and secondly, that which is economic in origin and is perpetuated by white women who gain a measure of freedom by employing black domestic servants (Daymond, 1990). Feminist critics such as Wicomb (1993) saw no need to justify the delay in addressing gender issues but instead criticised the liberation discourse for excluding the aim of emancipation of women into the struggle against racial discrimination. Wicomb (1993:36) sees the failure to combine gender issues with racial issues as a way of perpetuating patriarchal oppression:

Black patriarchy, deciding on the legitimate portrayals of black gender relations, does so in the name of racial solidarity. Those who control discourse, whom a culture authorises to speak, will not tolerate exposure and, indeed, will construct it as treacherous and politically unsound.

In her study involving the Biblical Proverbs 31, Masenya's (1996:159) argument on the South African situation is as follows:

South African readership (of the bible) include African men who benefit from patriarchy, White men who benefit from both patriarchy and racism and White women who benefit from racism. Though we are in a non-racist and non-sexist South Africa, (referring to the period from 1994), the repercussions of apartheid will still be felt in the decades to come, African women at the bottom of the hyriarchal pyramid suffer the most.

On condemnation of African cultural traditions, Madipoane (1996:76) endorses Ramodibe's (1989:21) criticism of African culture as follows:

African traditions and culture present themselves to women as an oppressive system. It has a male domineering factor. It is a patriarchal system. This oppressive patriarchal system was found in South Africa even before Whites came with their Western capitalistic culture. Capitalistic culture has reinforced the oppressive system, out of which it derives more benefits.

This study concurs with the quotation above that African traditions are patriarchal and are thus oppressive to women.

In the study titled “Female Subversion in Zakes Mda’s Novel *The Madonna of Excelsior*”, Kgoshiadira (2015) argues that female subversion in the mentioned text is effected through various media such as political activities, and sex and the body. For this study, the means of empowering women do not include the deployment of the sexual body because such deployment still reduces women to sexual objects for men’s pleasure. Deploying prostitution does not qualify to be a medium of subverting patriarchy; instead, it perpetuates patriarchy. Gqola (2015:14) correctly argues that the discourses of gender in the South African public sphere speak of “women empowerment” in ways that are not transformative.

On analysing Ngcobo’s novel in a South African setting titled *And They Didn’t Die*, Shah (2008) noted that Ngcobo’s (1991) argument is that marriage serves patriarchal and social structures. Ngcobo (1991) avers that girls were groomed for marriage from an early age and persuaded that being wives was their natural calling. Shah (2008) states that the depiction of marriage in the novel *And They Didn’t Die* exposes how various social opinions of women’s capabilities are internalised by the women themselves and affect them, with devastating psychological effects. Society promotes false optimism by conditioning a woman to believe that the fulfilment of her life depends on a successful marriage. If a woman is to marry and remain married, she must comply with the prevailing societal norms of behaviour, even if it means living under extremely unpleasant conditions (Shah, 2008:35).

Dlomo (2002) engaged feminist theory in analysing selected texts by two South African writers, Bessie Head and Ellen Khuzwayo. Dlomo (2002) concluded that the South African black feminist perspective can be said to be characterised by its embrace of womanism, mothering, and continuous national and racial liberation struggle. Dlomo (2002:57) argues that the objectives of South African black feminists, despite their various groupings, are cultural reconstruction, transformation of society, development, moral regeneration in socio-political, psychological, economic and ecological spheres of the new nation, especially post-1994. Dlomo (2002) argues that the writings of Head and Khuzwayo serve a didactic purpose by empowering women with a sense of resilience and avoidance of victimhood. Women should not indulge in the emotions of

self-pity and helplessness but what is required is courage, a sense of self-worth and commitment to the relentless struggle to attain the objectives of a South African black feminism.

The uniqueness of African South African women's spectra from their African sisters is emphasised by Kolawole (1998). Kolawole (1998:223) suggests that any black person who wanted to survive in the apartheid society would need the strength to confront negative myths and traditional stereotypes. However, for African women to survive in the same socio-political cosmos, they needed twice the courage, boldness, resilience, genius, and determination to be visible and audible. That Black South African women under the racist apartheid rule had to have double the courage than men to survive is echoed by Ibinga (2007) who used the feminist theory to analyse fictional texts of a South African writer, Langa (2000). Ibinga (2007:238) argues:

Black women share with their male counterparts the first type of oppression, dictated by an institutionalised, segregationist system denying them their fundamental human rights because of their skin colour. The second form of domination black women endure is the form of patriarchal tyranny under which they live in black communities.

According to Masenya (1996), characteristics of Africana womanism make the Africana woman almost the superwoman of the biblical proverbs 31 woman as analysed in her research entitled "Proverbs 31:10-31 in a South African Context". Masenya (1996:198) argues as that: "gone should be the days when hard work was expected only from those at the bottom of the ladder (mostly African women) while the powerful (African men, middle class African women, whites) are sitting at the gates."

The feminist theory is employed in Shah's (2008) study, which analyses Ngcobo's (1986) text *And They Didn't Die*. According to Shah (2008), Ngcobo's (1986) conscious feminism is reflected in the construction of the major characters who are women who are politically active figures who took their identities from the exigencies of life in South Africa and refined feminism in terms of a political struggle that took race, rural deprivation, and gender into account. Shah (2008) argues that the triple oppression of gender, race, and class meted out to female characters in Ngcobo's

(1986) text points to the diversity and complexity of women's experiences of oppression in South Africa.

Shah (2008) argues that women's struggles are inextricably intertwined with the total liberation struggle. By depicting African women's resistance, Ngcobo (1986) celebrates their participation and agency against the tyranny and exploitation of African patriarchy and white apartheid rule. Whereas black patriarchal oppression is internally generated by some customs and practices, white patriarchal oppression is externally induced by the equally oppressive apartheid systems of colonialism and settler colonialism (Shah, 2008). On studying the representation of women in fictional literary texts, Shah (2008) suggests that challenging patriarchy effectively requires challenging other systems of oppression that mutually support each other.

Fick's (2008:28) summation of the situation in South Africa is that African women in South Africa are trapped between traditional Black patriarchy within their Zulu (one of the ethnic groups in South Africa) context and the economic dependency on colonial white racist patriarchy. In Shah (2008:14), Rich (1977:57) is quoted as having captured the nuances of the African traditional social milieu when describing patriarchy as follows:

The power of the fathers: a familial, social, ideological, and political system in which by direct pressure or through tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and division of labour – men determine what parts women shall or shall not play, and the female is everywhere subsumed by the male.

Ibinga (2007) calls the African traditional oppression as defined above 'the culture of African tradition'. African feminism adopted in the study is informed by the oppressive nature of the African cultural tradition which western feminists have little knowledge of. I argue that the west is not familiar with some "cruel cultural practices" meted out to African women residing in the continent. These terrible cultural practices are like a "thorn in the flesh" of African women, excluding African women in the diaspora because they have little, or no experience of injustices perpetrated by the African cultural tradition on its women.

On analysing Kopano Matlwa's *Period Pain* (2017), Pucherová (2022) states that the novel asks uncomfortable questions about women's rights over their bodies, violent masculinities, and society's attitude to gender violence. The rape of the female protagonist communicates fear to the victim, male domination, and female submission. However, the narrative refuses to reduce women to their bodies and emphasises their individuality as political and social subjects. By representing misogynist violence through the voices of survivors, Matlwa asserts women's right to independence, self-determination in the public space, outside of traditional identities of domesticity, subservience, wifhood, and motherhood.

On the "thorny" issue of rurality and the domination of women in African tradition, Shah (2008) praises Ngcobo's (1986) novel *And They Didn't Die* by appreciating how recounting the story of rural women's resistance in apartheid South Africa makes a profound contribution to breaking the silence. This study scrutinises female characters for either their vocality or silence. Female characters given voice to resist patriarchy are deemed Amazonian; those that suffer abuse in silence are constructed in perpetuation of patriarchy.

Akhuemokhan and Okolocha (2015:82) also analysed Ngcobo's (1986) novel *And they Didn't Die*. The duo refers to the culture of African tradition as "rural Bantu culture", arguing that one can appreciate the possible predicament of individuals living within the purview of two cultures, as it happens with the black South Africans in *And they Didn't Die*. The dominating and saturating tendencies doubles, proceeding as it does from two authorities – the European and the African. Akhuemokhan and Okolocha (2015) argue that the narrative, *And They Didn't Die*, depicts in extreme terms a situation that pertained to most colonised Africans, where the European and the African cultures did not really co-exist as the former was superimposed on the latter. Viewed from the perspective of a cultural pyramid, the pressure increased the burden of conformism for, and prejudice against, those at the bottom of a cultural pyramid. According to Akhuemokhan and Okolocha (2015), an argument raised by Said (1983) is that cultural norms are constructed at the apex of the social pyramid and transmitted

downwards in an ever-widening arc to those at the bottom, at which point culture is universally applicable but neither universally accessible nor universally beneficial.

In their analysis of culture in *And They Didn't Die*, Akhmemokhan and Okolocha (2015) argue that the hierarchy of culture illuminates the coalition between culture and apartheid in fictional South Africa of the twentieth century. In a nation where prohibition was the order of the day, cultural leanings in the same direction seem to be encouraged and magnified. But because it is culture, something over which people have a sense of proprietorship, it does not trigger off the same antipathy from the populace as racism. While the people across the land were ready to do battle with apartheid rule, there was no equivalent project aimed at the equally biased practices of culture. In the post-apartheid era, it stands inviolate while the mountain of apartheid totters.

Boswell (2010) argues for the re-conceptualisation of black South African women's fiction writing as a form of literary criticism. Fiction which qualifies as Black South African feminist literary criticism is characterised by narrating experiences and events from the perspectives and interiority of Black women. Black women are portrayed as thinking subjects, not mere ciphers or bodies. In this way, writers of such texts foreground the subjugated knowledges of Black women, suppressed by hundreds of years of colonialism, and later decades of apartheid.

The critic argues that Black South African feminist criticism, in fiction, locates Black women historically, allowing insights into the forces of oppression that operate against them, as well as the opportunities they are able to take advantage of within the matrix of power within which Black women find themselves situated (Boswell, 2010). According to Boswell (2010), another characteristic of a Black South African feminist criticism is the concept of creative re-visioning: a subject's ability to re-envision and reimagine what is possible for her to achieve within her lifetime, given the constraints operating upon her. Boswell (2010:208) interviewed South African female writers such as Miriam Tlali, Laretta Ngcobo and Sindiwe Magona and concluded that these

writers were engaged in a creative re-envisioning of their lives as they became writing subjects. Since the societies in which they were born and raised deemed them only fit for domestic labour, and educated them accordingly, their acts of creatively re-envisioning themselves as writers in possession of creative agency marked a radical shift in their subjectivities.

Boswell (2010) further argues that the final characteristic of a Black South African feminist literary criticism is its insistence on imagining different social worlds, where justice, humanity and agency are freely available to all oppressed citizens. Through commenting on dominant structures within their society, and using their creative fiction to imagine different worlds, authors are engaged in a transgressive process of reshaping the world from a subjugated perspective. Lockett (1990:17) posits that in the South African context, the racial paradigm of power subsumes white women into the masculine Self and black men into the feminine Other; “yet when one considers the paradigm of literary power one finds that the work of Black men has largely been taken up by the establishment while that of Black women, and that of white women that cannot be appropriated by the paternal tradition, has not.” Tlali (1984:26) expresses barriers black women face in the arena of writing as follows:

The aspirant African female writer has still to remove the cobweb of tradition, custom, and the colonial mentality. She has to battle first with herself and then gather enough courage to face the world about her. Because they are hampered at every turn, even by the society they wish to write for, they find that they have to resort to all kinds of subterfuges to realise their dreams.

Masenya (1996:71) points to the factors that shaped black women’s lives in South Africa as follows: colonial imperialism, which is racism, classism, the African culture, and the church in South Africa. In *For Better or for Worse? – The Bible and Africana Women*, Masenya (2009) highlights the complexity of the South African situation from a biblical point of view where she adopts a view that the Book, the bible, was used by colonisers and apartheid ideologues as a tool of subjugation of the black masses. Masenya (2009) adds that the situation created a fertile ground for atrocities and injustices to covertly or overtly take place in the name of God, and remain unchallenged.

The scholar, Masenya (2009:140), unflinchingly declares that the Bible can be used by the powerful as a “wounding sword to unsuspecting powerless yet, faithful masses.” The critic further asserts that this craving for power to control enabled some of the early missionaries, the colonisers, the slave masters, the apartheid ideologues, and practitioners to use the Bible “for worse” to dispossess, enslave and tame, in the name of deity. Masenya (2009:134) rhetorically asks:

Why do Africana peoples continue to cling to the Book which has been successfully used by the powerful for, among others, their humiliation, land dispossession, racial segregation, slavery, patriarchy/*kyriarchy*, domination/imperialism and neo-imperialism? Why do Africana women continue to cling to a Book which men have been used in the past as well as in the present to perpetuate their oppression and marginalisation in the name of God?

In *For Better or for Worse? – The Bible and Africana Women*, Masenya (2009) paints a bleak picture of black women in a South African context. The critic argues that women are persuaded, using the Bible, to call their own oppression, or violence done to their own bodies in the name of a god, a worldly matter that needs to be shunned. In the process, women’s own female experience becomes alienated. The view expressed above may be like that of Spivak (1985:2203), an Indian scholar, literary theorist and feminist critic, who argues in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* that

it is not the question of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of sexual division of labour rather, it is that both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more in the shadows.

Studies conducted on some of Mda’s and Matlwa’s writings do not singularly and broadly explore the construction of female characters from an Amazon perspective in particular. For instance, Mahasha (2014) explores (African) identity and its accompanying constituents within the South African setting as captured in Mda’s *The Madonna of Excelsior* and Bessie Head’s *Maru*. The study further examines the flexibility of individualities in both societal and political domains and reveals how the

repression of identities upsets persons and countries. The study reveals that as a miniature of Africa, South Africa mirrors dreadful inequalities of the past, which found expression through colonisation and apartheid, resulting in an altered kind of African people's identity. Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007) and *Spilt Milk* (2010) are analysed by Montle (2018) in search of how the colonial past perhaps paved a way for social issues to warm their way into the democratic South Africa. On studying Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007), Spencer (2009) investigates the politics of representation in the text, focussing on how the two young protagonists construct their identities in post-apartheid South Africa.

None of these existing studies however employ Amazonian feminism to read Mda and Matlwa's texts. Thus, reading Mda and Matlwa's texts from an Amazonian perspective remains a fertile area for research on issues pertaining to the literary representations of women.

3.3. WOMEN SEEN FROM A WESTERN PERSPECTIVE

Women's struggles know no geographical boundaries. According to Pucherová (2022), the struggles that women face are similar globally, which makes it necessary to look at western feminism and African feminism as being in a relationship of complimentarism. The critic's view is that women's concerns should not be addressed in isolation.

Women in western literature written by men are for the most part seen as an "Other", as objects, of interest in only as far as they serve or detract from the goals of the male protagonist; and this denies woman her selfhood (Donovan, 1983:213). Donovan (1983: 213) argues that much of western literature in fact depends upon a series of fixed images of women (stereotypes); these reified forms are repeated over and over again through much of western literature: "The objectified images in western literature define a woman in so far as she relates to the interest of men or serve or thwarts the interest of men." The feminist critic argues that these works do not present the "inside" of women's experience: "we learn little, if anything, of the women's responses to events; these women are simply vehicles for the growth and salvation of the male

protagonist, and that western projects of redemption almost always depend upon a salvific woman” (Donovan, 1983:213).

In his handbook, *The Subjection of Women* written in 1869, Mill (quoted in Farfan 1988: 6), asks the following question: “would mankind be at all better off if women were free?” In response to his own question, Mill (1869) predicted the following:

The alleviation of the suffering of those unfortunate women who are brutalised by their husbands, as well as the virtual disappearance of the vicious propensities of men that have resulted from the abuse of power permitted by those aspects of marriage that cause the institution to represent the last surviving instance of slavery; and that the notion of innate male superiority must necessarily be dispelled not simply because it is unfair to women, but because it has an even more detrimental effect upon the men who seem to benefit from it. The relation between husband and wife is very like that between lord and vassal, except that the wife is held to more unlimited obedience than the vassal was. However, the vassal’s character may have been affected, for better and for worse, by his subordination, who can help seeing that the lord’s was greatly affected for the worse?

According to Farfan (1988), Mill’s work, *The Subjection of Women* (1869), has been labelled a cardinal document in the history of feminism, and called an overwhelmingly important handbook of the nineteenth century women’s movement. However, despite any contributions Mill (1869) could have made to boost women movements at the time, Farfan (1988) is convinced that Mill’s (1869) works seem to initially take women’s side in gender debates but are oriented by a persistent patriarchal ideology in which women are important primarily for their contribution to the production of better and more superior men. The deployment of feminist theory in this study exposes that patriarchal texts have used women as tools to bolster patriarchy.

Mill (1869) continues asking questions (quoted in Farfan 1988:6) as follows: “What good are we to expect from the changes pertaining to women proposed in our customs and institution? Would mankind be at all better off if women were free?” These questions are relevant for the present study as they pertain to women’s freedom from patriarchy. Patriarchy is a target of attack by the feminist theory, feminists, and feminist critics in their fight against gender inequality and violence against women mostly perpetrated by men.

Even though Farfan (1988) argues that Mill's (1869) texts are oriented by a patriarchal ideology, the questions Mill (1869) poses, and if answered in favour of women, are crucial to the freedom of women against the clutches of patriarchy and its concomitant abuses. Mill's (1869) response to his own questions is even more useful to feminism as he argued for women emancipation though in some cases for different reasons other than those advancing the goal of the women's movement of achieving gender equality. According to Farfan (1988:7), Mill (1869) argues as follows:

With regard to the larger and more equivocal issue of making women the equals of men in terms of educational and employment opportunities, the notion of innate male superiority must necessarily be dispelled not simply because it is unfair to women but because it has an even more detrimental effect upon the men who seem to profit by it.

Other advantages which Mill (1869) cites as reasons why women should be emancipated include his argument that the admittance of women to professions that had previously been barred to them also promises the doubling of the mass of mental faculties available for higher service of humanity and the added benefit of the stimulus that would be given to the intellect of men by the competition; and that, the release of women from their subjugation concerns the improvement and extension of their powers of influence over men.

On the issue of women being identified by their relationship to men such as being a wife to a man by marriage, Rich (1977) argues that compulsory heterosexuality functions to ensure that women are sexually accessible to men, with consent or choice on the women's part neither legally nor practically considered. The suggestion is that heterosexual marriages are mostly beneficial to men. In an African context, for a woman to stay unmarried is seen as choosing to make her body unavailable for heterosexual male consumption (Gqola, 2015).

Despite some political democratic changes concerning women, South African societies are still plagued by severe women abuse and femicide perpetrated by men. Russell (1992) defines femicide as an intentional killing of females. The critic believes

that her definition of femicide applies to all forms of sexist killing, whether motivated by misogyny, by a sense of superiority over females, by sexual pleasure, or by assumption of ownership over women. Russell (1992) adds that femicide on the extreme end of a continuum of antifemale terror includes a wide variety of verbal and physical abuse, such as rape, torture, sexual slavery, incestuous and extra familial child sexual abuse, physical and emotional battery, sexual harassment, genital mutilation, unnecessary gynaecological operations, forced heterosexuality, forced sterilisation, forced motherhood, psychosurgery, denial of food to women in some cultures, and cosmetic surgery. Russell (1992) states that whenever these forms of terrorism result in death, they become femicides.

For the present study, it would be a gross omission to exclude violence and femicide against women as a unit of analysis because statistics show that South Africa has one of the highest incidents of women killings globally (Simonovic, 2016). Gqola (2015) argues that gender-based violence was not regarded as a human right abuse under apartheid and as a result, large-scale experience of violence by women were cast aside. According to Gqola (2015: 3), the endemic violence against women in South Africa has been normalised and made part of its patriarchal culture which the feminist calls the “rape culture”. The feminist argues that this culture is made possible by people’s acceptance of rape as a normal expression of masculinity and their failure to intervene when witnessing sexual harassment. Instead, rape victims are silenced, shamed, and stigmatised (Gqola 2015). According to Pucherová (2022), Sephodi (2017), a young South African feminist writer who has popularised feminism, argues that some men in society seem to believe that women who rebel against what is regarded as “normal” need to be corrected through acts of violence, such as rape and murder; violence is then seen as a punishment for women who refuse to subscribe to traditional gender roles.

Farfan (1988) used feminist literary theory as a basis for a discussion of Henrik Ibsen’s (1964) major female characters. According to Farfan (1988), Ibsen’s female characters are foregrounded in apparent sympathy for their conditions as women whose dreams and potentialities cannot be realised within patriarchal society. One female character,

Hedda Gabler in *A Doll's House*, depicts the fate of a spirited but directionless young woman who, for lack of anything better to do and socialised to fear spinsterhood, marries herself off to a dull and insensitive but respectable scholar. Culmination of events ended with the female character committing suicide. In reference to the female character, Farfan (1988:19) concluded as follows: "The character dies a victim of patriarchal society, as much in the conditioned thinking it has instilled within her as in the limitations it has imposed on her from without."

Farfan (1988:17) analysed yet another of Ibsen's female characters, Nora Helmer, in *A Doll's House* as follows:

The female character carried her conditioning as wife and mother to its logical extreme and breaks the law to save her husband's life; but when he fails to do so for her, she realised that she had overestimated both her worth within her marriage and her husband's moral measure. Disillusioned and shaken by the revelation of her naivety and ignorance, her social inconsequentiality and the possible abnormality, the isolation of her rebelliousness forces her to leave her home and family to educate herself about the workings of the world. The female character finds herself unable to meet the requirements that society has set down for wives and in this she is a deviant exception.

The third character analysed is Rebekka West in *Rosmersholm*. Farfan (1988) concludes that the turn of events in the narrative eventually led to Rebecca losing all sense of herself as an autonomous individual and sacrificing her life to please the male protagonist in his perverted expiation. Like Hedda, Rebekka dies a victim of patriarchy. Farfan's (1988) study highlights that the three female characters in Hendrik Ibsen's works are constructed from a patriarchal viewpoint. The relevance of Farfan's work to the present study is that the feminist theory is the common denominator. Lorde (1981) argues against patriarchy and racism by stating that women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and educate men as to women's existence and their needs. Lorde (1981:234) argues as follows:

This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns. Now we hear that it is the task of black and third world women to educate white women, in the face of tremendous resistance, as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought.

Arguments put forth by critics such as Lorde (1981) about the plight of former colonised women fortify the argument of this study, which is that female characters in the texts under scrutiny could be subalternised because the two writers are from South Africa, which is a former colonised country. Mishra (2013) argues that males in postcolonial countries have continued colonising women's bodies in the postcolonial era. Post-colonial feminist thoughts add to the analysis tool to determine if female characters in the texts under scrutiny are kept occupied with the concerns of the master (patriarchy) or if female characters are accorded their autonomous individuality. For the study, female characters kept occupied with master's concerns are deemed as patriarchal constructs. However, if female characters are independent of male domination, the study will conclude that such female characters are constructed from an Amazonian point of view, which, according to Meeder (2008), feminists adopt to promote their goal of gender equality.

The feminist theory upon which the study is premised rejects gender role stereotyping. Bertens (2014) argues that gender has to do with how males and females are culturally constructed. To say that women are naturally timid is to construct a role for them. Like femininity, masculinity is a gender role with connotations of strength, rationality, stoicism, and self-reliance. Bertens (2014) argues further that what traditionally has been called feminine is a gender role that has been culturally assigned to countless generations of women. The study scrutinises and analyses selected texts for the gender role stereotyping of female characters.

Pucherová (2022:148) argues that in post-apartheid South Africa, women's rights continue to be juxtaposed against what is said to constitute "traditional culture" or "Africanness". Contemporary writing by South African women show that the dualism of "culture versus human rights" is a false one because it is used by patriarchy to justify women's submission and to divide them into "virgins" versus "temptress", or "angels" versus "whores". This binary construction is regarded as the most oppressive in the depiction of women.

Similarly, feminist critic, Donovan (1983: 213), argues that western fictional literature reflects endemic manichaeistic dualism. In western worldview, female stereotypes symbolise either the spiritual or the material, good or evil. Mary, the mother of Jesus, came through time to exemplify the ultimate spiritual goodness, and Eve, the partner of Adam, the most sinister of evil physicality. The schematic representation below shows how this dualism is conceived:

| | | |
|----------------|-----|------------|
| Spiritual | vs. | Material |
| Spirit | vs. | Body |
| Virginal ideal | vs. | Sex object |
| Mary | vs. | Eve |
| Inspiration | vs. | Seductress |
| Good | vs. | Evil |

Under the category of the good-woman stereotype, that is, those women who serve the interests of the hero, are the patient wife, the mother/martyr, and the lady. In the bad or evil category are deviants who reject or do not properly serve man or his interests: the old maid or career woman; the witch or lesbian; the shrewd or domineering mother/wife. Several works, considered archetypal masterpieces of western tradition, rely upon these simplistic stereotypes of women. Taking action, taking charge, is a choice that historically has been denied women and still is unavailable to them in many areas. In some western literature, women are the objects, the scapegoats of much cruelty and evil. Much western thought and literature has failed to come to grips with the problem of evil because it facilely projects evil upon women or other hypostasised 'Others', such as the Jew, the Negro, thereby denying the reality of the contingent order (Donovan, 1983).

Fanon (1963), a Black anticolonial intellectual in France, explains the issue of "Othering" in his seminal book, *The Wretched of the Earth* by stating that his service to the french state made no difference to the whites around him, who regarded black French subjects like himself as the "Other", as alien and inferior, yet frightening and

dangerous. Fanon (1963) came to understand that despite his intelligence, high level of education, and mastery of the French language, he was regarded not as a human being, but as a specimen of an exotic and savage race, viewed through stereotypes developed over centuries of racial prejudice. Fanon (1963) accuses racism, colonialism, and patriarchy of Othering the colonised natives.

If patriarchy, together with racism and colonialism, is accused of Othering, as Fanon (1963) notes, the suggestion would be that women's intelligence or education is disregarded in patriarchal societies and patriarchal texts. Spivak (1985), in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* argues that the oppression that women endured in colonialism was more than what men suffered. It could be concluded that women were doubly Othered in colonial times as a result of colonial rule and patriarchy. Othering is one other factor to be used in scrutinising and analysing female characters in the selected texts to determine if they are constructed from a patriarchal or Amazonian view. South Africa has a historical background of racism orchestrated by the apartheid regime. If Othering emanating from elements of colonialism, racism or patriarchy are present in some of the selected texts, it would suggest that such texts are patriarchal constructs.

In *The Second Sex*, De Beauvoir (1949) argues that patriarchy, in reality and in fictional texts, refers to women as an "Other". The critic points out that this does not mean that women should refuse to read such texts, but that the texts should be read with a perspective that recognises the sexism inherent in their moral vision. Only when the style of the text is studied in the context of the culture's moral view of women can it be of feminist significance. However, the critic is dismayed that much formalist analysis in the past has relied on the convenient divorce between values and aesthetics, thus evading the evaluative issue of the moral stature of the work.

Patriarchy needs to be tackled from all fronts, including in literature. Meeder (2008:51) points to the psyche of men as one of the causes of men's untoward behaviour, by arguing as follows:

Even in what we consider misogynistic or patriarchal cultures there is an undercurrent of the strong woman, a being that men fear because the shadow of her strength is always there, threatening to overpower their idyllic and fragile superstructure. Men cannot survive without woman; even when they try to suppress the very idea of her, banishing her to the shadows; woman is there like a sleeping tiger.

The present study aims to investigate if Mda and Matlwa have constructed female characters in a manner that, according to Meeder (2008:51), is threatening to overpower men's "idyllic and fragile" superstructure of patriarchy. Grosz (1995) argues that empowered female characters unsettle the phallogentric equation of masculinity and humanity. Boehmer (2006), on analysing power relations across gender in post-independence settings, has observed similar trends as Wicomb (1993), that when gender issues are not incorporated into the people's liberation, gender oppression remains a critical problem and an obstacle to social change.

Feminist theory shifts the writer, whether male or female, to the background of the literary text. According to Grosz's (1995) *Feminism after the Death of the Author*, a text having a female author carries in itself a certain probability of shaking up or unsettling the phallogentric equation of masculinity and humanity, but there is no guarantee. While there is a signature of some kind or other, while the reader countersigns, the signature never ties the text to its origin nor provides it with a definite destination, a fixed and settled context or a controllable audience. Signature is a condition for a text's endless repeatability, its perpetual openness to repositioning, its capacity to slip into – and out of – feminist interests and contexts, its fundamental plasticity and its material contingency regarding its own political status and effectiveness.

This study's focus on the Amazon-image character vis-à-vis the traditional phallogentric female construct is likely to affirm Grosz's (1995) argument that a text having a female writer carries with it a probability of unsettling the phallogentric equation of masculinity. However, Grosz (1995) cautions that it is not a guarantee that female writers produce "feminist" texts and male writers produce patriarchal texts. In critiquing Bachofen (1861), Homans (1986) (in Farfan 1988:26) argues that from the

point of view of “an androcentric literary tradition, women’s place in language is with the literal, the silent object of representation, the dead mother, the absent referent...this is the position of women in *Das Mutterrecht*.” Farfan (1988) argues that when feminist writers take hold of the matriarchs that Bachofen has written about and manipulate his ideas to meet the requirements of their work, they are assuming for themselves a position other than that of “silent object representation”. Instead of being the object that is written about, they are writing and in writing they are literalising patriarchy in such a way that it is no longer simply Bachofen’s figure of speech but it is also an entity insisting on a reality of its own.

On analysing the images of women in fiction and reality, Robbins (2000:51) condemns the chauvinistic approach dictated by society, and suggests the following:

If literature is one of the privileged sites of representation, if the images presented in literary and artistic texts are powerful because of the power accorded to literature, images of women are the obvious starting point to begin a critique of the place of women in society at large. The images we see or read about are part of the context in which we live. If we can read these images differently, we can go some way to altering perceptions of reality; we can see a need for changes: and when we have seen the need, perhaps we can bring it about. The ultimate goal for studies undertaken in this field, such as this study, should be to effect urgently sought changes in women’s lives, lest efforts only attest to the futility of it all except titles.

Conversely, Gramstad (1999) argues that as discrimination against women is worldwide, feminists, in their quest for women emancipation and empowerment, oppose gender role stereotypes. Radloff (2016) refers to Simonovic’s (2016) investigation report on the high instances of violence against women and children in South Africa, which stated that there are deeply rooted patriarchal attitudes regarding the role of women in society. From this report, it can be deduced that not only is patriarchy undemocratic, but it is also dangerous for women. Hence, attempts at eradicating patriarchy should be made in every sphere of society, including literature. A study, which explores an alternative female character to the gender-stereotypical constructs is justifiable and necessary as a way of chipping away at patriarchy that rears its head even in the literary world.

3.4. AMAZONIAN CHARACTER

According to Meeder (2008), feminists have taken up the Amazon image as an icon to counter the stereotypical female characters constructed from a patriarchal viewpoint. Amazons have become a symbol for women empowerment as a means of achieving gender equality. Hurwit (1999) argues that whether actual or symbolic, Amazons were unwilling to accept their designated, dominated places in Athenian society. The result was that they were seen to be posing a threat to Athenian society and had to be portrayed as the antithesis of the idealised, masculine way of life. Whether myth or reality, Amazons represented a very real threat to their “men only” club; they respected strong women while at the same time decrying their temerity and audacity.

Belsy (1985) argues that, unlike an object that is only acted upon and passive, an Amazon as a subject may speak, write and act, and in so doing may insist on occupying a significant position in society. This study aimed to juxtapose an Amazonian female character with a female patriarchal construct to deduce how type of representation advances or detracts from the feminist project.

On studying the social and political institutions of ancient Athens, Hurwit (1999) argues that Amazons appeared to possess the same rights and freedoms as men enjoyed. They possessed and rode horses; they waged war against men; they lived as they chose, and chose to live without men. Amazons were fiercely independent women warriors. Boardman (1985) argues that the possession of horses has always been seen as a status symbol; as such, the warrior women have traditionally been equated with freedom. Some Greek pottery shows Amazons taming horses. Owning horses was a sign of status, of conspicuous expenditure, and of power. Images of Amazons on Greek pottery sent a message of wealth and power.

Davis-Kimball (2002:54) regards Amazons as the underlying foundation that held ancient societies together. The critic argues that Amazons are “our heritage and our role models; they deserve to come out of the shadows of history and be celebrated”. It is believed that Amazons were Nomads and traditionally egalitarian – men, women,

and children work side by side, often at the same tasks with little of the type of role playing that is often associated with patriarchal cultures. Division of labour into strict roles could impede their work and jeopardise the welfare of the tribe (Davis-Kimball, 2002).

In the next chapter, Mda's selected texts are analysed to determine if his construction of female characters is from a perspective that promotes the objectification of women in perpetuation of patriarchy or if female characters are depicted in a way that shows they are capable of self-determined actions as subjects and as "selves" with reflective critical consciousness.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN MDA'S TEXTS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Zakes Mda's selected texts are analysed in this chapter to determine whether the female characters are patriarchal constructs or Amazonian characters. Female characters are scrutinised and analysed to determine if they have a self-defined and critical consciousness of an Amazonian character or if they have a stereotypical identity of patriarchal constructs. The study determines and juxtaposes objectified female characters with female characters that are constructed in an Amazonian image. The Amazonian female characters are in texts in promotion of the feminist goal of gender equality. Bertens (2013:84) argues that patriarchal female characters are constructs and defines them as follows:

Since the way female characters (in patriarchal texts) are routinely portrayed had not much in common with the way feminist critics saw and experienced themselves, these characters are clearly constructs.

Adopting this definition of constructs, this study seeks to determine if Mda's female characters are patriarchal constructs or Amazonian characters through analysing his texts in this chapter. According to Lefkowitz (2007), the ancient Amazons, whom feminists have taken up as a symbol for women's empowerment, challenged the cultural stereotype of docile femininity by exhibiting a vigorous and resourceful courage in battle. Every feature of Amazonian society had a direct antithesis in ordinary Greek practice. Lagerlof (2000) argues that Amazons appeared to possess the same rights and freedoms than men enjoyed unlike Athenian women. Amazons rode horses, hunted, and waged war against men while Athenian women were esteemed in the private sphere where they were traditionally relegated.

Mda's texts under critical focus are: *And Girls in their Sunday Dresses* (1993); *Ways of Dying* (1995); *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995) and *Little Suns* (2015). The first three texts (1993 and 1995) were written around the transitional period from apartheid era to democratic government in South Africa. The transitional period was still a period

of political upheavals and racial struggle. The fourth text was written in 2015, which is well into the democratic period. The twenty-year gap between the third and the fourth text chosen might help in determining if the writer is progressing with the times or not, with respect to the representation of women in fictional texts. The expectations of change on how women are portrayed in fictional texts is informed by the political, economic and social changes in democratic South Africa. Gqola (2015:14) confirms political changes in South Africa as follows: “today we have a constitution that affirms women’s dignity and rights to full humanity.”

The text *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* (1993) is a play while the other three texts are novels. The choice of mixing two genres in one study is motivated by the fact that Mda has many literary productions to his name. The study finds it worthwhile to note how women are portrayed in a different genre than a novel. As an author, Mda has written various texts. The study has selected only four texts for manageability. Mda’s *The Madonna Excelsior* (2002) foregrounds women but was excluded from the study simply because in all the four texts chosen, there are enough female characters for analysis. One chosen text, *Little Suns* (2015), is mostly about men fighting wars, but there are women in the text that the study scrutinises and analyses to determine from which perspective they are constructed. An interesting point is raised in Farfan (1988) arguing that some texts written by men about women may initially seem to be on women’s side in gender debates; however, these woman-centred works are actually oriented by a persistent patriarchal ideology. Analyses of selected texts are preceded by a synopsis of each text. The author’s background is also provided.

4.2. SYNOPSIS OF MDA’S TEXTS

About the Author: Zakes Mda is a South African novelist, poet, and playwright. He was born in 1948 in the Eastern Cape. He has won major South African and British literary awards for his novels and plays. At the time of this study, Mda was Professor of Creative Writing at Ohio University in the USA. Although resident overseas, he continues to visit his native South Africa.

4.2.1. *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995)

It is a novel about a young girl, Dikosha, and her brother, Radisene, in the mountain kingdom of Lesotho. They grew up in one of the rural mountainous villages. When Radisene attended high school away from the village, Dikosha was left in the village where she lived all her life. Radisene lived his life in the lowlands of the city of Maseru. The lives of the two characters are woven around the lives of other people in the village. City life is glimpsed at from the side of Radisene's life in Maseru. Everyday lives of Dikosha, Radisene and the people around them make the bulk of the story. The narrative features love, betrayal, corruption, suspense, witchcraft, various ceremonies and dance, and agrarian life for the rural areas. Included in the narrative are political violence and political events, which took place in Lesotho and in South Africa. When the narrative ends, Radisene is back from city life in Maseru to his home village. Important for this thesis is the fibre of patriarchal ideology which permeates the entire narrative. The analysis of the text focuses on the following characters: Radisene, Dikosha, Grandma 'Maselina, Sorry My Darlie, Mother-of-Twins, and Mother-of-the-Daughters.

4.2.2. *Ways of Dying* (1995)

The novel starts with a funeral procession of a young boy whose death can be described as a political killing at the hands of his own people. One other young boy died a gory death of being eaten by dogs under the bridge. The main characters are Noria and Toloki who grew up and schooled together in the village but later separately moved to the city to seek work where they meet again. In the outskirts of the city, Toloki works as a mourner (nurse) in various people's funerals in the city. Noria gets involved in politics as politics in the city is more of a common practice than back in the village. Noria and Toloki find themselves living together in Noria's shack as Toloki had nowhere to stay and was sleeping outside anywhere he could find shelter. The characters that are considered in the analysis of the text are: Noria, Toloki, That Mountain Woman, Napu, and Xesibe.

4.2.3. *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* (1993)

The text is a play of two women which is acted out when the two women, Lady and Woman, are queuing for days to buy rice in some government offices. While queuing and sleeping in the queue, the two women befriend each other. They tell each other of their difficult lives. What they tell each other revolves around men. Other issues that are woven around their personal lives are politics, corruption in government offices, bureaucracy, racism, violence, and poverty. When the day comes for the two women and others in the queue to be attended to, they are made to fill in forms, which require information they consider ludicrous for buying rice, such as the colour of their eyes and hair. The two female characters are fed up and leave the queue without buying the rice for which they waited for days.

4.2.4. *Little Suns* (2015)

Little Suns is a novel which is partly a historical account of events that took place in the then Cape Province during the apartheid era. A love story interweaves the near historical events of the novel. The Amampondomise king and his men killed magistrate Hope, a white man, and his white clerks. The whites were representatives of the colonial British government. A war broke out because of the killings. The colonial government teamed up with other local tribes against Amampondomise. The king and some of his men, who included the main character in the story, Malangana, fled to Lesotho for refuge. The king was arrested twenty years later as he crossed back to the Cape Province, but was found not guilty for lack of evidence.

Woven around the events above is a thread of a love story of Malangana (*Little Suns*) and a Mthwakazi (Bushman) maiden which started twenty years before he went to exile in Lesotho. The story resumes when Malangana comes back from exile after more than twenty years, and starts searching for Mthwakazi everywhere in their locale. The bulk of the love story is based mostly on the search and some memories of her before going into exile. The narrative ends with an elderly Malangana meeting the

target of his search, now an elderly Mthwakazi. The main characters are Mthwakazi and Malangana.

4.3. ANALYSIS OF MDA'S TEXTS¹

4.3.1. *She Plays with the Darkness*

4.3.1.1. Dualism: Mother-of-Twins versus Mother-of-the-Daughters

Pucherová (2022:148) argues that in an African context, dualism of “culture” versus “human rights” is used by patriarchy to justify women’s submission and to divide women into “virgins” versus “temptresses” or “angels” versus “whores”. Donovan (1983) argues that in Western tradition, stereotypes tend to fall into two categories, reflecting the endemic manichaeistic dualism where female stereotypes symbolise good or evil, spiritual or material, virginal ideal or sex object, Mary or Eve, inspiration or immoral seductress. De Beauvoir (1949) refers to dualism in patriarchal texts as “antonyms in pairs” in the depiction of women. In arguing against dualism in the depiction of female characters, De Beauvoir (1949:1408) states:

If woman is depicted as the Demon or the female Praying Mantis which, when satiated with love devours its partner, then it is most confusing to find a woman also the Goddess Mother...The saintly mother has for correlative the cruel stepmother, the angelic young girl has the perverse virgin: thus it will be said sometimes that Mother equals Life, sometimes that Mother equals Death, that every virgin is pure spirit or flesh dedicated to the devil.

The quote above shows how the dualistic approach is applied in western literary tradition. In *She Plays with the Darkness*, Mother-of-Twins is unmarried. She is a mother of the male protagonist called Radisene and a young girl named Dikosha. The other female character is Mother-of-the-Daughters who is married and has ten

¹ Page numbers appear in brackets at the end of each excerpt of that particular text. Though texts are analysed individually, excerpts from each novel are sometimes brought together on certain aspects common to all. Editions of cited texts are in the references below.

daughters. The two women are used in the text to compare the life of a married woman with that of a single woman. The comparison goes as far as comparing their children.

In patriarchal terms, for women not to get married is regarded as going against tradition because patriarchy expects women to get married for men's sake. Rich (1977) puts forth an argument that patriarchy perceives unmarried women as not serving men properly. Gqola (2015) argues that wives make their bodies available to men through a social contract and that society raises women to believe that it is the function of women's bodies to please men sexually and symbolically. In dualism, a woman who is not contracted to a man is thrown into the "bad woman" category while the married ones are "good women" who follow the tradition of serving men "properly". The sad part is that women themselves are internalising various social opinions of women. On analysing the novel *And They Didn't Die*, Shah (2008) observed that women are made to believe that the fulfilment of a woman's life depends on a successful marriage.

However, radical thinkers argue differently. In Kwasha's (2015) study, single women characters are presented as independent individuals rather than as appendages. Female characters described here are empowered characters. They are portrayed as architects of their own potential happiness rather than passive receivers of the dictates of patriarchy. The female characters described in Kwasha (2015) are an opposite of stereotypes in patriarchal texts. The study is yet to determine if female characters in Mda's text are modelled from a patriarchal view or from an Amazonian perspective.

Bertens (2014:84) exposes the patriarchal charade of good-woman versus bad-woman stereotyping of women as follows:

Female independence gets a strongly negative connotation, while helplessness and renouncing all ambition and desire are presented as endearing and even admirable. The message is that dependence [such as that of Mother-of-the-Daughters] leads to indulgence and reverence while independence [such as Mother-of-Twins] leads to dislike and rejection. The desired effect is a perpetuation of the unequal power relations between men and women.

The single parent, Mother-of-Twins, is independent of men, and she is thus not serving men properly in a patriarchal sense. Throughout the text, her life is made a perpetual struggle as if to make her pay for her unmarried status. The struggle the single mother faces may be a way of discouraging women's independence. Compared to married Mother-of-the-Daughters, the unmarried woman's (Mother-of-Twins) appearance is not enviable, as evident in the following excerpts:

Visibly ravaged by the world (14)
She looked worn and haggard (109)
He [Radisene, Mother-of-Twins' son] was even angrier that years had not touched Mother-of-the-Daughters [who is married]. What right did she have to look so youthful when his own mother had aged so terribly? (109)

The message of the above excerpts serves to instil fear in women that their hope to wellbeing and a good life lies in aligning themselves with a man as Mother-of-the-Daughters has done. It may be suggested that when a woman is married, aging is delayed in coming her way, while in patriarchal eyes unmarried females are likely to suffer ravages of the world, looking worn out and haggard.

On the other hand, married Mother-of-the-Daughters receives an admirable description of character as follows:

[She] was a homely woman who enjoyed a robust laugh with her neighbours. (11)

Mother-of-the-Daughters' dependency on her husband makes her admirable and is revered as a good woman. In comparison, the single mother, Mother-of-Twins, is represented in derogatory terms as she is projected as an immoral, dangerous seductress. It is a patriarchal strategy to denigrate women for their unwillingness to conform to patriarchal standards, as confirmed in the following lines:

She had struggled alone to bring up two children born of pleasure, whose fathers she could not even point out. (11)

That the unmarried Mother-of-Twins does not know the fathers of her two children is an insult to her and it is derogative. Pucherová (2022) rightly argues that binary construction such as "angels" versus "whores" is used by patriarchy to justify women's

submission to men. The female character's independence from men gets a strongly negative connotation, which leads to dislike and rejection. The rejection of independent female characters is a patriarchal ploy employed subtly to persuade women readers to shun women's independence. The unmarried female character is also ridiculed by being called Mother-of-Twins even though the two children are not even twins but only because they were born in the same year, bizarrely as it may sound. Hereunder follows what is said to have happened which resulted in her being called Mother-of-twins:

When he [firstborn son] was only four weeks old his mother left him with his grandmother and went to a night dance. It was at this dance that Dikosha [second born] was conceived. After she was born, her mother could be seen with two babies on her back, as though they were twins. The people of the village called her Mother-of-Twins in derision. (3)

The excerpt above is meant to impress in the reader's mind that the character is irresponsible by neglecting a small baby for a night dance. To worsen the matter, it is claimed that she even engaged in sexual activities with men she did not even know as the above excerpt indicates. Bertens (2014) argues that patriarchal texts shun women's independence and often go to great lengths to discourage women's independence by constructing undesirable female characters to promote women's dependence on men. The critic avers that the desired effect of constructing female characters like this is to perpetuate unequal power relations between women and men.

The following excerpt puts Mother-of-Twins where patriarchy wants her to belong, that is, in the bad-woman purview where women are made to not bother themselves with church issues which patriarchal texts reserve for "good" female characters:

Mother-of-Twins was not a church going woman, and could not be bothered about her son's new interest in religion. (14)

The fact that Mother-of-Twins is not church-going could be used to enhance a dualistic view that, as an independent unmarried woman, she could not be a good woman as she does not attend church like "good" women do. Patriarchal texts construct unmarried female characters, such as Mother-of-Twins, in ways that suggest that independence for women should be rejected.

With regard to church and church attendance, Masenya (1996) argues that the bible can be used as a weapon of women's subjugation. Patriarchal writers reserve church and church attendance for female characters that they want perceived as "good" women, as biblical Mary, exemplifying the mother of Jesus the Christ, and not an Eve, the seductress. With ten children and a husband, Mother-of-the-Daughters is serving men properly. By virtue of being married, she is in the "good-woman" category of a cultural stereotype where she is a patient wife, serving the interests of her husband. She might have given up her ambition for the sake of marriage. In Bertens' (2014:84) terms, a woman who does not follow her ambitions but chooses marriage instead is referred to as "an unworldly sacrificing angel." Mother-of-the-Daughters is thus a good woman in patriarchal terms.

Associating church-going with a "good-woman" and non-church attendance with a "bad-woman" is patriarchal and shores up opposing categories of the western tradition stereotypes. De Beauvoir (1949) argues that religion, law and science all are just to benefit patriarchy and to define and delimit women. Words of an unnamed peripheral female character in one of Mda's chosen texts, *Ways of Dying*, promote patriarchy when the character explained why she was refusing sexual advances from the owner of the house in which she was working. Her words do not attest to her independence and strength from within her, but she relies on factors without. The "good" woman's words are as follows:

She was a church woman, and a married woman with a husband and children. The fact that she was in need of a job did not mean that her body was for sale. (90)

The unnamed female character above has summed up how a good-woman is stereotypically depicted: church going, married "with a husband" and children. Noria, the main female character in *Ways of Dying*, has employed the unnamed female character above to take care of her child. Noria is discussed in full in another section of chapter four of the thesis, but she is included here as an example of dualism, one that juxtaposes her with the female character above. Noria is not married, but she once was, has no husband, and is "working" as a prostitute at a hotel in a nearby town. On

the other hand, the unnamed female character is a “good” wife from a patriarchal viewpoint. She is a long-suffering, patient wife who serves men properly by virtue of being married; she has a husband and children, and she is church going. Noria’s independence is projected in a negative light to discourage women from pursuing lives of independence from men.

In reference to church and churchgoing, Masenya (2009) argues that inadequate biblical interpretations are failing to resolve women’s problems. Colonialism and formerly colonised men herd women to church while many of them (men) do not set foot in church. Masenya’s (2009:139) view is that the bible as a colonial and patriarchal weapon does not alleviate women’s problems:

Inadequate Bible interpretations made the battered life of an Africana woman believer just more miserable. These interpretations are inadequate because they are the logical consequence of a dualistic western mentality. Moreover, Africana women (and men) inherited it from some of the missionaries, and apartheid Bible teachers and preachers.

Even though men are included as victims of inadequate bible interpretations, it has to be taken into account that postcolonial men re-colonise the bodies and minds of their women in perpetuation of patriarchy (Mishra, 2013). In other words, if misinterpretation of the bible “helps” in subjugating women even after the coloniser has left, then it is just fine with the formerly colonised men.

According to Bertens (2014), cultural stereotypes are there to serve a “not-so-hidden purpose” which is patriarchy. Female independence (as in the case of Mother-of-Twins in *She Plays with the Darkness* or Noria in *Ways of Dying*) gets a strongly negative connotation, while helplessness and renouncing all ambitions and desires are represented as endearing and even admirable (as in the case of Mother-of-the-Daughters in *She Plays with the Darkness* or the unnamed female character in *Ways of Dying*). The message is that dependence leads to indulgence and reverence, while independence leads to dislike and rejection.

Rich (1977) refers to a good-woman stereotype as patriarchal motherhood – one of the institutions by which women have been traditionally controlled. In this institution, the master (the man) keeps a woman busy with, amongst other oppressive measures, pregnancies and babies. Mother-of-the-Daughters has ten children, which translates into the idea that for ninety months or for almost a full eight years of her life, she was pregnant! She confirms it in the following line:

I [Mother-of-the-Daughters] have given birth to ten daughters. (42)

The “good” Mother-of-the-Daughters’s status is summed up in Sephodi (2017:81) that in an African culture, a woman gets “lobolad” (paid bride money for), married and have children. Lorde (1984:234) talks of the oppressed being kept busy with the concerns of the master as follows:

An old and primary tool of all oppressors is to keep the oppressed occupied with the master’s concerns...I play into the saviour’s hands by concentrating on authenticity, for my attention is numbed by it and diverted from other important issues.

Oduyoye (1995:78) refers to some cultural practices of the African tradition as captured by the west. The critic argues as follows:

Westerners often see the African woman as a beast of burden walking behind her husband, carrying his children, one inside, one on her back, and many more following in a long procession of children whom she brings forth from puberty to menopause. She is clearly an inferior creature to the western woman, a person at the bottom of the human pecking order.

However, part of what Oduyoye (1995) complains about should not be discarded because of the oppressive nature of the African tradition, which is patriarchal both in reality and in fiction. Some African men, more often than not, construct female characters that do not change with the times, but are stuck in the past. What Oduyoye (1995) refers to as a western “misconception” above should be a challenge to African writers whose tendencies are to construct female characters similar to the scenario of an African family described in the quotation above. Bertens (2014) rightly argues that the reason for constructing female characters similar to the woman in the quotation above is nothing other than a perpetuation of the unequal power relations between men and women.

True to the western literary tradition of dualism, even girl children of Mother-of-Twins and Mother-of-the-Daughters are compared to see who a better mother is compared to the other. Mother-of the-Daughters (married) is said to have taken good care of her ten daughters and had even taught them well their social roles, and she compares her daughters to Dikosha who is a daughter of the unmarried Mother-of-Twins as follows:

I can tell you that by the time they [the ten daughters] were four years old they could prepare their own meals...But Dikosha [a daughter of the unmarried Mother-of-Twins] never prepared any meals for herself. (42)

Comparing daughters of the two female characters enhances the point which patriarchy is insinuating that an unmarried mother cannot succeed in raising children without a man. In addition, when the married woman boasts of ten children, it is implicitly meant to castigate the unmarried woman who only has two children whose father(s) she does not even know. It is the “good woman” stereotype, Mother-of-the-Daughters, who points out that the daughter of unmarried Mother-of-Twins cannot even cook. The married woman’s boasting of her children’s cooking skills suggests that the unmarried woman is not doing a good job in raising her children. That the Mother-of-the-Daughters raised her children properly is captured in the following line that makes reference to Father-of-the-Daughters: “his daughter who has been brought up so well” (117).

In contrasting the two female characters, Mother-of-the-Daughters and Mother-of-twins in *She Plays with the Darkness*, feminisation of poverty is applied only to the unmarried Mother-of-Twins while the married Mother-of-the-Daughters is well off. Mother-of-Twins, unmarried, talks to Mother-of-the-Daughters after Radisene (Mother-of-Twins’ son) became rich in the city of Maseru and sent her money. Mother-of-Twins says the following to Mother-of-the-Daughters:

I have been poor all my life; I scrounged for food and for clothes. Thank God I had friends like you, otherwise my children and I would not have survived. (77)

Another line that confirms Mother-of-Twins’ status of poverty is:

[She] had struggled alone to bring up two children. (11)

The trend in the text is that if a female character is constructed as unmarried, amongst other negative connotations, she is often portrayed as suffering, as poverty-stricken or as a whore. Negativity attached to female constructs is meant to scare women into submission to male domination. Mother-of-the-Daughters, on the other hand, is financially comfortable in her marital home. This assertion is affirmed in her words in the excerpt below:

When Father-of-the-Daughters has sold wool or mohair or some old oxen to the butcheries in the lowlands, we do not go crazy with the money and buy all sorts of useless things. (77)

Selling oxen, wool or mohair, shows some kind of wealth in the family. Married Mother-of-the-Daughters is thus not poor like unmarried Mother-of-Twins. As a married woman, Mother-of-the-Daughters also seems to be given the power to advise the unmarried Mother-of-Twins after she had received money from her son in Maseru. Mother-of-the-Daughters advises unmarried Mother-of-Twins as follows:

But it is not wise to spend so much money on clothes. You should be keeping some of this money in the post office for a rainy day. That is what we do, you know, in my family. We keep it in our post office savings book. (77)

The excerpt above captures pride oozing out of married Mother-of-the-Daughters as she tells Mother-of-Twins how she and her husband take good care of their money.

Added to the aspect of poverty for unmarried Mother-of-Twins is exploitation. Mother-of-Twins is engaged in projects that are exploitative to women. Men of the community shun the said projects, and married Mother-of-the-Daughters is not working in the projects either. The following testifies to the hard labour women are made to endure:

She [unmarried Mother-f-Twins] had gone to work at the self-help project where women [derogatively called "Bulldozers with Breasts"] were constructing a road, breaking rocks with huge hammers...for a tin of cooking oil...there were only two men among a whole drove of women. Men generally did not like to work in self-help projects, even at those times when

they were not digging the white man's gold. When the farming season was over they preferred to sit under trees, drinking beer and playing *morabaraba*. (108-9)

The excerpt above is a befitting description of work exploitation. Women working in the project do not earn a salary but are given "a tin of cooking oil". It is a definition of women exploitation. According to the excerpt above, majority of men stay away from the project and prefer to play *morabaraba* at home while women at the project "break rocks with huge hammers". Women at the project are also derogated by being called "Bulldozers with Breasts". Men see these exploited women as metaphors of the big machines. It is hard labour for the women in the project without pay.

There is yet another community project in which Mother-of-Twins, together with other women of the village, but excluding married Mother-of-the-Daughters, is engaged in. The excerpt below confirms such an engagement:

She [Mother-of-Twins] spent most of her day at the dam, which she and other women of the village were digging. The soil was as hard as rock. The women persisted. One day, they knew, they would wake up to find the dam full of the tears of the goldwidows [water]. (117)

It is worth noting that Mother-of-the-Daughters, a woman married with ten daughters, has never worked in the said projects where most women work. The fact that her husband is selling wool or mohair, and that they have a savings account at the post office, is indicative of how well-off they are, and thus there is no need for her to work. For married Mother-of-the-Daughters having never worked in the projects drives the patriarchal notion that women's dependence on men will make their lives comfortable and yield better outcomes than being a single mother who must work hard to fend for her children. It also enforces the ideology that a woman's place is in the home tending children. No wonder unmarried Mother-of-Twins, unlike the married Mother-of-the-Daughters, looks "haggard, ravaged by the world, and aged" (109).

Radisene, son of Mother-of-Twins, expresses displeasure at his mother's so-called community projects; Radisene is confirming his mother's poverty status and women exploitation:

I am shocked, mother. I sent you money so that you would not live a life of poverty. And what do I find? You are working in a self-help project for a tin of cooking oil. (109)

It is exploitation of women where they must work on road and dam constructions for some item of food. Men of this village do not involve themselves in the projects that are said to be community projects; instead they “sit under trees drinking beer and playing *morabaraba*” (108). The exclusion of married women from the projects in which unmarried women are working suggests that single women have to marry in order to live comfortably. While these women can be seen as exhibiting Amazonian characteristics of engaging in physical hard labour, the equivalent of the ancient Amazons engaging in battle, the text suppresses their feminist potential by couching their representation in negative rhetoric about unmarried women.

The exploited women in the narrative are brainwashed into believing that they are doing work in the projects for the sake of the community. If indeed the projects are for the good of the community, men and married women are supposed to be working together as an indication of fairness and equality. Such efforts by both genders would speak to African feminisms such as Stiwanism (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994) and nego-feminism (Nnaemeka 2003) which advocate joint developmental efforts by women and men. However, the narrative presents the projects not as communal projects but as projects reserved for women who choose to not conform to their expected gender roles. Mother-of-Twins seems to have learned to accept her miserable situation as “normal” and declares the following:

I am working in this project not because I am starving, my child, but because I am building something for my community. When we finish the road even buses will be able to come to the village, and we are going to see more progress in our village. (109)

How is any of what Mother-of-Twins says in (109) above her concern alone if it is for the community? What about men in the village, are they not concerned about roads and buses and digging of dams for the good of the community? What about married women such as Mother-of-the-Daughters who are not working in the projects, are they not concerned about improving the community just as the poor unmarried women are?

That the unmarried women are the only villagers made to endure hard labour seems to be a patriarchal narrative ploy to project singleness as undesirable. In some places where single women had to work, “the soil was as hard as rock” (117). Yet, the long-suffering women are hopeful as attested in the excerpt below:

One day, they [women] knew, they would wake up to find the dam full of the tears of the goldwidows [water]. (117)

Comparison of the two sets of children belonging to Mother-of-the-Daughters and Mother-of-Twins continues to adulthood. The ten daughters of Mother-of-the-Daughters are all married. One of the daughters, Tampololo, is married to Trooper Motsohi, and the other nine daughters’ marital statuses are summed up as follows:

[They] were all married to mountain men who looked after cattle or worked in the mines. (117)

In patriarchal terms, the fact that all ten girls of Mother-of-the-Daughters are married is indicative of her “good” teachings as a “good” mother as opposed to a “bad” mother like Mother-of-Twins whose only daughter, Dikosha, never married. However, a scrutiny of the quotation above paints a bleak picture for the ten daughters. They are constructed as dependent on their husbands. Nowhere in the narrative are we told that the girls are equipped with some skills to take charge of their lives. Their work is mainly to take care of their men, and being mothers. The girls seem to be condemned to poverty as their husbands are cattle herders and mine workers.

Rich (1977) argues that heterosexual marriages are insisted upon by patriarchy because they benefit men. A male protagonist in *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995) explains his understanding of marriage as follows:

All women were created for: to marry and settle down and look after her husband and children. (135)

On the other hand, Mother-of-Twins’ only daughter (Dikosha) is not married throughout the narrative, and Radisene, Mother-of-Twins’ only son never marries throughout the narrative. In a patriarchal context, the unmarried Mother-of-Twins has failed her children because Dikosha does not have a husband and Radisene does not have a

wife while all ten daughters of the married Mother-of-the-Daughters are married. Thus, in this text, a dualistic representation can be seen even with the offsprings of the two female characters.

The following excerpt gives a glimpse into why Mother-of-Twins' son Radisene is not married:

And Radisene was not the most popular person in the village to have as some kind of a son-in-law. (117)

The excerpt above implies that single Mother-of-Twins has failed to raise her son properly; hence, he is not considered a son-in-law material in the village.

4.3.1.2. Unequal treatment between siblings: Education for Radisene (boy) and marriage for Dikosha (girl)

In *She Plays with the Darkness*, the siblings, Dikosha (a girl) and Radisene (a boy), are not given equal opportunities about education. It is worth mentioning again that Dikosha and Radisene are Mother-of-Twins' children. Radisene is chosen for scholarship to proceed to high school, but Dikosha is denied such a scholarship. The two write their final examination to exit primary school in the same year. Denying the girl child an opportunity to attend high school is not based on merit because Dikosha had completed Standard 7 with a first-class pass, while Radisene had received only a "third-class pass in Standard Seven" (5). The "Holy Fathers" of the church give a reason for their choice of Radisene to attend Catholic high school in the lowlands (Maseru):

After all, Dikosha was a woman, and bound to find a good man of the church and settle down in blissful matrimony. Radisene, on the other hand, even though he had received an unimpressive pass, showed promise as somebody who could be prepared for the work of the Lord. He was a man. (5)

Inequality, which manifests in the treatment of women and men in patriarchal societies, is evidenced by the biased choice made in favour of Radisene to attend high school,

even though his examination results were lower than those of his sister Dikosha. The female character, the sister, is ignored with some cover-up reasons meant to perpetuate a sexist ideology. That the denial by the church Fathers for Dikosha, female character, to access education is tied to marriage shows that girls are socialised for marriage from a young age. Dikosha's path to education is blocked and she is diverted to marriage while her brother is allowed to proceed in pursuit of career endeavours.

The insistence of patriarchal societies for girls to marry is because men are the benefactors of such unions (Rich, 1977:1760). The dominant ideology of the patriarchs is clandestinely applied on unsuspecting targets. The critic argues that the union of woman and man is "compulsory", judging by the efforts at socialisation of girls for marriages, both in societies and in fictional literary texts. The critic puts forth the following argument:

Heterosexuality is compulsory because only partners of the opposite sex are deemed appropriate because it functions to ensure that women are sexually accessible to men, with neither consent nor choice on the women's part taken into account...It systematically ensures the power of men over women...It is a union in which the needs of the male are primary.

According to Shah (2008), girls are socialised into believing that their ultimate goal in life is to get married. On studying Ngcobo's novel *And they Didn't Die*, Shah (2008), observed that marriage serves patriarchal and social structures where girls are groomed for marriage from an early age and persuaded that being wives is their natural calling. In the excerpt above, Dikosha is told of a "blissful matrimony" awaiting her. Shah (2008:35) refers to promises such as "blissful matrimony" as "society's promotion of false optimism by conditioning a woman to believe that the fulfilment of her life depended on a successful marriage. Social opinions on women are internalised by the women themselves and control them to devastating psychological effect."

My view is that marriage (between woman and man) should not be at the behest of societies because if this is the case, marriage is then turned into a patriarchal weapon for women subjugation. In the same vein, Masenya (1996:156) advocates freedom of choice with regard to marriages and argues as follows:

Not every woman in society is a wife, therefore girls as well as boys, should be freed from marrying if they choose not to marry.

In her argument, Masenya uses the phrase “should be free” strongly to suggest that society may be wittingly or unwittingly enslaving its people by enforcing ideologies that others may not agree with. With reference to constrictive patriarchal rules on marriage from a postcolonial point of view, Mishra (2013) avers that women in postcolonial settings, specifically India, want to rear family and family relations but not at the behest of their counterparts or co-partners. Dikosha finds herself in a predicament where her path to education is blocked in favour of marriage. Dikosha’s voice is not heard; she is silenced, and thus is a victim of patriarchy.

Social expectations for girls to marry can be observed throughout the narrative. As Dikosha was not married even in her forties, the following is said of her:

Her beauty was a daily topic in the fields where women were hoeing, in the forests where girls gathered wood...the general feeling, especially among men, was that her beauty was wasted, since she was not married. (71)

The association of beauty with marriage is a patriarchal expectation that forces women to make themselves attractive to men. This may suggest that if a woman is not born with that kind of natural physical beauty such as Dikosha was, they have to work hard at it to look attractive to men. Rich’s (1977) argument on the patriarchal expectations for women to beautify themselves is that women in patriarchal societies do not only face trials and tribulations but must also present themselves as attractive according to dominant standards of heterosexual desirability. If her beauty is wasted by remaining single, the implication is that Dikosha’s beauty was for the sake of men, and not for herself.

Sexism not only dictates standards of beauty for women, but also defines women’s roles in society. The extract below from *She Plays with the Darkness* bears testimony to sexist view about beauty as follows:

She [unnamed character] is so ugly she looks like something that has come to fetch us. Her husband too is just like that. They are the ugliest couple at Ha

Sache. Well, you know that Ha Sache is full of ugly people. But as for her husband...he is a man...he has the right to be ugly. Indeed, a man is never ugly, as long as he has cattle. The beauty of a man is in his cattle. (164)

There is an element of irony in the narrator's voice here as he seems to be making a mockery of the villagers' narrow mindedness. It is, however, paradoxical that a woman is expected to make herself attractive for men, yet Dikosha, born with that natural physical beauty, as explained above, is projected negatively in the narrative. Within the supposed irony is couched a deep sense of sexism.

In addition to her beauty, Dikosha is constructed as an immoral female character and her beauty is equally described as tainted with immorality. The narrator says that Dikosha's beauty seems to take a life of its own as described in the following excerpt:

Indeed. Dikosha was beautiful in the extreme. Hers was an irrational beauty, a crazy beauty. Beauty ran amok on her face, messing it up with ravishing but discomfoting features. It ran loose in the rest of her body, creating curves along its insane path that any red-blooded male would love to rub his body against. (71)

Dikosha's beauty is descerated through phrases such as "was crazy", "irrational", "ran amok", "messed up" her face, "ran loose", and its path is "insane". The description of her beauty receives both attention and negativity. The narrator's choice of diction implies a beauty that is cursed as it bedevils men. The negative description of Dikosha's beauty may imply that a beautiful woman is stereotyped as a dangerous seductress, according to the manichaeistic dualism of western view (Donovan, 1983). The description of Dikosha's beauty above stereotypes Dikosha as a "praying mantis", according to De Beauvoir (1949) in what the critic refers to as "opposites" of good versus bad in stereotyping of women.

The line "any red-blooded male would love to rub his body against" above suggests that Dikosha is constructed as an object for men's sexual pleasure. The concept of woman-as-object is promoted to perpetuate patriarchy. Barry (1979) argues that the notion that women are men's sexual objects is as a result of an overpowering, all-

conquering male sex drive, “the penis-with-a-life-of-its-own” which makes men falsely believe that they have a sexual right to women.

Dikosha grows into a woman but does not marry, to the amazement of the society. Societal expectation for girls to marry is confirmed in the following:

Those who could count remembered that she [Dikosha] was in her forties, and could have been a grandmother if she had done what all women were created for: to marry and settle down and look after her husband and children. (135)

The excerpt above tells it all: a woman “is created to look after her husband” in patriarchal terms. Dikosha, already in her forties but not married, is seen as deviant by patriarchal norms. Female characters who do not marry, like Dikosha, are mostly projected as bad or evil and are to be shunned. According to Bertens (2014), such constructs are meant to encourage female dependency on men while denouncing female independence as rebellious behaviour not to be emulated.

Basow (1992) warns of consequences put in place by patriarchal societies for women regarded as deviants for choosing not to marry. Basow (1992:12) argues as follows:

Gender stereotypes are powerful forces of social control. People can conform to them and be socially acceptable but restricted, or they can rebel and face the consequences of being socially unacceptable.

One such consequence is name-calling for those “rebellious” against marriage. In *She Plays with the Darkness*, Dikosha, plays a subsidiary role to her brother, and is only eighteen years old but is already labelled a “*Lefetwa*” as her mother says:

I am tired of cooking for a *Lefetwa* whose twentieth birthday has come and gone.
(41)

Lefetwa, loosely translated into English means “the one left behind [by men]” or “the rejected one”. The text explains as follows:

People of the village referred to Dikosha as a *Lefetwa*, a girl who had long passed the age of marriage, after all she was eighteen years old...even those girls who were at high school...were called spinsters by the people of the village... Yet Dikosha did not mind such labels. (5)

That Dikosha does not mind such labels aids patriarchy in its goal to keep women subdued. She is deliberately constructed not to answer back to name-calling. Had she been given a voice, Dikosha would have defended herself. That way, Dikosha would have assumed the role of an Amazon woman who does not subscribe to patriarchal repression. Dikosha's voicelessness denies the reader access into her "inside" experience. Instead of constructing a female character who speaks back to negative constructions, Mda prefers advancing female characters' non-reaction by even stating that "she did not mind such labels" (5).

4.3.1.3. Dikosha as an Immanent Character versus Radisene as a Transcendent Character

As noted earlier, Dikosha's path to education is blocked; the opportunity to proceed with education is instead accorded her brother. Denying Dikosha a chance at education is tantamount to truncating her life while her brother is given a chance to transcend the bounds of their bucolic lives. Young (2003) quoted in Mishra (2013) argues for women's education as follows:

For postcolonial women not to remain passive and not to continue bearing male-oppressive environments, they need to emancipate themselves through education, struggle, and hard work.

For Dikosha to be denied education is, according Young (2003), equal to being denied a chance at emancipating herself. Dikosha is ascribed stagnation while her brother is given a chance to create freedom for himself through education and gets an opportunity to experience life in the city. In *The Second Sex*, De Beauvoir (1949:1404) argues against patriarchy for stereotyping women as immanence and men as transcendence. The critic argues as follows:

Patriarchy constructs woman as immanence, as stagnation and immersion in nature, and man as transcendence, as continually striving for freedom and authenticity, thereby impeding women's struggle to achieve existential freedom and autonomous subjectivity. In patriarchal cultures man is the norm and woman the deviation.

De Beauvoir (1949:1411) summarises women's fate in patriarchal societies according to her immanence-transcendence principle as follows:

For a great many women the roads to transcendence are blocked: because they do nothing, they fail to make themselves anything. They wonder indefinitely what they could have become, which sets them to asking about what they are.

The road to transcendence for Dikosha's brother Radisene is not blocked. He progresses to high school in the lowlands towns. After finishing high school, he stays on in the city running his own business. He becomes rich and owns expensive cars. He owns a "Range Rover and a brand-new S500 Mercedes Benz" (121). He builds a mansion in his village for his mother and sister, and sends his mother money frequently. He succeeds in leaps and bounds compared to the bucolic life he lived in the village. His sister, Dikosha, on the other hand, lives a truncated life back in the village. The dichotomy of city life as lived by Radisene and bucolic life for Dikosha back home can be understood from the viewpoint of De Beauvoir (1949:1408) who says:

The paternalism that claims woman for hearth and home defines her as sentiment; inwardness; immanence. In fact, every existent is at once immanence and transcendence, when one offers the existent no aim, or prevents him from attaining any, or robs him of his victory, then his transcendence falls vainly into the past – that is to say, falls back into immanence. This is the lot assigned to women in the patriarchate.

What De Beauvoir speaks of includes the confinement of women within the domestic space, usually to cater to the needs of patriarchal societies. Implicit in this confinement is both the overt and covert belief that women are good at nothing but the execution of domestic chores, whereas their male counterparts are often depicted as industrial.

4.3.1.4. Dikosha as an “unworldly woman”

According to Masenya (1996), patriarchy encourages women to think less of their problems because they are worldly matters. Women are thus expected to be “unworldly” to block their transcendence. Dikosha is stereotypically constructed as an “unworldly woman”. The two male characters, Radisene and Sorry-My-Darlie, are constructed as transcendent, while Dikosha remains stagnant in the village. The excerpt below shows males’ patriarchal view of females, as evinced when Sorry-My-Darlie, who is wooing Dikosha, says to Radisene:

I hope you will tell your sister [Dikosha] that I have a car. (28)

The implication here is that Dikosha is regarded by the two male characters as lacking cognitive powers to think for herself and thus would just marry someone simply because he has a car. This suggests that Dikosha is materialistic and that she can never marry for love but for materialism, as the wooer says nothing about love. Sorry-My-Darlie’s words also seem to be suggesting that he is convinced that she will marry him and that he has a car is merely a bonus. The utterance even comes out as a plea, which would suggest that he is a benefactor of such a relationship. Radisene’s response to Sorry-My-Darlie’s plea is:

You know that she [Dikosha] doesn’t care for things like that [referring to Sorry-My-Darlie’s car] ... she [once] saw a car in the Bona magazine that I once bought her. She was not impressed. She said it was much smaller than the trucks she had seen bringing bags of food to the clinic. (28)

It can be asked: why does she not care for “things like that” (cars) while they (the two men) do? According to Bertens (2014), the disparity between male and female characters is created to serve a not-so-hidden purpose – patriarchy. Both male characters are from the same village; the female, Dikosha, does not own a car but these two men do. This sheds light on the imbalance of economic power between males and females in society, to perpetuate female dependency on men.

The phrase “I once bought her” said by Dikosha’s brother implies that he has financial power over Dikosha, including the patriarchal power of the “fathers”. The “unworldliness” factor desired by patriarchy for women leaves Dikosha powerless. She is constructed for dependency on men, which serves a patriarchal purpose. The two male characters, Radisene and Sorry-My-Darlie, also patronise the female character: she has not seen a car except in a magazine, which only the brother could buy. Her observation, and disappointment, is that the car in the magazine is much smaller than the truck she has seen in the village. Bertens (2013) rightly argues that representation of women reinforced cultural stereotypes, which, amongst others, include women as cute but essentially helpless children, as evinced by how the two male characters treat the female character like a child. The two male characters, Radisene and Sorry-My-Darlie, continue their conversation about Dikosha’s alleged disinterest in worldly matters and boasting about their own wealth in the following excerpts:

Listen Radison; do me a favour, man. Let me give you money to buy a ticket for her to come and visit you. Then she will see the things of the city...I have a car, Radisene! What more could she want? (28)

These words suggest that Dikosha has no right to desire anything from a man more than the material things he can provide. The arrogance in Sorry-My-Darlie’s words pushes an agenda of women’s happiness being dependent on what they get from men, not what they give to men. So women are always placed at the receiving end, making them passive rather than active agents of their own happiness.

Radisene and Sorry-My-Darlie freely move from city to village and back, but Dikosha’s movement was limited to life in the village where she only moved from her rondavel to the Cave of Barwa where she has sexual fantasies with the ancient cave people painted on the walls of the cave. When the two male characters go to the city, Dikosha is made to regress into a cave. Dikosha is also said to be refusing to stay in the mansion which her brother built in the village for his mother. She instead prefers to stay in her rondavel, which she later used as a brothel. This, from the Amazonian perspective could be read as truncating Dikosha’s life to perpetuate her dependence on men and to maintain the unequal power relations between herself and the two male

characters around her who talk of money, city, mansion, cars, and air tickets. The two male characters have followed their ambitions as constructed transcendence. Dikosha is immersed in nature: the thatched rondavel, the Cave of Barwa, and a garden of cabbages. What Dikosha owns confirms the “unworldly” aspect promoted by patriarchy for women. It is a contradiction that Dikosha is stereotyped as “unworldly” but she is at the same time constructed as a prostitute, a so-called “devourer of men”. According to Stratton (1994), when male writers perpetually construct women as prostitutes, they are effectively using them to advance their own agendas. In this case, by making Dikosha a village prostitute, Mda projects her as a symbol of the degradation of the rural area with growing urbanisation.

De Beauvoir (1949:1408) argues that paternalism that condemns the woman to “hearth and home” defines her as sentimental, inwardness, and immanence. Patriarchal writers thus construct female characters as immanence. Dikosha is one such character constructed in perpetuation of patriarchy. According to Bertens (2014), stereotyping is meant to suppress women’s ambition and desire. In the text under scrutiny, male characters, Radisene and Sorry-My-Darlie, are made to follow their ambitions where they acquired riches for themselves and reaching stardom in soccer, respectively. In addition, all that both male characters can say of Dikosha is that “she doesn’t care for things like that.”

Barry (1979) argues that women learn to accept oppressive cultural practices because they receive it as dogma. This may lead to, amongst other things, the psychological as well as economic imbalance of power between husband and wife, male employer and female worker, father and daughter, male professor, and female student. The scenario painted by Barry (1979) could be applicable to the situation between Dikosha and her brother, Radisene. Dikosha seems to have accepted the oppressive practices meted out to her because throughout the narrative she has no voice.

4.3.1.5. Dikosha projected as immoral

Literary representations of women often repeat familiar cultural stereotypes which include a woman as an immoral and dangerous seductress; woman as an eternally dissatisfied and shrewd person; woman as cute but essentially a helpless child; woman as a self-sacrificing angel; and so on (Bertens, 2014:84). In *She Plays with the Darkness*, Dikosha is projected as an immoral woman. One of the trends, which seems to be followed in the texts under scrutiny, is that of stereotyping unmarried female characters as immoral. Bertens (2014) argues that constructing female characters as unmarried and immoral is aimed at discouraging female independence in order to sustain women's dependency on men. The contradiction created by Dikosha's supposed naivety, unworldliness and immorality benefit men.

Dikosha's life regresses to spending her time between the Cave of Barwa and her rondavel. As an immoral construct, her character starts to show when she engages in sexual fantasies inside the Cave of Barwa where she imagines herself dancing with the "red paintings of men and women with protruding buttocks" (50) on the walls of the cave. Dikosha lays on the ground in the cave and starts to have sexual fantasies while her brother Radisene and Sorry-My-Darlie are in the city improving their lives. Dikosha's sexual fantasies inside the cave are amongst the first signals that she is constructed as a sex object. Ordinarily, her engaging in sexual fantasies would suggest that she is taking charge of her sexuality as women taking control of their sexuality is a feminist act propagated by Cixous (1980) in her theory of *écriture féminine*. However, on closer scrutiny, it emerges that Dikosha's sexual fantasies only position her as an object of desire for men. The excerpts below confirm the sexual fantasies Dikosha has inside the cave:

The men were dancing in circles around her, their maleness unflinchingly pointing at her. (51)

There was a group of men dancing around a person lying on the ground, their maleness pointing firmly outwards. A woman was kneeling next to the supine figure, breasts dangling over it. (50)

In both excerpts, Dikosha is at the receiving end of sexual advances; she is not the one making these advances on men. Mda here uses masculine language to write about Dikosha's sexual awakening and the consequence is the inscribing of Dikosha as an object of men's sexual desire rather than an agent of her own sexuality, giving reasons to women to heed Cixous' (1980) call to re-write their own bodies using a feminine language.

An erect penis as in their "maleness unflinchingly pointing at her" and "maleness pointing firmly outwards" is used in patriarchy as a symbol of power over women. That Dikosha is visualising stiff penises is a sort of premonition about what is to come her way when she engages in prostitution as the narrative progresses. Regarding how patriarchy views issues of sex, Barry (1979:1772) argues as follows:

In the overpowering, all-conquering male sex drive, the penis-with-a-life-of-its-own, is rooted the law of male sex right to women, which justifies prostitution as a universal cultural assumption on the one hand, while defending sexual slavery within the family on the basis of family privacy and cultural uniqueness on the other.

When Dikosha "admires the grotesque shadow of her body" (50) that is cast on the rough walls of the cave, one can deduce that the worst is still to come on the path of the female character. Indeed, Dikosha is constructed as a prostitute using her rondavel as a brothel. Constructing female characters as prostitutes is one of the familiar cultural stereotyping in patriarchal texts (Stratton, 1994). In addition to the sexual fantasies she has in the Cave of Barwa, Dikosha starts to engage in sex with real men as a vocation. The sexual encounters are dubbed "confessions" as the excerpt below confirms:

She [Dikosha] has taken on a new habit now. They say she listens to the confessions of men. She invited them [the men] in and closed the door. In the darkness of her room they began to speak about their beautiful and ugly deeds, and confess to their dark secrets. She merely listened and said nothing. But when the men left they felt relieved...strangers gravitated towards her house ...she listened for hours on end. (178-9)

When these men finally walked out they had relieved themselves of all the burdens of conscience. But sometimes they were drained and exhausted. Some

walked slowly and sombrely, while others walked with a spring in their step that spoke of fulfilment. (179)

It probably does not need a genius to interpret that the confessions above, taking place in Dikosha's dark rondavel behind closed doors, are sexual activities between Dikosha and the men who leave her rondavel "relieved", "exhausted", and "fulfilled". The sexual encounters of Dikosha and the men are figuratively referred to as "Confessions", perhaps to allude to the nuances of vulnerability and transparency accompanying the sexual act. The men that sleep with Dikosha lay themselves bare, seemingly in all respects in the process of gratifying themselves sexually. Dikosha becomes the 'location' at which men's exposure of their nakedness finds expression. The excerpt below tells of the type of men who come to "confess" to her and it gives the impression that she enjoys her trade:

Strangers came to confess too, such as truck-drivers...of late they seemed to monopolise her services. She preferred them, because they came with strange and exotic confessions from far-away places. Often they spent the whole night confessing, whereas the locals confessed only for a few hours and then went back to their families with clear consciences. (199)

Dikosha is said to be enjoying the "confessions" from her male visitors. In addition, the enjoyment she gets from the confessions, Dikosha also seems to be committed to the confessions. Below are the words Dikosha utters to her brother, Radisene, after he forcefully takes her out of her rondavel and into his car to take her to the city, Maseru:

"Take me back, please. I have confessions to hear" (205), Dikosha pleading to her brother Radisene as he held her against her will at the top of the hill.

Dikosha's plea to her brother to take her back because she has to listen to men's "confessions" is an indication that she has committed herself to prostitution. Kgoshiadira (2015) argues that in Mda's other novel *The Madonna of Excelsior*, women engage in prostitution as a means of making money out of the white men in the town of Excelsior in order to provide for their children. She sees this as an act of subversion whereby the women empower themselves economically by using their bodies for sex work, the same bodies initially desecrated through rape by white men (Kgoshiadira, 2015). While this argument may make some sense, it must be

acknowledged that prostitution reduces women's bodies to objects for men's sexual gratification; the body is effectively a toy that can be bought, used and discarded by men. In Mda's *She Plays with the Darkness*, Dikosha shows no evidence of subverting patriarchal power over her body by sleeping with men; she rather submits to this power.

Unequal power relations between brother and sister are also evident in the text. Power, both patriarchal and financial, is the prerogative of the brother. The financial power is based on the following: his monies, expensive cars, the mansion, and the red dress he once bought her, and probably the Bona magazine he also bought her. The patriarchal power emanates from the fact that he is a man in a phallogocentric society, which gives familial powers to men. Throughout the narrative, Dikosha remains someone on whom power is enacted, never someone who enacts power.

4.3.1.6. Incestuous relationship between brother and sister

In addition to being constructed as immoral, there is a hint that Dikosha is a victim of an incestuous relationship with her brother, Radisene. Incest happening in homes is tantamount to the terrorism of women by patriarchy. On this, Barry (1979:1771) argues as follows:

In the privacy of the home, compulsory heterosexuality leads the daughter to "accept" incest/rape by her father, it leads the mother to deny that it is happening, and it leads the battered wife to stay on with an abusive husband.

Hints that incest is taking place between brother and sister actually permeate the narrative. Barry (1979) argues that incest is one form of terrorising women behind closed doors in the guise of family privacy. Russell's (1992) broader definition of femicide includes verbal abuse and physical abuse such as rape, torture, sexual slavery, incestuous and extra familial child sexual abuse, physical and emotional battery, sexual harassment, genital mutilation, forced motherhood, and forced

sterilisation. Fictional texts in which female characters are constructed to suffer sexual terrorism aim to perpetuate patriarchy.

Radisene buys his sister a red dress, which shows that he has economic power over her as she is not earning any salary. Although this can be superficially read as a gesture of kindness, that thought is easily disregarded when one realises that Radisene refuses to leave her rondavel when his sister wants to change from her “ragged dress” into the red dress which he has just bought her. Her “ragged dress” (10) shows poverty on her side, which is one of the ways through which patriarchy sustains female dependence on men. That the male character has financial power and the sister only has a “ragged dress” reveals the feminisation of poverty.

To put on her new red dress, Dikosha has to remove the old dress first. Her brother’s refusal to leave the rondavel denies her freedom to privacy. The excerpts below reveal that Dikosha is wearing nothing beneath the old dress, meaning that she has to be naked first before putting on the new dress. Radisene’s refusal to leave her rondavel shows who is wielding power, physically and financially, between the two. Here follows the conversation between Radisene and Dikosha:

What have you got that I haven’t seen before? Radisene asked with a naughty grin on his face. (10)

Ha, you think I am afraid of you, said Dikosha, stripping her ragged dress off. She wore no petticoat, and stood naked as a snake in front of him. Only a strip of beaded *thethana* covered her femaleness. She giggled and shook her waist in a subtle tease, her small breasts firmly pointing out, and quickly put on the red dress. (10)

The question Radisene asks his sister above seems to have sexual connotations, and it is open to different interpretations. The present study’s interpretation is that there is incest going on in this house. Radisene’s behaviour suggests that he has seen other females naked before or that it is not for the first time he is seeing his sister naked. Giggling can be an indication that Dikosha is not comfortable standing naked in front of her brother. After putting on the red dress, Dikosha and Radisene take a stroll

through the street, which makes villagers uncomfortable because they are not used to what they are seeing between a brother and a sister. The excerpt below shows the reaction of villagers which seems to increase the suspicion of incest:

People of the village peeped through the cracks of their doors and saw the twins [Dikosha and Radisene] walking hand-in-hand up the path that led to the general dealer's store. But instead of going into the store they turned towards the airfield (13) ...the twins took a short cut through the fallow fields and descended to the river, they crossed to the other side to the Cave of Barwa (16) ...the twins sat on the granite rock at the mouth of the cave. (17)

For Dikosha and Radisene to walk hand in hand is an unusual sight for the villagers who can only peep at them from behind closed doors. What the siblings do next when they reach their destination is more concerning than holding hands. The excerpt below provides more information:

Dikosha put her head in the brother's lap. He ran his fingers through her hair, entangling locks that had not seen a comb for ages. Her long legs were spread to what had once been a hearth, and her feet played with the ancient ash. (17)

Brother and sister's hand-in-hand walk starts in the morning hours, but they go back home at night. A question to a suspicious mind would be, 'what on earth were the two doing all day long in the cave until night time?' Excerpt below confirms the time the two return home:

Night had fallen when they [Dikosha and Radisene] walked back home. How time flew when she was with her brother, thought Dikosha. (19)

Radisene's and Dikosha's visit to the cave must have meant something important to both Dikosha and Radisene because when Radisene goes back to the city, Dikosha takes it upon herself to visit the cave where she and her brother had gone. How Radisene feels and the reasons for Dikosha's visits to the cave are captured in the following excerpts:

Dikosha went to the Cave of Barwa, hoping to recapture the warm moments she had spent there with her brother. And for the next four years she went there almost every day. She spent her days, and sometimes her nights in the Cave of Barwa. (41)

Dikosha was filled with love for the people of the cave and wished she could spend all her days with them. (52)

He [Radisene] missed the mountain people. He missed the bucolic life. Most of all he missed Dikosha. He had not seen her for seven or eight years. (56)

Dikosha's behaviour captured above, of going to the cave every day to recapture moments with her brother, casts suspicions as to what the two did in the cave until night time. It is quite strange for a sister to think of a brother in such a manner; that gravitates towards an incestuous relationship. As the narrative continues, there is evidence that there was indeed an incestuous relationship between brother and sister. The excerpt above also tells us that the brother is thinking of his sister more than any one else in the village.

The relevance of incest in the study is that a woman is victimised. Any kind of victimisation of women is opposed in feminism. Texts which tend to repeat women abuses as suffered in reality are seen to be promoting patriarchy. In addition to abuses that Dikosha is made to go through, she is denied a voice to communicate how she feels about the ill-happenings to her. Excerpts below attest to her voicelessness:

Her quiet beauty was in keeping with her own silence. She never spoke with anyone, not even with her mother or the girls with whom she sang and danced. They had her voice only when she sang. She broke her silence only when her brother, Radisene visited from the lowlands. (2)

Dikosha's silence became even more intense. She did not utter a single word. She seemed to have lost interest even in the songs of the pumpkin. (37)

It can be questioned why she breaks her silence only when she is with her brother. To everybody else, including her mother, she remains silent. According to Barry (1979), the terrorisation of women by men has been rendered almost inconsequential by treating it as natural and inevitable. People of the village only peep through the cracks of their doors when they see Dikosha and Radisene walking hand in hand to the cave. They do and say nothing about it.

The unequal power relations between brother and sister are evinced when Dikosha is made her brother's saviour. Instead of politely asking his sister to accompany him to the city in order to take care of him because he has no wife to stay with and no longer has money, Radisene takes Dikosha by force. The excerpt below gives a glimpse of Radisene's power over Dikosha:

You are coming with me, Dikosha. I have tolerated your nonsense for long enough...I am taking you with me. (200)

Dikosha's refusal to go with her brother to the city is regarded as "nonsense" by her brother. A male sibling is assigned power over a female sibling. Rich (1977) rightly argues that consent on the women's part is not taken into account. The excerpt below records the sister giving in to her brother's domination:

She [Dikosha] could only repeat, "Please, Radisene...please..." But when she saw that he was determined to have his way, she begged that she be allowed to at least take Shana's *sekgankula* with her. (200)

As stated earlier, "she was in her forties" (135), but Dikosha's only possessions are Shana's *sekgankula* (some toy guitar made of tin which belonged to a dead boy called Shana), a red dress bought by her brother which she is always wearing, and a patch of cabbages. She owns no other property, and with this the text implies that women do not need to own material possessions since they will always need to depend on men for this.

4.3.1.7. Dikosha as salvific woman

Dikosha is constructed as a salvific woman to save her brother when city life turns on him and is left penniless. Donovan (1983:214) argues against androcentric texts as follows:

Feminist criticism is moral because it sees that one of the central problems of western literature is that in much of it women are not seats of consciousness. They are objects, who are used to facilitate, explain away or redeem the projects

of men. Western projects of redemption almost always depend upon a salvific woman.

For the sister to be his redeemer, Radisene has to hit rock bottom first. Towards the end of the narrative, Radisene is broke. It is said that two Nigerians swindled him of his money. He needs to start a small business. Perhaps he could build a café at Ha Samane, his home village (198). However, the fact of the matter is that Radisene's rich city life is over; he is back at the village with no money, but still has his Range Rover. Still, patriarchy, either in real societies or fictional texts, ensures that when misfortune befalls a man, a patient woman (in this text, a sister) should be found waiting to take him in. Dikosha has waited for him for twenty years. She never spoke to anyone except her brother. Dikosha's life is that of poverty, domination, immanence, and abuse. At the end, she has to "save" her brother despite her abject poverty and repression. Radisene's appearance is described as follows:

[He] had changed beyond recognition. His face was gaunt. He looked like a battered old man. His hair had gone completely white, and the perm made it look as if it belonged on the head of some malnourished old white man. He still permed his hair, even though the fashion had died out long ago. (200)

All the twenty years in the city, Radisene never attempted to do anything that would enable him to talk to his sister until he needs her. He pounds the door of her rondavel and shouts:

Dikosha! Things are bad out here! Our mother is in jail! Open up! I am in trouble, Dikosha! I've got to talk with you! (199)

Radisene sounds in trouble enough to admit it to his younger sister: "I am in trouble" (199). The trouble is probably not because his mother is in jail but because he has to face life in the village, as his city life is over for him. It is true that his mother is in jail with two other women for assaulting a rapist. Radisene seems to be socialised into believing that women are meant to be his caregivers. When he fell ill in Maseru, he was cared for by one female character named Misti – a target of his love. Sitting next to his bed and touching his brow, Misti talks to Radisene and says:

At last you are awake, and your temperature is going down. I have been taking time off to look after you. Now that you are better I must go back to work. I'll come and see you again this evening. (68)

Meanwhile, Radisene's thoughts are registered as follows:

He wished he could be sick more often so that his life could be saved by Misti over and over again for ever and ever more, world without end, amen. (69)

The male character's thoughts above seem to suggest his false belief that women are expected to nurture men in sickness and in health. The thoughts of the male character also suggest that he is already spoiled into believing that women are supposed to take care of him. Radisene's wish that he be sick more and more so that Misti can extend her care for him smacks of patriarchal entitlement to women's attention. Rich (1977) argues that one form of false consciousness which serves compulsory heterosexuality includes the demand that women provide maternal solace, non-judgemental nurturing, and compassion for men who harass them.

Radisene's domination of his sister includes using violence. After pounding on the door of his sister's rondavel and screaming that their mother was in jail, Radisene kicks down the door and falls with it into the rondavel. As if he has not just broken down her door, Radisene and Dikosha simply exchange the following words:

"You haven't grown old, Dikosha!" Radisene gasped. "And you are still wearing the red dress I bought you!"

"I told you it would last for the rest of my life," Dikosha answers her brother. (199).

The short conversation between sister and brother raises questions why the sister has not changed her dress for some twenty years. The dress seems to be linked to what the two of them did in the cave, which suggests incest between brother and sister. In saying, "I told you it would last for the rest of my life" (199), Dikosha could also be referring to the feeling she had experienced when she was with her brother in the cave and not only to the red dress. For Radisene to say, "the red dress I bought you" could be a reminder to Dikosha that he still holds economic power over her.

Radisene does not give his sister a chance to negotiate with him that she is not interested in going to the city with him. The excerpts below support the fact that the female character is denied negotiation:

“I am going to take you away with me” says Radisene.

“Take me where? Please, Radisene, leave me alone. I cannot go away from here.” Dikosha asks and tells Radisene.

You are coming with me, Dikosha. I have tolerated your nonsense for long enough...I am taking you with me. (199)

The conversation above shows that Radisene is not negotiating with Dikosha to go with him to the city; he is simply instructing her amidst her protests. The following also shows that the brother is using physical force on his sister:

People of the village were still dozing when he [Radisene] forced her [Dikosha] into the Range Rover. No one saw him driving away with her. Dikosha was silent throughout the journey. (200)

After the siblings arrive in the city, Radisene’s use of force on his sister continues. He gets out of his car and does the following to his sister:

He pulled her to her feet and dragged her up a hill behind the homestead...they sat down on the rocks near some bushes.

They [Dikosha and Radisene] sat in limbo. Darkness fell. Clouds gathered. (204)

Phrases such as “Forced her”, “pulled her”, and “dragged her” show the brutal force Radisene is meting out to his sister. Moffett (2006) links gender violence to patriarchal beliefs men have about women: they see women as their properties. The phrases used in the excerpt above confirm violent acts perpetrated by a male character against a female character, a brother against his sister. Constructing male characters that abuse female characters perpetuates patriarchy in texts. Rich (1977) rightly links patriarchal oppression to power exerted directly, and often violently, on women’s bodies.

As they sit in darkness, Dikosha pleads with her brother to take her back home to the village but is met with resistance from Radisene. The following excerpts capture their conversation:

I want to go home, Radisene, moaned Dikosha. Take me back, please. I have confessions to hear.

To which Radisene replied with a question, “Has it ever occurred to you that I also might have confessions to make?” (205)

Radisene’s question to his sister above seems to be a direct reference to the fact that he wants to have sexual relations with his sister. Her response below shows that she seems to be aware of what her brother is referring to – sex.

No, you can’t confess to me. You are my brother. We are from the same womb. (205)

The excerpt above indeed confirms that what is referred to as confessions are actually sexual activities. Dikosha is trying to convince her brother that he cannot have sex with her because they are siblings. Her refusal to have him confess to her might be in vain, judging by how he has handled his sister this far. The surroundings they find themselves in are not in her favour either – darkness has fallen; there is no one around as they are up the hill behind the homestead near some bushes. The scene that plays out now between brother and sister still confirms the notion that incest is taking place between the two. This represents an act of terrorism against Dikosha, as deduced from Barry (1979). Radisene continues insisting that his sister Dikosha allows him to “confess” to her by asking her the following question:

Why did you refuse to see me for more than twenty years if I am your brother? (205)

Radisene’s question might be suggesting that he thinks Dikosha was angry with him for not coming back home to the village but instead stayed for many years in the city. Radisene assumes Dikosha’s wearing of the dress meant she always wanted her brother home. Secondly, to Radisene, it also means she always went to the Cave of Barwa to try and recapture the time she had spent with her brother in the cave. Thirdly,

that she only talks when her brother is around seems to suggest to Radisene that she would comply with whatever demand he makes of her.

Radisene continues trying to falsely convince Dikosha that they are not siblings, just for him to have sex with her. He says the following, which includes disparaging her:

No. You are not my sister. You merely visited my mother's womb. You are the child of the night dance! Radisene added with all the viciousness he could master in his voice. (205)

The excerpt above suggests that Radisene's voice has "viciousness" in it. Radisene is further terrorising his sister and instilling fear in her. Female characters that suffer abuses from male characters are constructed in perpetuation of patriarchy. Such female characters are thus stereotypically constructed to serve men's interests as opposed to Amazonian characters who promote the feminist goal of achieving gender equality.

Not only does Radisene derogate his sister but also his mother. The derogation stems from the fact that Dikosha was conceived in a night dance when Radisene was only four weeks old. The result was that Dikosha and Radisene were born in the same year, which led to the community calling the two children twins. The derogation and saying that Dikosha merely visited his mother's womb is probably an attempt to minimise the guilt he might be feeling in forcing himself on his sister. He might also be attempting to make his sister feel vulnerable, which may weaken her resistance.

The excerpts above confirm two of the claims of this thesis, namely, that the brother-sister relationship in the text under scrutiny is incestuous and that the brother is taking his sister to the city by force in order for her to play a salvific role to him as he is now. Making Radisene to force Dikosha into playing the role of a salvific woman to some extent embodies motherist ideology which constructs the rural woman as a saviour (Acholonu 1995; Nkealah 2016). However, a motherist as Acholonu (1995)

conceptualises her, nurtures men for the good of humanity, not to perpetuate moral decadence. Mda's female character is therefore not a feminist character. At the end of the narrative, Dikosha asks her brother the following question:

What's going to become of us, Radisene?

I don't know. We'll sit here for ever; until the marwana ants finish us. (205)

Radisene's answer to his sister's question above is the last line of the text. That they will sit there together forever shows finality. Radisene has captured his sister against her will and she has given in. For Radisene to take his sister by force suggests that it is for his benefit. Dikosha is constructed as an object for her brother's use. According to Donovan (1983), objectified female images are constructed to benefit men in perpetuation of patriarchy.

Dikosha is constructed to fit the patriarchal mould of traditional literary fictional texts of stereotyping female characters. Dikosha is an object of incest; she has been the "patient" sister for twenty years waiting to redeem her brother, all the while wearing the same red dress every day, thus also embodying the feminisation of poverty. She is a sexual object for men who go to her dark rondavel for "confessions", which refer to sexual encounters. Even as the narrative ends, Dikosha has nothing to show for her forty years of existence. Dikosha is merely a patriarchal construct in perpetuation of patriarchy. Radisene's economic power – a company, a Mercedes Benz and Range Rover, a mansion – enables him to dominate and possess his sister.

4.3.2. *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* (1993)

4.3.2.1. Dualism

According to Donovan (1983), female stereotypes symbolise either the spiritual or the material, the good or evil. De Beauvoir (1949) refers to the dualistic approach of stereotyping female characters in most of Western literature as antonyms in pairs

where, for example, the saintly mother has for correlative the cruel stepmother, and the angelic young girl has the perverse virgin. De Beauvoir (1949) writes that female stereotypes depicted as “evil” are referred to as female preying mantis and spider, who, satiated with love, crush and devour their partners.

In the text under scrutiny, *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses*, a Woman is portrayed as “good” and has for a correlative Lady symbolising “evil” in accordance with the dualistic approach adopted in patriarchal texts. The objectified image of Woman is that of being “Good or “spiritual” versus Lady who is portrayed as, according to Donovan (1983), a seductress or the biblical Eve. Lady who is associated with evil is called “a whore” (to use the actual word in the chosen text). Donovan (1983) argues that in the bad or evil category are deviants who reject or do not serve men properly. The so-called “good” female characters are simply vehicles for the growth and salvation the male protagonist.

The appearance of the two female characters, Woman and Lady, is constructed in such a way that it sets the two women apart. The descriptions of Woman and Lady reveal that in naming the characters thus, Mda also seeks to show that there are differences in terms of representation between the two characters. For instance, Lady is described in a negative way as confirmed in the excerpt below:

Lady [who calls herself a whore] is a bit overdressed. One can see that there was a conscious effort on her part to make herself appear very chic and sexy. Her mannerisms are that of the woman of the world, but of course at the end of it all she appears pretentious – even ridiculous. (4)

The description of Lady above creates a negative impression to the reader in that Lady is perceived as a “bad” woman, as is the intention with dualism that one female character is projected as “evil” while the other is portrayed as “good”. The excerpt above refers to Lady as “woman of the world” which suggests that Lady is living a carefree life – a life shunned in patriarchal societies. Patriarchy wants women to be dependent on men. According to Bertens (2014), independent women are not admirable in patriarchal societies. That Lady’s attire makes her look ridiculous

emphasises a fact that independent women in these societies are sometimes a target of ridicule to discourage them from achieving their goals. Bertens (2014) argues that independence for women is discouraged in reality and in fiction to promote female dependence on males to perpetuate patriarchy.

On the other hand, Woman, the only other female character in the play, is described in a positive way as follows:

She is much more simply and soberly dressed. Indeed, she looks like someone's mother. (4)

In order to set the two female characters apart in accordance with what Donovan (1983) refers to as manichaeistic dualism of western view, the two female characters are dressed differently, as excerpt above shows. While Lady is said to be “ridiculously dressed”, Woman is depicted to be “soberly dressed”. Even through their attires, one can tell that Woman is projected as “good” while Lady looks “bad”. The word “soberly” used for how Woman is dressed is also in reference to her character, a suggestion that Lady is not of a sober character. For Woman to be described as looking like somebody's mother suggests that she has met the socially acceptable standards of womanhood – by being a mother. It could also be a suggestion that a status attached to motherhood is more important than the status of womanhood (Rosaldo, 1974).

Woman seems to fit the category of a “good-woman” stereotype. Woman is thus constructed to promote a patriarchal notion that a woman needs to be “good” for her to be admired in society. Being “good” in patriarchal thinking means, according to Donovan (1983), female characters are constructed objects solely for the purpose of facilitating, explaining away or redeeming the projects of men. That Lady's description, unlike Woman, has negative connotations could be to discourage independence for women in perpetuation of patriarchy. Regarding women's appearance, Rich (1977) argues that patriarchy expects women to beautify themselves in order to look attractive to men while men are not expected to and yet put this pressure on women. Rich (1977:1761) argues as follows:

Women do not simply face trials and tribulations experienced by all subordinates in hierarchical institutions; they must also present themselves as attractive according to dominant standards of heterosexual desirability and be concerned with sexuality in the appropriate ways and be supportive of male superiors. Such expectations, rarely conscious, even more rarely explicit, permeate public male-female relationships. They form part of a larger unwritten set of rules about the relative positions of men and women in society.

Therefore, some women, as evinced in the text under analysis, feel compelled to dress in a manner that satisfies their male counterparts for reasons such as sexual attraction, looking dignified and presenting themselves as worthy of respect. The excerpt below describes how Lady, already in her “ridiculous” attire, attempts to beautify herself facially as follows:

She [Lady] dabs a little powder on her cheeks. On her lap is all the paraphernalia used in make-up; lipstick, eyebrow pencils and mascara. She uses some more lipstick on her lips and tries to shape them in what she thinks is a sensuous way. (4)

The make-up that Lady applies does not seem to improve the negativity she has attracted already. The excerpt above points out that Lady only “thinks” that her lips look sensuous, but seemingly not to the onlooker (Woman). Indeed, Woman’s comment on Lady’s made-up face shows that Woman does not seem to like what she sees on Lady’s face. Woman comments to Lady as follows:

I’ve got eyes, and I can see layers and layers of thick gooey stuff all over your face. It makes you look like a whore. (7)

In applying make-up, Lady is attempting to make herself attractive, not only for herself but for others as Rich (1977) purports that women are pressured to do so by patriarchal notions about their appearance. However, instead of being admired by her friend, Lady receives negative commentary. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the excerpt above confirms that Woman despises Lady. Referring to what Lady applies on her face as “gooey stuff” is negative enough but Woman goes on to paint a grimmer picture of Lady by saying that the make-up makes Lady look like a whore. Wittingly or unwittingly, Woman is already stereotyping Lady as a “bad-woman”.

Unlike Woman who looks like somebody's mother, Lady is constructed as a "whore" that should be disliked and rejected because she is a sexual deviant. According to Bertens (2014), the desired effect for constructing female characters that take action for "self" in fictional texts is to discourage female independence to perpetuate the unequal power relations that exist between men and women.

Woman's negative remarks about Lady's make-up above makes Lady an unlikable character. Lady's negative character escalates to a worst representation of women as she tells Woman of her "work". Lady seems to take pride in her "trade" as she tells Woman what she does for a living in the following excerpts:

I *am* a whore. (8)

I am not a street walker, I have never stood at street corners waiting for clients to come and pick me up in their cars...my clients are upper crust of the society. I entertain Ministers and Ambassadors. I am a high class hooker. I service the rich capitalists when they come to town on business. (18)

Not only is Lady stereotyped as a whore in the two excerpts above, but she is also characterised as taking pride in her "trade" of prostitution. If we recall that Diksha in *She Plays with the Darkness* is represented as a whore, while the women in *The Madonna of Excelsior* are also constructed as prostitutes, then we have to admit that Mda's female characters are trapped in a cycle of whoredom that suggests the limitations of his imagination of women; he seems to resort to stereotypes because he cannot think of women as being capable of anything besides giving sexual pleasure to men. Constructing female characters for roles that demean women is derogatory, according to Donovan (1983). The feminist critic argues that evil is projected upon women in literatures that function as propaganda furthering sexist ideology. The same is true in the African context where the female body is often sexualised and commodified (Nkealah, 2008). Donovan (1983) argues that only when the style of a text is studied in the context of the author's or the culture's moral view of women can it be of feminist significance.

In telling Woman that “I *am* a whore”, Lady confirms De Beauvoir’s (1949) argument that through their own lived experiences, women tend to show that they have internalised the ideologies of otherness that relegate them to immanence and to the position of being man’s Other. Lady is a construct meant to perpetuate patriarchy.

Lady’s answer in excerpt below to Woman’s question when asked how she got into prostitution confirms the pride she takes in her “work”:

“Choice! Goddammit, can’t a woman choose what she wants to do with her life?”(13)

Lady enjoys being a prostitute and further states that it is a trade she got into by choice. Whereas she agentively acknowledges and celebrates her trade, in the text there are nuances of dehumanisation for the purposes of shaming her because of her trade. It is possible that the author seeks to free his female characters into embracing and celebrating their sexuality; however, on the other side of the coin, the text seems to see her being involved in prostitution as worthy of condemnation and dehumanisation. Assigning dehumanising roles to female characters in fictional texts is, according to Bertens (2014), an attempt by patriarchy to discourage female independence. Female independence is assigned to female characters labelled as sluts, shrews or seductresses deliberately. The result is that female independence gets a strong negative connotation, while helplessness and renouncing all ambition and desire are presented as endearing and even admirable.

Further efforts at instilling the fear of independence in women are observed when it is insinuated that Lady has failed to properly bring up her daughter who has also become a prostitute like her mother. Lady, a self-avowed whore, says the following about her daughter:

A daughter. A good-for-nothing teenage daughter. She gets laid all over town and doesn’t bring a cent home. Spends it all on herself. Flashy clothes

and jewellery...I taught her everything she knows. Every little trick. Every little movement. The ungrateful brat! (15)

Lady's character is made "eviller" when it is revealed that her own daughter is a prostitute as well. Lady's situation worsens when she tells Woman that she is the one who introduced her own child to the prostitution trade. In the excerpt above, Lady is complaining to Woman that her daughter has not given her the money that she makes from prostitution. Lady is selling her daughter to prostitution for monetary gain. Lady's bitterness about her daughter's failure to give her money indicates that she is not worried about her daughter's "work", but only about money. Imaging Lady and her daughter as prostitutes creates an atmosphere of a non-ending cycle of dehumanisation and female dependence on sex for survival.

Lady is further shrouded in negativity as she tells Woman the following:

I thought my daughter would be my insurance in my old age. You should see her; she is a beautiful little thing. An expert in her job [prostitution], for she was trained by the best (in reference to herself). But a good-for-nothing brat who doesn't care for her mama who brought her into the world and taught her all she knows. (20)

Even though it is only Woman who is said to be looking like somebody's mother, the excerpt above indicates that Lady does have a child too who, unfortunately, is constructed as a deviant just like the mother. Lady is buried in negativity as she boasts about how well she had taught her daughter to become an "expert" prostitute. According to Donovan (1983), in the category of the "evil" woman stereotype are deviants who reject or do not properly serve man. The critic argues that feminist criticism is moral because it sees that one of the central problems of western literature (traditional literature) is that in much of it female characters are stereotyped as mere objects for men. Stereotypes tend to fall into two categories, which reflects dualism.

In line with dualism of the Western worldview, Lady in the text under scrutiny is stereotyped as "evil" while Woman is constructed for the "good-woman" category.

Bertens (2014) refers to dualism as a “binary opposition”. The critic argues that the desired effect for constructing female characters that are disliked and rejected is a perpetuation of patriarchy wherein the unequal power relations between men and women are maintained.

Lady and her daughter are constructed as tools for perpetuating patriarchy by depicting them “bad” versus “good”. The argument put forth by De Beauvoir (1949) in what the critic refers to as “antonyms in pairs” is that in patriarchal texts the angelic young girl has a correlative of a perverse virgin; that every virgin is pure spirit or flesh dedicated to the devil. Lady’s daughter is a teenager engaged in prostitution, which makes her flesh dedicated to the devil in patriarchal terms (De Beauvoir, 1949). Rich (1977) refers to the dualistic approach of the Western tradition as “false dichotomies”. The critic argues that in Western tradition, women have been stalled in a maze of “false dichotomies” which prevents their apprehending the marriage institution as a whole: “good” versus “bad” marriages; “marriage for love” versus “arranged marriage”, and other examples of false dichotomies.

Unlike Lady who is said to look like a worldly woman, Woman is said to look like somebody’s mother. The question below asked by Lady to Woman confirms that Woman does have children; she does not only look like somebody’s mother. Lady asks Woman the following question:

Sister woman, wait! What will your children eat? (17)

Lady asks Woman the question above when Woman gets tired of queuing to buy rice for her children. Both Lady and Woman have been in the queue for some days waiting their turn to buy rice. For Lady and Woman to be in the queue for days because they need to buy rice for their children means that poverty is feminised for the two women. Feminist critic, Rich (1977), argues that in patriarchy, a single mother trying to support her children instantiates a confrontation of the feminisation of poverty.

4.3.2.2. Derogation and exploitation of female characters

Most female characters in the text under scrutiny are assigned roles that are derogatory and exploitative. Almost all female characters around Lady, and Lady herself, are constructed and stereotyped as whores. Barry (1979) argues that assigning roles such as prostitution to female characters is terrorism and a sexual abuse of women. In the extract below, Lady complains about what is going wrong in their trade of prostitution as follows:

The young girls have taken over. Teenage whores line the streets by the dozen, and no one wants to screw us old whores any more. The competition is hard, sister woman, very hard, and we are dying of hunger. (18)

The excerpt above indicates that it is not only Lady and her daughter that are prostitutes but that there are other teenage girls in the trade. The fact that Lady is an older woman prostitute and the other prostitutes are young girls gives an impression that prostitution in the text under scrutiny is an unending cycle of female victimisation. A perpetual cycle of generations of prostitution is created. In the excerpt above, Lady says that they “old whores are dying of hunger”. That the old prostitutes are dying of hunger buttresses the view that poverty in the text under scrutiny is feminised.

Lady is not married although she once was. Nothing about marriage is said of Woman except that she has children. According to Bertens (2014), Lady is regarded as an independent female character because she is not married and she is thus not dependent on a man for her livelihood. An independent female character is stereotyped as an immoral and dangerous seductress, hence she is assigned a strong negative connotation. On the other hand, Woman who is said to be “soberly dressed and looks like somebody’s mother”, is presented as endearing and admirable.

Bertens (2014) argues that the message sent forth by constructing opposing female stereotypes is that dependence (on men) leads to indulgence and reverence while independence leads to dislike and rejection. The desired effect is a perpetuation of the unequal power relations between men and women designed by patriarchy. Donovan

(1983) argues that the construction of female characters in perpetuation of the unequal power between men and women enables a feminist critic to determine the degree to which sexist ideology controls the text. According to Donovan (1983), sexist ideology promotes the concept of woman-as-object.

The concept of woman as object, according to Donovan (1983), is adopted in Mda's other text, *She Plays with the Darkness*, previously discussed where from generation to generation, female characters are stereotyped as whores. The presence of female characters constructed as whores in Mda's selected text is evinced in the excerpt below:

The whores stood outside, as their mothers had done before them, and like sirens lured unwary travellers with songs of the beautiful things they would do to their bodies if they were to stray into their chambers. (155)

The excerpt above in Mda's *She Plays with the Darkness* and the one from *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* are similar in the sense that young girls and their mothers are stereotyped as prostitutes. Lines which bear testaments are "the whores stood outside, as their mothers had done before them" (155); and "teenage whores line the streets by their dozen; and no one wants to screw us old whores anymore" (15), respectively. Barry (1977) argues that sexual abuse and terrorism of women by men has been rendered almost invisible by treating it as natural and inevitable. Literature partakes in the matrices of cultural dominance, hence the construction of cultural stereotypes in perpetuation of patriarchy.

In *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses*, there are girls working in government offices. However, even though not in direct prostitution, the girls working in offices are not spared from falling prey to the "sexual domination perspective" adopted by "patriarchists" (Barry, 1979). To Lady, the office girls are sex objects just as she is. Lady, who is said to be a whore herself, says the following of the office girls:

What is the difference? Many of them [girls working in offices] have to sleep with someone to get their jobs. They have to lay some dirty old man to get a promotion. We are in the same profession. Only I do it openly and in my terms,

as a free agent. They get laid and still have to sit behind office desks and typewriters before they can get their porridge. (19)

The above excerpt can be analysed in two folds: typically, in androcentric literary tradition, female agency and capacity for power is not promoted. Instead, a woman who is seen to be doing well for herself is usually met with resistance, negativity, and rejection (Bertens, 2014). According to Donovan (1983), career women are labelled deviants because they are seen not to be serving men's interests properly, while women who renounce all ambition are presented as endearing and even admirable. According to Bertens (2014), female characters portrayed as career women, like the office girls above, or independent women or powerful women, are often disliked and rejected in patriarchal texts. The critic argues that the desired effect for rejecting career women, for example, is an attempt to maintain the unequal power relations between men and women to perpetuate patriarchy. Rich (1977) argues that men are simply threatened by women's independence; hence, the common reaction is suppressing them.

Secondly, the excerpt above confirms the sexual exploitation of women in the work place. Lady views the girls working in government offices as victims of sexual abuse. Mackinnon (1979:1769) has this to say about the sexual exploitation of women in the workplace:

The workplace, among other social institutions, is a place where women have learned to accept male violation of their psychic and physical boundaries as the price of survival; where women have been educated to perceive themselves as sexual prey.

Mackinnon's (1979) argument that women have been "educated" to perceive themselves as sexual prey is confirmed by female character, Lady, in Mda's *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* as she proudly says the following:

I doubt if the current generation [of prostitutes] still does that – we used to choose a day each week when we would all don our Sunday Dresses and we would take our regular lovers and husbands out to town. On this day, even if the wealthiest johns came to town and wanted to do business, we turned them down. (29)

Lady sounds as if she is taking pride even as she is only remembering what happened some time ago. Lady's attitude towards prostitution denotes that she is a subject in charge of her own sexuality and has the choice of what to do with her body; however, in the same breath, the text foregrounds women like Lady as largely sexual prey. Mackinnon (1979) argues that constructing female characters that are assigned roles as objects for men is to perpetuate patriarchy.

Donovan (1983) argues that action or taking charge is a choice that historically has been denied women and is still unavailable to them in many areas. The main female character's view is phallogentric in that she refuses to accept that the girls in government offices could be agents of power and do deserve promotions. However, Lady assumes that the office girls get promotions after being sexually abused. There is thus an attempt to deny the office girls of what Donovan (1983) refers to as "taking charge" where characters are subjects, and not objects, capable of self-determined action, and are moral agents. The office girls are thus denied authenticity. According to Donovan (1983), judgements, which evaluate a character's authenticity, enable feminist critics to determine the degree to which sexist ideology controls the text. Constructing inauthentic female characters is thus in perpetuation of patriarchy.

According to Bertens (2014), female characters who have careers, such as the girls working in government offices in the text under scrutiny, receive negative connotations to discourage women from pursuing their ambitions and becoming independent. Bertens (2014:84) argues as follows:

Female independence [such as those girls working in government offices] gets a strongly negative connotation. The message is that independence leads to dislike and rejection. The desired effect is a perpetuation of the unequal power relations between men and women.

In the excerpt above, Lady speaks about the "current generation" of prostitutes, suggesting that female exploitation is continuous. Bertens (2014) correctly argues that the desired effect is a perpetuation of the unequal power relations between men and women. On fighting for women's rights, feminist critic, Mackinnon (1979), argues that

women fleeing from abusive men at work to marriage is terrorism and tyranny against women. The critic's argument is evinced in Lady's view of marriage:

One of the major insurance policies, of course, is marriage. All of us [referring to all of them in prostitution trade], as we do our rounds, we are looking for a john who will fall head over heels and marry. There are many of us who are married in all over Europe, married by former clients who wanted to keep this thing for themselves for ever...the women now lead respectable lives as housewives...one old colleague, married in Switzerland, has a successful marriage and a successful career as a singer...you can't get more respectable than that. (21)

In the last part of the sentence is the word "respectable", which might be taken as denoting agency on the part of the women who seize opportunities to make their lives better, but in the same breath, it can be read as some form of conditioning of women by patriarchal societies to enable women to pass the marriageability test. Also in the above excerpt, one prostitute had a successful career only after getting married. Oduyoye's (1995) argument against patriarchy is that society demands that a woman gets married and stay married because she has no dignity outside marriage. It is a fallacy. According to Rich (1977), patriarchy enforces heterosexuality against homosexuality because the former benefits men. Female characters who are constructed to push a patriarchal narrative about marriage inevitably perpetuate a sexist ideology.

Bertens (2014) argues that independent women, which include unmarried women such as Lady, strongly receive negative connotations. When analysing Mda's text to the end, one discovers that the so-called independent female characters barely succeed in their usually miserable lives; the narrative ends with them suffering. In the text, Lady, constructed as a whore, is not successful either; she is poor; and she has no money. Lady confesses her status of poverty to Woman in the following:

Look, I am kneeling down on the wet ground in my beautiful dress pleading and begging. I am broke. I don't have a cent to my name. (17)

Lady is a whore, she is broke, and she has not amounted to anything in her fictional life. Bertens (2014) correctly argues that constructing female characters as

independent but failures is to make women fear independence and thereby renounce all ambition and desire. The critic's summation of his argument is that the desired effect is a perpetuation of the unequal power relations between men and women.

De Beauvoir (1949) argues that in most fictional texts, female characters are constructed as immanence thereby impeding women's struggle to achieve existential freedom and autonomous subjectivity. Construction of female characters as immanence, and thus blocking transcendence, is to perpetuate patriarchy. De Beauvoir (1949) further argues that impeding women make them wonder indefinitely what they could have become, which encourages them to ask about what they are. Lady is juxtaposed with Woman, where Lady represents the bad, and Woman the good in the dualistic stereotyping of women in patriarchal texts. The teenage whores who line the streets represent the deviants. The office girls, "beautiful in their Sunday Dresses", symbolise good girls who seem, unfortunately, to be sexually exploited as well. De Beauvoir (1949) affirms that in androcentric texts, the angelic young girl has for a correlative the perverse virgin. However, "angelic" office girls in their Sunday dresses are conflicted and derogated through the words of Lady. The derogation also exposes the sexual exploitation of women in the workplace. Regarding exploitation of women in the workplace and Mackinnon (1979:1769) argues as follows:

Economically disadvantaged, women – whether waitresses or professors – endure sexual harassment to keep their jobs and learn to behave in a complaisantly and ingratiatingly heterosexual manner because they discover this as their true qualification for employment. The workplace, among other social institutions, is a place where women have learned to accept male violation of their psychic and physical boundaries as the price of survival; where women have been educated to perceive themselves as sexual prey.

If female characters are constructed in accordance with Mackinnon's (1979) argument, it would then suggest that the writer's desired effect is a perpetuation of patriarchy which, amongst other things, ensures the manipulation of women by men. Mackinnon (1979:1769) argues further that women fleeing sexual exploitation at work face outcomes that still favour men:

A woman seeking to escape such casual violations along with economic disadvantage may well turn to marriage as a form of hoped-for protection, while

bringing into marriage neither social nor economic power, thus entering that institution also from a disadvantaged position.

The situation of women fleeing from casual sexual violations along with economic disadvantage at work and landing on a man's arms in marriage is, according to Mackinnon (1979), nothing less than terrorism and tyranny against women. Rich (1977) perceives marriage as patriarchal wherein families are supposed to be run at the behest of men. Mackinnon's (1979) argument is that for a woman to enter into a marriage from a disadvantaged position perpetuates the unequal power relations between men and women.

If writers construct female characters that are outside the bounds of the feminist theory, then such female characters are constructed to perpetuate patriarchy. In Mda's *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses*, the main female character and protagonist is a self-confessed whore; her daughter is a prostitute; girls who line the streets at night are prostitutes; and the girls in government offices are sluts. Women in the text under scrutiny are not progressing. De Beauvoir (1949) argues that patriarchy constructs woman as immanence, as stagnation, thereby impeding women's struggle to achieve existential freedom and autonomous subjectivity, and man is constructed as transcendence continually striving for freedom and authenticity.

4.3.2.3. "Sunday-Church" stereotyping

Mda's texts under scrutiny seem to associate female characters with the "good-woman" stereotype, with Sundays and church going. Of concern to feminists such as Masenya (2009) is that male characters are rarely associated with church practices but female characters are often. Masenya (2009:140), in *For Better or Worse*, argues as follows:

The Bible can be used by the powerful as a wounding sword to unsuspecting powerless yet, faithful masses ...many women, (and other marginalised people sitting in the church) are today being exhorted to focus on heavenly/spiritual business. In the process, women are persuaded, through the use of the Bible, to

call their own oppression, or violence done to their bodies in the name of a god, a worldly matter that needs to be shunned. In the process, women's own female experience becomes alienated. When this happens, the oppressors continue to smugly walk away comfortable in their abuse of power.

In line with Masenya's (2009) argument, it could be argued that female characters in Mda's text are stereotyped as the "good-woman" category by associating them with church and church going on Sundays, while male characters are excluded from church-going and church practices. Church-going is thus foregrounded as one of the weapons used by patriarchy to subjugate women. The tendency by writers to associate the bible and church-going with the "good-woman" stereotype and non-church attendance with the "bad-woman" stereotype functions as propaganda furthering sexist ideology.

According to Bertens (2014), texts in which female characters are subservient to their male counterparts are perpetuating patriarchy wherein power relations remain unequal between men and women. With regard to writers perpetuating patriarchy, Mishra (2013), a post-colonial feminist, argues that postcolonial men continue to recolonise the bodies and minds of their women. It is thus to the advantage of former colonised men to continue with "colonialism" against women after the colonisers themselves have left.

Examples of Sundays and churches follow in excerpts below. As a point of departure, Mda's text, *Little Suns*, show how "sunday-church" issues started as used as a weapon of subjugation by colonialists against the colonised. The text dramatises the arrival of what the study chooses to refer to as "sunday-church" ideology of the coloniser to the colonised. It is worth noting that only women were involved in the following excerpt from Mda's *Little Suns*:

A horseman in a black suit [a white man] and brown riding boots comes galloping and wielding a whip. He rides straight to the hoeing women. They drop their hoes as, screaming, they run off helter-skelter ...This is the day of the Lord, you heathens... They must respect the Sabbath, it says so right here in the book of

books. No work is permitted on the day of the Lord. It is reserved only for praising his name. (28)

The white man wielding a whip against women hoers is a symbol of colonialism enforcing its alien religious ideology on African people as one of the means of subjugating the colonised, both men and women. However, Mishra (2013) argues that African men have continued to colonise their women's bodies and minds in perpetuation of patriarchy. It can be observed in the excerpt above that only women are in the field hoeing when the coloniser arrives on horseback. It is typical of patriarchy in that it is women or female characters that are associated with church-going. According to Masenya (2009), women are exhorted to focus on heavenly or spiritual matters. Women are manipulated by the use of the Bible to endure the oppression or violence done to their bodies.

In the excerpt above, it is only female characters that are called "heathens"; that are chased by a man on a horse with a whip because, they were told, it is the day of the Lord. For the female characters to scream and "run off helter-skelter" shows some degree of violence and dehumanisation of women. It is oppression and pain meted to the female characters. It is understood that writers may belong to societies where the ideology of patriarchy is dominant; however, if their texts partake in the matrices of the cultural dominance, then such writers are implicated in perpetuating patriarchy. In this example, hoeing is a menial job stereotyped for women, thereby adding to the evidence that female characters are constructed in perpetuation of patriarchy.

The implication of "sunday-church" – a factor that is used by patriarchs to stereotype female characters – finds expression in Mda's *Ways of Dying*. An unnamed married woman is nearly raped while she is sleeping where she works looking after Noria's baby. The male protagonist in the text under scrutiny says about the woman:

She was not prepared to stay in a home where the man of the house could not control his raging lust. She was a church woman, and a married woman with a husband and children. (90)

The excerpt above stereotypes the female character as the “good woman” and further associates her with church, marriage, and children. The male protagonist feels it is not enough simply to say that the woman refused the sexual advances of the owner of the house where she was sleeping. The male protagonist thinks that for a woman to be “good”, she has to be “a church woman”; she has to be “a married woman with a husband”, and with children.

Masenya (2009) argues that boys and girls should be given the freedom to choose whether to marry or not to marry. Rich (1977) argues that patriarchal societies prescribe and channel women to marriage for the benefit of men. Writers who construct female characters that are in the texts simply as vehicles for the growth and salvation of the male protagonist are perpetuating patriarchy.

Female characters are sometimes stereotyped and categorised into “good woman” versus “evil woman”. The “sunday-church” factor mentioned in this study comes into effect with regard to dualism. The “sunday-church-going” is mostly associated with the “good-woman” category. In *And the girls in their Sunday Dresses*, Lady tells Woman about a certain woman who was once a prostitute but is now married overseas and repentant. Lady says to Woman:

No one would ever know about her past; except for the fact that she is saved. Not only does she sing gospel all over the show, she preaches it as well, and tells everyone she was once a hooker. (21)

The excerpt above stereotypes a particular female character who began living her life as a “bad” character but changes her life around to being a “good” character who is not only saved but also sings and preaches the gospel. According to Masenya (2009), oppressors abuse their power by exhorting women, using the Bible, to regard their lived experiences as matters of the world when they should instead focus on spiritual matters. In the process of focussing their attention on spiritual issues, women’s female experiences are alienated. The oppressors of women and patriarchs continue walking

away comfortable in their abuse of power. Writers repeat these tendencies of thematising injustices against women in their literatures to perpetuate patriarchy.

Observations made in the study of Mda's narratives under scrutiny are that hardly any male characters are associated with church and the Bible. The text entitled *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* is self-explanatory in its lucid association of women with church going. Mda's *Little Suns* does not come out clearly on whether male characters are church-goers or not when the male protagonist says:

The people walked into the church. Many of the women are wearing their *manyano* – the Mothers' Union – uniforms of black skirts, red shirts, white bibs and white hats. (30)

In the excerpt above, there is no reference to men but women in their church regalia. Women's notable presence in churches is captured in Masenya's (2009:140) *For Better and for Worse*, where she says:

Women are persuaded, through the use of the Bible, to call our own oppression, or violence done to our own bodies in the name of our god, a "worldly" matter. The valid concerns of women become relegated to the "things of the world" which must be shunned.

If male characters are not stereotyped as churchgoers, it is assumed that writers do so deliberately in an effort to bolster patriarchy. Channelling women to church may be argued for by stating that it is for women's good. However, feminists such as Masenya (2009) have seen through the lies of patriarchy and protest that the Bible has been used as a weapon of subjugation by colonialists to unsuspecting Africans; a weapon adopted by African men to oppress their women even long after colonialism has ended. Oppressed as they are by patriarchy, and were by colonialism, wielding the Bible, African women find it problematic and confusing that their reality constantly contradicts their supposed inclusion in the biblically based love of God. Female characters are patriarchal constructs if they play submissive roles with no growth for them but only that of their male counterparts.

Feminists such as Farfan (1988) protest repeating stereotypes in literature such as submissiveness for female characters. According to Masenya (2009), the Bible is implicated in preaching submissiveness to women for their men, which fuels domination of women by men. In the excerpt below, it can be seen that both prostitutes and the girls working in government offices do wear Sunday dresses. Lady tells Woman:

We (prostitutes) would all don our Sunday dresses. (29).

Sunday dresses are not only worn on Sundays. They are worn on any day when one wants to look beautiful. That is why you see the office girls in their Sunday dresses. (34)

The dualistic approach of stereotyping associates the “good-woman” stereotype with church-going. In the excerpt above, prostitutes are made to don Sunday dresses as well. Prostitutes being associated with Sunday dresses is intended to deepen the negativity they receive as “prostitutes”. According to Bertens (2014), independent women, by virtue of being unmarried, get a negative connotation, dislike and rejection. Some writers stereotype female characters as “whores” or “prostitutes”, particularly unmarried female characters, in order to promote patriarchy.

Another “evil” female character in Mda’s *She Plays with the Darkness* is made to use one the “good” days mentioned in the Bible, “Christmas”, for her “evil” deeds instead of celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ in Christian Ideology. The female character in the text is Dikosha who is constructed as a “whore”. Dikosha’s sexual escapades are called “confessions” as shown in the following excerpt:

Dikosha had spent Christmas morning hearing confessions [not the usual church confessions but sex]. These were busy times for confessions, for many of the men who worked in the mines were home for the holidays. Some men had come from towns in the lowlands. They all had such a strong urge to confess that they went to her house even before going to their wives and children. (198)

Unmarried, Dikosha is yet another female character projected as a prostitute in Mda’s text. Dikosha is stereotyped as an object for men’s use when they have “a strong urge to confess” before going to their wives. Donovan (1983) argues that in western

tradition, stereotypes reflect the endemic manichaeistic dualism of the western worldview. In listening to “confessions” of men, unmarried Diksha is stereotyped for the “evil” category, as opposed to what patriarchy calls “good woman”, whose presence in the text is to promote patriarchy. Arguably, if Diksha is constructed as the “evil one”, then making her to do her “evil deeds” on a Christmas day would bury her further into negativity.

In *Ways of Dying*, the derogatory remark made by the male protagonist, Toloki, about the naked buttocks is meant to desecrate the female body. Male characters’ bodies are rarely derogated. Toloki, the male protagonist says:

It was part of the Easter ritual of the church to give the members of the congregation quantities of water mixed with holy herbs to induce vomiting. After the water and an enema, the worshippers would dot the hillside in a colourful display of blue, green and white, as they squatted there and threw up and emptied their bowels...it was the highlight of their [Toloki and friends] Easter to laugh at the row after row of fat buttocks decorating the hillside. (106)

The excerpt above does not only confirm what the study calls “sunday-church” stereotyping of women but also highlights the derogation of women. Repeating stereotypes, which project women negatively, is to perpetuate patriarchy (Nkealah 2008). In *She Plays with the Darkness*, the narrator says:

He crossed the road into the precinct of the Catholic mission. At the gate a group of women dressed in the black and purple uniform of the Mothers’ Union were discussing the emergency. (23)

Still, it is a group of women at the Catholic mission donning their black and purple uniform, and not a group of men. The tendency to stereotype mostly women for church supports arguments by feminists, such as Masenya (2009), that constructing female characters for the beneficitation of men is patriarchal. Masenya (2009) argues that the Bible, with its message of salvation and a better life in the hereafter, can be used by the powerful (patriarchy) as a wounding sword to unsuspecting powerless yet faithful masses (women). In the context where the salvation message is used as a powerful subjugating tool in the hands of oppressors, atrocities and injustices may be justified

in the name of God, and remain unchallenged. Female characters that encourage submissiveness in women are constructed to perpetuate patriarchy.

4.3.2.4. Socialisation of Marriage

The researcher considered the “socialisation of marriage” as one of the aspects thematised by writers to construct female characters for perpetuations of patriarchy. The “socialisation of marriage” as a factor emanates from Rich’s (1977) argument that expectations by the dominant standards of heterosexual desirability which are rarely conscious, even more rarely explicit, permeate public male-female relationships. The expectations form part of a larger unwritten set of rules about the relative positions of men and women in society. According to Rich (1977), the unwritten set of rules regarding male-female relationships amount to compulsory heterosexuality, which is an institution that systematically ensures the power of men over women, and functions to ensure that women are sexually accessible to men. Heterosexual unions are patriarchal as only the needs of the male are primary. The feminist argues that compulsory heterosexual marriages are central to creating and preserving the inequality between men and women (Rich, 1977).

The study’s stance on marriage is based on Rich’s argument about society’s insistence for young people to marry in what can be labelled as “ordinary” marriage when excluding homosexuality. The importance attached to “ordinary” marriages by societies makes Rich’s (1977) argument that compulsory heterosexual marriages are central to creating and preserving the inequality between men and women believable. Rich (1977) argues that it is unacceptable that heterosexual marriages are almost made compulsory by patriarchs. Relying on feminist theory to analyse Ngcobo’s novel *And They Didn’t Die*, Shah (2008:35) asserts:

Marriage serves patriarchal and social structures wherein girls are groomed for marriage from an early age and persuaded that being wives was their natural calling. Society promoted false optimism by conditioning a woman to believe that fulfilment of her life depended on a successful marriage. Women’s greater need

for marriage, which derives both from social expectations and economic vulnerability, puts men in powerful positions.

In Mda's *She Plays with the Darkness*, young girls are groomed for marriage in some questionable ways. In the excerpt below, the male narrator explains what girls do in preparation for their marriages:

Young girls were encouraged by older girls and young women to pull the pages of the book [in reference to vagina] that contained the mysteries of life, until they were long. As the girls played their games, out of sight of everyone else, they pulled each other like that, every day, until the pages were stretched and hanging out. The longer they were, the happier the future of the girls would be, for girls were taught that when they got married these long pages would please their husbands, and their marriages would last for ever. (123)

The so-called "game" played in the extract above by young girls, older girls and young women is an act of pulling the inside layers of the vagina by oneself and by one another until the two layers dangle out of the vagina. Notable in the extract above is that it is only women "playing the game", that is, there are no men around to force them to play the "game". The behaviour displayed by the women may be understood through De Beauvoir's (1949) argument that throughout history, women have been reduced to objects for men in patriarchal cultures. These women pulling their vaginal labia elongates them, making sexual pleasure high for men. So effectively, they are being socialised into playing the roles of pleasure givers when they become wives. In consensus with De Beauvoir (1949), Mackinnon (1979) argues that women have been educated to perceive themselves as sexual prey. It is unsurprising then to see girls preparing and working hard at pleasing their future husbands. Similarly, Ogun-dipe-Leslie (1994) argues that the struggle African women face is related to the way they have internalised and have come to endorse the patriarchal system themselves. Assigning roles in fiction or reality that promote male privilege is patriarchal. Although there is a hint of sarcasm in the narrator's voice as he describes what the women do, it seems the description itself provides a kind of narrative sexual pleasure for him.

On female genital mutilation, Diop (2017) argues that female genital mutilation is performed on female subjects to control women's sexuality while enhancing male's

sexual enjoyment. The feminist critic argues that the implication is that female genital mutilation endorses the message of the subordinate role of women in society. Amongst other negative things and pain perpetrated on women, female genital mutilation also perpetuates inequality because it is meant to curtail women's ability to enjoy sex. In this text, Mda suggests that the elongation of the vaginal labia is for women's future enjoyment of sex, but ultimately it is intended to "please their husbands", not themselves. The text therefore does not present feminine sexual expressions intended for women's self-pleasure as Cixous (1980) suggests in *écriture féminine*.

4.3.3. Little Suns

In Mda's *Little Suns*, young people are also socialised for marriage. Marriage ceremonies are organised in a manner that is appealing to young people, with the desired effect being that young people should follow the example. The male narrator in the text says the following about weddings and young people:

Weddings were the highlight of any teenager's year because of the singing and dancing at the *umbhororho*. And, of course, cavorting with the opposite sex. Weddings beget weddings. (69)

The extract above confirms Rich's (1977) argument on how girls and boys are trapped into heterosexual marriages. The critic argues that the ideology of heterosexual romance, beamed at a girl from childhood out of fairy tales, television, films, advertising, popular songs, wedding pageantry, is a tool ready to the procurer's hand, which he does not hesitate to use. Early female indoctrination of "love" as an emotion may be largely a western concept, but a universal ideology concerns the primacy and uncontrollability of a male sexual drive and male sex "right" to women. Of concern is that women learn to accept this as dogma. Texts which push the narrative of persuading boys and girls to marry are patriarchal because only the needs of the male are, according to Rich (1977), primary. Socialising and coercing young people into marriage is patriarchal. Excerpts below from Mda's *Little Suns* confirm Rich's (1977) argument against patriarchy that heterosexual marriages are mostly for men's benefit.

Donovan (1983) argues that in patriarchy's dualism, in the category of the "good-woman" stereotype, female characters that serve interests of the hero are the patient wife, the mother and/ or the woman. Extracts read as follows:

It was high time that Malangana [a man] got married so that his blood could be calmed by a good woman. (127)

A man does need at least one woman in the house to wean him from immaturity. (131)

The two excerpts above from Mda's text refer to the woman who is supposed to marry Malangana, the male protagonist. The woman is already assigned the work she ought to perform to please the husband. She is expected to "calm his blood", and "wean him from immaturity". Interestingly, Malangana's duty towards his supposed wife is not mentioned. Diop (2017) argues that patriarchal societies promote male privilege and assign subordinate roles to women in both reality and fiction. In the text under scrutiny, Malangana is constructed as a privileged and dominant character while the would-be wife is assigned a subordinate role. The desired effect, according to Bertens (2014), is a perpetuation of the unequal power relations between men and women, which is meant to sustain the ideology of patriarchy. Penelope Farfan (1988:14) argues against Bachofen's (1861) patriarchal ideology as follows:

It is woman's vocation to tame man's primordial strength, to guide it into benign channels.

Quite a job for a wife. Analysing excerpts above shows that only the needs of a man are primary, and those of a woman seem less entertained, if at all. Rich (1977) argues that in addition to being central to creating and preserving the inequality between men and women, compulsory heterosexuality functions to ensure that women are sexually accessible to men, with consent or choice on the women's part neither legally nor practically taken into account. Texts which focus on male-centred benefits are perpetuating patriarchy. Malangana, the male protagonist in Mda's *Little Suns* seems to be constructed in promotion of inequality between men and women.

The narrative continues and says: “A man does need at least one woman in the house” (131), when talking about why Malangana should marry. In saying, “at least one woman” indicates that a man could marry more than one woman. What can be more patriarchal than one man having several wives? Some societies bent on sustaining patriarchal traditional practices allow and promote polygamous marriages in both reality and in fiction. African feminisms address polygamy because polygamous marriages are prevalent in some African cultural traditions. Feminist critic Ade (2000:76) argues against patriarchy and polygamy as follows:

Polygamy is a bane of society, and it is a vice to be dealt with, not by procrastination but by divorce.

In an argument against polygamy, Ahikire (2008:18) criticises Kenya for passing laws that reverse gains made by feminists over time, through retrogressive legislative processes. In passing laws through Kenyan legislative processes, the following was put forth as a basis of argument for polygamy by the Kenyan legislature:

Polygamy is common among traditional communities in Kenya...Kenya's parliament has passed a bill allowing men to marry as many women as they want...when you [men] marry an African woman, she must know that the second one is on the way, and a third wife...this is Africa.

Postcolonial feminists condemn oppressive cultural practices wherein men are said to be recolonising bodies and minds of their women in the name of preserving their culture (Mishra, 2013). In Mda's *Little Suns*, African cultural practice of men having multiple partners is evinced in the following extracts:

His [Malangana's] mother; [was] one of Matiwane's very junior wives. (26)

She, [one of the king's wives] as the most senior of the wives. (90)

If you [Malangana] really like the Mthwa woman you can have her as your fifth or sixth wife, something to play with when you come home tired from the fields or from battle – not the mother of your heirs. (87)

But he [Malangana] could still marry more wives. For instance, he could marry a wife who would act as a helper to the senior wife. (87)

The extracts above reveal that patriarchal inclinations pervade the narrative under scrutiny. It is oppressive and indeed humiliating for women in polygamous marriages that some wives are only “something to play with” when the husband is tired from work, or she is a mere helper to a senior wife. A wife should be just a wife, with no senior or junior wife. Writers who construct characters that are meant to uphold traditional oppressive practices on women perpetuate patriarchy. In feminist terms, the institution of marriage is often associated with women oppression. Mill’s (1869) argument on the oppression of women in marriages is quoted in Farfan (1988:7) as follows:

Freedom for women would somewhat lead to the alleviation of the suffering of those unfortunate women who are brutalized by their husbands as well as the virtual disappearance of the vicious propensities of men that have resulted from the abuse of power permitted by those aspects of marriage, have caused the institution to represent the last surviving instance of legalised slavery.

The extracts above are from Mda’s *Little Suns*. Six wives for one man is tantamount to women in slavery. For a man to “horde women” as his wives is an abuse of power. It is of little wonder that Mill (1869) in Farfan (1988) argues that brutality perpetrated on women by their husbands, in polygamous marriages, have caused the marriage institution to represent the last surviving instance of legalised slavery. Texts that promote male privilege such as polygamy ostensibly in preservation of culture do so to perpetuate a not-so-hidden purpose, patriarchy.

In the excerpts below, Malangana is talking to a girl he wishes to marry. Seemingly, the girl has little to say about the supposed marriage. In essence, Malangana harshly “proposes” to the girl, Mthwakazi, as follows:

Don’t ask me silly questions about why I want to marry you. It is what I want to do because the heart tells me so. It is not because I have eaten your food that you carry with you. I have wanted to do that even before. (148)

We did adult things already because we are looking forward to a future together. Is that not why you allowed me into yourself? (147)

Malangana talks of “we” in reference to himself and Mthwakazi but it is only him talking and the girl is silent, and thus not part of the negotiation. Arguments that Malangana

raises to remind Mthwakazi that the two of them had had sex before seem to be used as a weapon of blackmailing her into marriage. Mthwakazi is pushed to a corner. The way he talks of their sexual encounter is selfishly about him alone. He says, “I have eaten your food”, and “you allowed me into yourself”. Malangana’s behaviour seems to confirm an argument by the feminist critic, Rich (1977), that heterosexual relationships benefit men. Male characters such as Malangana are constructed to promote patriarchal privilege. Mthwakazi has no subjectivity; she is a passive participant; she is stereotyped to promote submissiveness in women in an effort to scaffold patriarchy.

A central problem of Western literature (patriarchal) is that, much of it characterises women as objects – objects that are used to facilitate, explain away, or redeem the projects of men (Donovan, 1983). The objecthood of Mthwakazi is shown in that Malangana did not even know her name the first time he had sex with her. He “ate her food” (148); she “allowed him into herself” (147), “we did adult things” (147) in reference to having had sex with her, yet he did not know her name. It is elucidated in the text that *Mthwakazi* means “a woman of the *abaThwa*, the people who are called the Bushmen by the English” (15). Here follows Malangana’s confirmation of his sexual encounter with a girl of *aba Thwa* and how he felt about it:

He [Malangana] thought Mthwakazi’s ways were forward and shameless, yet much more enjoyable than the ways of amaMpondomise maidens. This tryst in the bushes by the river, for instance; it was something that his body had never experienced before. Even the intercultural business he used to do with other herdboys could not match this by any measure known to man. He wanted to take the whole thing with him, the whole organ, the whole person, the whole experience, and hide it in his *egumbini* – his sleeping quarters. (146)

Excerpt above tells of how Malangana felt about having sex with Mthwakazi but nothing is said about how Mthwakazi felt. Donovan (1983) argues that patriarchal texts rely upon simplistic stereotypes of woman, and that patriarchal texts do not present the interiorities of women’s experiences. Malangana explicitly explained how he felt to the extent that he wanted to take the vagina with him. Another sexual encounter, and how the man experienced it, is recorded in another of Mda’s texts under scrutiny, *She Plays with the Darkness*. For the female, her experience of whether it was an ordeal

or pleasure is not told. An omission of her experience of the sexual encounter would mean that her presence in the text is of no consequence. Radisene, a male character, after having had sex with Tampololo, a female character, had this to say about the experience:

He had never in his wildest dreams imagined the joys of a woman's body against his own. His deep, dark secret was that until Tampololo, he had never known a woman before...if he had only known what untold ecstasies he was missing! ...he remembered how he had hollered for his mother and promised to buy Tampololo the whole world, including her personal train with its own railway line. (133)

The female character, Tampololo, is denied a voice to tell of her sexual experience with Radisene. The narrative only talks of how Radisene felt. Texts that focus on male-centred benefits are perpetuating patriarchy. Going back to Mda's *Little Suns*, cited above, where Malangana tells Mthwakazi that "it is what I want to do" (148) is indicative of the notion that a man is viewed as dominant over woman. The following also show that Malangana can even use force to get what he wants:

Tell her [Mthwakazi] that if she doesn't come out, I will go in there and fetch her by force, which will shame her in front of everyone. I am not playing with her. (172)

"You [Mthwakazi] are coming with me. I am marrying you today." He did not give her a chance to protest. He grabbed her and flung her on to the horse. Then he mounted and they galloped away. (173)

Malangana simply went to Mthwakazi's home and took her away by force. He "grabbed her and flung her" onto his horse. Mthwakazi is literally abducted by the supposed husband-to-be. Malangana is a perpetrator of violence against the girl. A marriage starting in violence is likely to continue in a similar manner. Gough (1975) argues that women and feminist critics are confronting not only a maintenance of inequality and property possession, but also a pervasive cluster of forces ranging from physical brutality to control of consciousness. For writers to repeat abusive behaviours in fiction, which are perpetrated against women in reality, is a perpetuation of patriarchy.

Persistence on young people to marry runs through Mda's *Little Suns*. After the defeat of Amampondomise king by the Imperial British forces of the Cape Province, the king and his soldiers, including Malangana who was not yet married, fled to Lesotho. Even in exile, Malangana was pestered by talks of him getting married. On his deathbed, one of the soldiers says the following to him:

Wena, Malangana, what do you think I am going to tell the ancestors when I meet them now that I am leaving without seeing what that penis of yours can do? Or don't you have it? (228)

Societal expectations for young people to marry are made clear in the excerpt above. However, feminist critics such Masenya (1996) disagree. The critic argues that girls, as well as boys, should be freed from marrying if they choose not to marry. Rich (1977) argues that pressurising young men and young women to marry is patriarchal because such a union benefits men. Tied to the aspect of marriage is that girls are expected to behave differently from boys in patriarchal societies. The following from Mda's *Little Suns* shows through the voice of the male protagonist some of the expectations societies place on girls:

Like all maidens, a girl was supposed to remain pure and unsullied until someone married her. (90)

Expectations on maidens to remain pure until a man marries them are different from expectations made on young men. The excerpt above seems to suggest that, it is non-negotiable that a girl should get married. In *She Plays with the Darkness*, the different expectations on males regarding sexual issues and marriages are confirmed in the following excerpt:

He [Radisene] was in his forties, and deemed to be a man of the world; with enough money to sow wild oats everywhere he went. (133)

A male character is allowed to sow wild oats "everywhere". Maidens have to remain "pure and unsullied" until someone (a man) marries them. With regard to what societies regard as "normal" marriages, Rich (1977) argues that women suffer in a heterosexual regime that ignores the fluidity of desire in favour of channelling that

desire toward heterosexual unions in which the needs of the male are primary. In Mda's *Little Suns*, one female character, Mamani, only talked about in the narrative was considered to be having something wrong with her because she had refused to marry. The following on Mamani reads as follows:

People had suspected there was something wrong with Mamani [one female character]. She had refused to marry and had turned down suitors long after her younger sisters were married. (53)

The narrative affirms a patriarchal belief that a woman who does not marry deviates from the norm to her detriment, of course. According to Donovan (1983), female characters such as Mamani are deviants. Unlike the "good-woman" stereotype, the deviants are in the "evil" category of stereotyping because they reject or do not properly serve man or his interests. On the same vein, Bertens (2014) argues that patriarchy dislikes and rejects female independence. His argument is that the desired effect for constructing female characters that get negative connotations is a perpetuation of the unequal power relations between men and women.

Marriage seems to be taken seriously in Mda's texts. *Ways of Dying* opens with a juxtaposition of a funeral procession and a wedding procession blocking each other's path with neither party ready to budge. The juxtaposition of the dichotomous events could be indicative of the seriousness attached to marriage. In the same narrative, when female character, Noria, accommodated a male character in her shack, some people passing by her shack commented as follows:

It was nice that Noria had at last found herself a man. The cynics responded that for sure she had always been hiding men in her shack; no woman could survive like a nun as she pretended to do. (155)

Excerpt above shows that Noria had not been married for a longer time than women usually do in the community. Even when she finally has a man, she is castigated by cynics. Independent women, mostly independent of men, are rejected in patriarchal societies. According to Bertens (2014), female constructions are put together, not necessarily by the writers who presented them themselves, but by the culture to which

they belong to maintain male power. Marriage seems to be a strong factor in perpetuating patriarchy. According to Rich (1977), compulsory heterosexuality is central to creating and preserving the inequality between men and women. In the text under scrutiny, Noria went back to her father's house after a fight with her husband. The male protagonist says the following of the incident:

He told her that he did not want a daughter who would be deemed a failure. (84)

In the above excerpt, Noria's father seems to have a patriarchal view that a woman belongs to her husband, and that a failed marriage makes woman a failure. When analysing the novel *And They Didn't Die*, Shah (2008) included the fact that society promoted false optimism by conditioning a woman to believe that the fulfilment of her life depended on a successful marriage; and that a woman's need for marriage derives from both social expectations and economic vulnerability, which put men in powerful positions.

Various factors, including "economic vulnerability", contribute to Noria's going back to her husband's shack after a two-year absence. Considering the precepts of the feminist theory, Noria's decision to go back to her husband, after he threw her out of their shack, is not a surprise. Rich (1977) argues that women are confronting not only a maintenance of inequality but a pervasive cluster of forces, ranging from physical brutality to the control of consciousness, all of which have convinced women that marriage and sexual relationships with men are inevitable components of their lives.

De Beauvoir (1949) argues that throughout history women have been reduced to objects by patriarchy to the extent that women themselves have internalised the ideology. In the text under scrutiny, Noria went back to her abusive husband. Constructing a female character, such as Noria, whose consciousness is controlled by patriarchy, is to perpetuate the ideology. Still arguing against the control of women's consciousness, De Beauvoir (1949:1411) asks the following question:

Does she love her husband or her marriage?

Kathleen Barry (1979) indicates that women's internalisation of the dominant ideology of patriarchy leads to a psychological as well as an economic imbalance of power between husband and wife. Mackinnon's (1979:1769) argument captures the situation relating to the imbalance of power between husband and wife as follows:

A woman seeking to escape violations along with economic disadvantage may well turn to marriage as a form of hoped-for protection, while bringing into marriage neither social nor economic power, thus entering that institution also from a disadvantaged position.

Noria is thrown out of her father's house after staying for two years. She finds herself running back to her husband who threw her out of their shack two years before. According to Barry (1979), what is happening to the female character, Noria, is terrorism. The critic argues that through the lens of what she names a "sexual domination perspective," sexual abuse and terrorism of women by men has been rendered almost invisible by treating it as natural and inevitable. Both her father and her husband are perpetrators of harassment and violence against Noria. Noria is constructed as an object for the two men to act out their oppressive power with its concomitant power of property possession, albeit shacks.

Gough (1975) argues that patriarchal forces have convinced women that marriage is an inevitable component of their lives, even if oppressive. Shah (2008) concludes that some patriarchal factors include the idea that women themselves internalise social opinions, which control them and bring about devastating psychological effects. The desired effect for such female constructs is to preserve and promote female dependence on men in perpetuation of the unequal power relations between men and women. Noria is a patriarchal construct.

In *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses*, it seems marriage is associated with a woman's beauty and a "good-woman" stereotyping of female characters. For a woman to be eligible for marriage, she has to be beautiful and "good". Donovan (1983) argues that several works of western tradition rely upon simplistic stereotypes of woman,

which means that a sexist ideology controls the text. In the text mentioned, Woman says the following to Lady:

You are such a beautiful woman. You could have made some lucky man a good wife. (13)

Rich (1977) avers that women do not only face trials and tribulations experienced by subordinates in hierarchical institutions, but are also supposed to present themselves as attractive according to the dominant standards of heterosexual desirability. The excerpt above reveals that some man would have been “lucky” if he had married the beautiful lady. The narrative confirms Rich’s (1977) argument that marriages benefit men as the needs of the male are primary. Female characters that are constructed to serve the interests of men function as propaganda furthering sexist ideology (Donovan, 1983).

4.3.3.1. Woman as scapegoat

In this study, scapegoating women is understood as a patriarchal act meant to uphold the dominant status quo. On scapegoating of women, Donovan (1983) argues that in some western literature, women are scapegoats of much cruelty and evil; and that much of western thought and literature has failed to come to grips with the problem of evil because it facilely projects evil upon women or other hypostasised “Others”.

Scapegoating is observed in Mda’s *Little Suns*. In the two extracts below, the female character, Mthwakazi, is blamed for things going wrong. For example, in a conversation between two soldiers, it is said:

You [Malangana] are sitting here the whole night doing *amanyala* with this Bushman girl while the nation is on fire? One soldier from the king asks as he dismounted his horse “with a whip ready to attack Mthwakazi”.

Do not take it out on the girl. She is only a girl. You know how easily they can be led astray, said another soldier. (151)

Malangana was having sex with Mthwakazi. However, it was only Mthwakazi that was nearly whipped by a soldier for what was believed to be her fault for keeping Malangana away from his duties. Mthwakazi is thus made a scapegoat; she is held responsible for Malangana's irresponsible behaviour while on duty. Trying to whip the woman is an act of violence against her. In the real world, some women are victims of violence. On analysing fictional texts in her study, Penelope Farfan (1988) refers to a female character constructed as object as a tool in the technical arsenal of patriarchal literature.

A second soldier still in the extract above says that girls "can easily be led astray" in reference to Mthwakazi. The soldier seems to push a patriarchal notion that women are of less intelligence compared to men. Hurwit (1999) talks about Athens as a bastion of male privilege where women were passive and submissive with no political rights or freedoms. Women could not own property or vote, and possessed little or no legal rights. They were thought not to have the cognitive powers of men. For the soldier to say that girls can easily be led astray is to demean Mthwakazi's thinking ability and thus elevating his own cognitive powers.

In both fiction and in reality, women, according to De Beauvoir (1949), serve as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. The imaginary looking glass makes the soldier feel as if he is superior to the woman. In texts that are patriarchal, women are simply vehicles for the growth and salvation of the male protagonist. They are in such texts not for themselves as subjects but as objects for men. Constructing female characters that are only in the text for men's use and ridicule perpetuates patriarchy. The two soldiers are not the only ones blaming Mthwakazi for Malangana's misbehaviour while on duty. In the excerpt below, Malangana also blames his girlfriend:

It was becoming clear to Malangana that the night he spent with Mthwakazi by the river had wrought changes in the lives of his people that could not be reversed. All because of a woman he had not been part of those decisions. He felt a deep anger towards Mthwakazi for capturing his spirit so mercilessly that he became derelict in his duty to his king and to his people. (154)

Malangana blames the girl for “capturing his spirit” which caused him to neglect his duties as he laments. In saying, “all because of a woman” shows that he does not attach importance to the woman. Donovan (1983) rightly argues that much of western thought and literature project evil upon women. Patriarchy blames women for societal problems. Depicting women in fictional texts as subjects of blame is an attempt at perpetuating patriarchy.

4.3.3.2. Mthwakazi as a salvific woman

Fictional literature that is intended to further sexist ideology stereotypes female characters for such a purpose. Donovan (1983) argues that western projects of redemption usually depend upon a salvific woman. According to Donovan (1983), assigning a “salvific role” to female characters is for serving men’s interests as a way of maintaining patriarchy. Mthwakazi is one female character assigned various patriarchal roles, including that of salvific woman in Mda’s *Little Suns*.

The amaMpondomise king with some soldiers, including Malangana, fled to Lesotho during a battle with the British colonial government of the Cape Province before Malangana could marry Mthwakazi. After more than twenty years of exile, Malangana came back to his village in the Cape Province looking for Mthwakazi. It was a difficult undertaking because Malangana did not know her real name. In redemption roles, female characters are expected to “save” or rescue a man whose life has changed for the worst; at times when he desperately needs someone to lean on. Below is an excerpt that details Malangana’s worst situation after more than twenty years in Lesotho, and then back in the Cape Province looking for Mthwakazi:

He hobbles into a night illuminated only by a sliver of a moon, the stars and a bonfire a few yards from where the boys and girls are practicing their wedding songs ...I am looking for her ...I will walk through the night. I must find Mthwakazi.
(73)

I refuse to die before I find Mthwakazi. (103)

Malangana's physical state has changed; he is now old and hobbling. His desperation to find Mthwakazi can be felt in the urgency of his voice. Malangana's adamant resolve to find Mthwakazi verges on obsession. His obsession in finding the nameless female character after more than twenty years in exile seems as if he is looking for something that belongs to him. The feminist theory upon which the study is premised opposes patriarchy in its attempt to "possess" women. Rich (1977) argues against patriarchy wherein women are made the emotional and property of men. Mthwakazi is thus a tool for maintaining and for promoting patriarchy. As Malangana goes from one place to another asking for the whereabouts of Mthwakazi, some responses to his questions reveal stereotyping of female characters, including the feminisation of poverty, and giving menial jobs to women. The following excerpts from *Little Suns* bear testament:

If this Mthwakazi is a beggar-woman, as you say, then someone there is bound to have seen her. (107)

And there she was indeed. Yes, I spoke to her. The kinship of beggars. Once in a while she's seen in the streets, one old man tells Malangana. (72)

Digs roots and collects herbs (66) ...nanny to the children of the missionaries (17)...herding geese. (261)

Arguably, Malangana has a noble job of being a soldier whereas Mthwakazi does menial jobs. She "digs roots and collects herbs", she is "a nanny", and she is "herding geese". Mackinnon (1979) argues against discrimination of women under capitalism where women are segregated by gender and work structurally inferior, low-paying service jobs, such as secretaries, domestic workers, nurses, typists, or child-care workers. Mthwakazi is also projected as a poor woman in the excerpts above. She is labelled as "a beggar woman", and "the kinship of beggars". It seems poverty is mostly associated with women. On "feminization of poverty", Cassandra Lauren Melo (2019) argues that poverty among women and girls remains a prevalent social justice and health issue that stunt the potential and freedom of females throughout the globe. If female characters in fictional texts are constructed as poverty-stricken, it suggests that their potential and freedom are stunted, and therefore, have to rely on patriarchal men to survive.

De Beauvoir (1949) argues that patriarchy constructs woman as immanence; as stagnation and immersion in nature, thereby impeding women's struggle to achieve existential freedom and autonomous subjectivity. Mthwakazi's growth is stunted; she dug roots and collected herbs in her youthful days and in her old age, she was herding geese. Mthwakazi's major role was that of "salvific woman" to serve Malangana's interests by "saving" him when life turned sour on him. Mthwakazi is thus constructed a tool for perpetuating patriarchy. Donovan (1983) rightly argues that in patriarchal texts, women are simply vehicles for the growth and salvation of the male protagonist; and that some Western (patriarchal) projects of redemption usually depend upon a salvific woman. It would then probably suggest that man is put on a pedestal, and when he falls, there has to be a woman to catch him.

In the excerpt above, Malangana is seen "hobbling" as he walked. The excerpts below explain Malangana's bad condition, which shows that he badly needed salvation:

Everything about him [Malangana] is twisted: his face, his lips, his arms, his waist, and his legs. Especially his legs. They are like dry stumps of grey wood with knees forming twisted knobs that knock against each other as the crutches try to find their way. (7)

"The world has beaten him to a pulp", says a woman. (14)

"Something is eating you, perhaps your own sins. It looks like the world has not been very kind to you", says a white preacher man. (29)

"Your bones. They rattle like the seashells of the diviners" (70), says an old man...what happened to you now that your bones rattle like the ankle-shells of a dancing diviner?" (71)

He hobbles away from the general dealer's store. (104)

He only looks old because the world has battered him and beaten him to a pulp and then ground him to powder. (141)

"Tell the vagabond to go away, Margaret", a white woman yelled to another white woman. (189)

When the heart was longing it ate the body bit by bit. It started with the fatty areas, and then chewed the muscles and even gnawed parts of the bones, making them brittle. Longing made his body convoluted, twisted and grotesque. (235)

“He looks like he’s going to tumble down every time he walks”, says a white sergeant. (252)

He is the Madman of the Hill who used to claim to be a war hero ...a communal diagnoses of the man. (256-7)

Mthwakazi is expected to serve Malangana’s interests. Barry (1979) argues that patriarchy demands that women have to provide maternal solace, non-judgemental nurturing, and compassion for their harassers, rapists, and batterers. Mthwakazi would not be bothered by Malangana’s sorry situation because patriarchy demands her support. According to Mackinnon (1979), women have been “educated” to perceive themselves as sexual prey. De Beauvoir (1949) argues that women have internalised the dominant ideology of patriarchy. Excerpts below shows how Malangana and Mthwakazi finally met after more than twenty years apart. The excerpts show how Mthwakazi plays out her “heroism” of being the salvific woman:

[At the river he, Malangana, sees a shepherd. It is a woman herding geese].
She walks towards him, smiling.

“What took you so long?” she asks, her eyes squinting and her grin toothless.

She’s grown old and her face is wrinkled and her eyes surrounded by crow’s feet, but she’s undoubtedly his Mthwakazi.

“I waited for you,” she says again. “What kept you so long?” (260-261)

Mthwakazi grew old waiting for Malangana to come back from exile after more than twenty years. Her questions to Malangana were almost rhetorical: “what took you so long?”, and “what kept you so long?” The questions are asked as if the two of them were together the previous day, not twenty years ago. Because she is assigned the role of a “salvific woman”, Mthwakazi is typified as a “good-woman”, a stereotype which falls in the category of those who serve the interests of the hero, versus the “evil” category of women who do not serve men properly – the deviants. The two categories of “good-woman” versus “evil woman” reflects what Donovan (1983) calls the endemic manichaeistic dualism in the Western worldview. Stereotyping Mthwakazi as a good wife and a patient wife is a means of perpetuating patriarchy.

Whereas Mackinnon (1979) argues that women have been educated into patriarchy, De Beauvoir (1949:1411) unearths some hidden truths about women's state of mind and the institution of marriage. The critic suspects that some women might be pretending to accept the patriarchal status quo and behave as if they are happy inside the institution. De Beauvoir (1949:1411) goes on to say:

Like all the oppressed, woman deliberately dissembles her objective actuality; the slave, the servant, the indigent, all who depend upon the caprices of a master, have learned to turn toward him a changeless smile or an enigmatic impassivity; their real sentiments, their actual behaviour, are carefully hidden.

Mthwakazi could be pretending to accept her salvific role, but because Mthwakazi is constructed to be in a slave-like or servant-like state, she has no say or voice to tell of her experiences. Donovan (1983) rightly argues that patriarchal texts do not present anything of women's personal responses to events. The role of salvific woman is for serving men's interests, according to Donovan (1983). Bertens (2014) argues that patriarchy refers to female characters that serve men as "self-sacrificing angels". Seemingly, "saviour" roles are only meant for female characters in some fictional texts. In *Ways of Dying*, the main female character finds herself in trouble and decides to go back home to her father. She did not have a "salvific man" waiting for her when she suffered, it was only her unsupportive father who harshly responded to the character's mother as follows:

Now that the world has thoroughly thrashed her, she comes back to us. She thinks that this world is her mother's kitchen! (79)

With regard to a character's suffering, Donovan (1983) argues that when the suffering is exploited to the point where it breaks the boundaries of appropriateness, the suffering cannot be justified morally or aesthetically. The critic further argues that literature in which women are treated as "Other" should be read with a perspective that recognises the sexism inherent in their moral vision.

4.3.4. *Ways of Dying* (1995)

4.3.4.1. Name-Callings of female characters

According to Kramp (2019), patriarchal men and women tend to resort to name-call, verbally assault and explicitly denounce strong women. Their actions expose the anxiety of contemporary patriarchy. In addition, while patriarchy has traditionally used more subtle mechanisms to regain control, it is exposing its fragility through desperation. Where female characters are called names in Mda's texts under scrutiny, it would suggest that exponents of patriarchy are desperately trying to regain the control of their fragile system.

In *Ways of Dying*, Jwara's wife called young Noria, who was only about five years old at the time, a "bitch". The narrative below bears testament:

That stuck-up bitch Noria. (102)

Jwara's wife was accusing Noria, a little girl at the time, of having given pleasure to her husband.

No doubt that this is Noria, the beautiful stuck-up bitch from his village. (11)

He [Toloki] only knows that as far as his memory can take him, Noria was always referred to as a stuck-up bitch, and was proud of the title. (30)

Noria is verbally assaulted and the situation gets worse when the male character, Toloki, says that Noria is proud of being called by that derogatory word, which he even refers to as her "title". Were she given a voice, she would probably tell how embarrassed being called a "stuck-up bitch" really feels like. However, here, the subaltern cannot speak, bringing to mind Spivak's (1985), *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Kramp (2019) argues that aggressive patriarchal figures assault women who actively speak for their ideals and act with conviction. Repeating verbal assault in fictional texts against female characters is a perpetuation of patriarchy (Kramp, 2019).

4.3.4.2. No identity for most female characters

Most female characters in Mda's selected texts are unnamed while almost all male characters are named. According to Mowczko (2013), in societies where individualism is prized, people's identities are represented by names as unique identity markers. In her study of the Old Testament, the scholar discovered that some women's names are withheld, which compelled her to ask questions such as, 'Were not the women important enough to be named? Is the Bible minimising the significance of its female characters? Does the Old Testament promote a society in which the service of women is diminished or ignored?'

In Mda's texts, one also finds that a male character who is a husband has a name, but his wife is unnamed. This implies that the wife's identity is minimised and that its tact to maintain inequality between husband and wife. With regard to women's struggles, names, and identity, postcolonial feminist Mishra (2013:133) argues:

In the core women, whether they are rich, poor, strong, weak, educated, illiterate, want to live with respect, name and as a partner, not as wife of olden days...in some other cases, women crave for self-identity and liberation from patriarchal clutches.

In *Mda's Ways of Dying*, Noria's father has a name, Xesibe, while her mother is only known as "That Mountain Woman" throughout the narrative. The name is associated with the village she comes from. The narrator confirms her name in the excerpt below:

Noria's mother, the willowy dark beauty is known to us only as "That Mountain Woman". (30)

Toloki, the main male character, has a father whose name is Jwara, but his mother is only known as "Mother of Toloki" (42). One peripheral male character is named Nefolovhodwe, while his first wife in the village has no name. Nefolovhodwe has a second wife in the city who has no name either. The second wife is only described as a "tall, thin girl, with straightened hair, red lips and purple eyelids, and a face that looked like that of the *leupa* lizard" (132).

Mda's text, *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses*, has only two characters who are women. The two female characters have no names; they are only known as "Lady" and "Woman". Lady is constructed as a whore, and Woman is the stereotyped version of a "good woman". The two stereotypes exemplify the dualistic approach of "good" versus "evil" in the world-view of patriarchy. In Mda's *Little Suns* the main male character is named Malangana while the female character, who is his girlfriend, is known only as Mthwakazi, which is not her name but a reference to her tribe.

Two female characters in Mda's *She Plays with the Darkness* have no names; the one with ten daughters is called "Mother-of-the-Daughters" (10), and the other, mother of Dikosha and Radisene is called "Mother-of-Twins" (10). Rosaldo (1980:230) argues that womanhood in various societies is not as significant as the value attached to mothering; the distinction between the act of mothering and the status attached to it is important. One concurs with Mowczko (2013) who opines that constructing female characters with no names means that women's significance is minimised to promote a society in which the service of women is ignored.

4.3.4.3. Noria terrorised from childhood

Barry (1979) argues that, viewed through the lens of the sexual domination perspective, sexual abuse and terrorism of women by men has been rendered almost invisible by treating it as natural and inevitable for the purpose of maintaining male power. From the onset of the narrative under scrutiny, Noria, a female character that typically plays a "supporting" role to Toloki, the main male character, has been terrorised since childhood. Together with Toloki, Noria started school at the age of five or six. The male protagonist recalls some of the incidences of terrorising Noria when she was a little thus:

We would tell Toloki to run home while we detained Noria for a few moments of her laughter. She enjoyed all this attention, and as she grew older she devised

ways of using it to her advantage...we all loved the stuck-up bitch, for she had such a beautiful laughter. (72)

They said that nursemaids and babysitters used to tickle Noria for the pleasure of hearing her laughter. This went on until her mother had to stop the whole practice after baby Noria developed sores under her armpits. (32)

Men detain a little girl while they let go of the boy. Men claiming that they wanted her to entertain them by her singing hold Noria against her will. Young as she was, Noria was called a “stuck-up bitch” by a group of men who detained her. The men’s actions against the little girl can be described as an act of harassment to the little girl. Barry (1979) rightly argues that sexual abuse and terrorism of women by men is rendered almost invisible in patriarchal societies. Constructing characters that act out as the ideology of patriarchy demands in reality is a perpetuation of the ideology.

Excerpt (32) above explains how Noria was forced to laugh by her babysitters when she was still a baby by tickling her armpits until they became sore. The assumption would be that her detainers could be fondling her, which is improper touching, to force laughter out of her. Mackinnon (1979) argues that women have learned to accept male violation of their psychic and physical boundaries; and that women have been educated to perceive themselves as sexual prey. This abuse of a five-year old by men eventually extends into the abuse of women by men later in life.

4.3.4.4. Noria sexually objectified

The female body is often sexually objectified and a woman’s worth is equated with her body’s appearance and sexual functions (Szymanski, Moffitt & Carr, 2011). Excerpts that follow reveal that Noria is constructed as an object for men’s use. The male narrator says the following of Noria’s character:

In the village, we all knew that by the time she reached her mid-teens, she had acquired a reputation for making men happy. (71)

Although Noria did not have any money for the bus fare, she was well known to the bus drivers and conductors from the days when she used to spend most of her time making them happy. So they let her ride free of charge. (86)

Noria would disappear into a pit latrine to change from her gym dress to a polka-dot dress. Her face would be pale with powder, and her lips red with lipstick. She would then catch the bus to town, where she would give pleasure to bus drivers and conductors. (72)

She would also ride around in taxis, dispensing pleasure to the drivers, who would buy her gifts and flatter her. (73)

At the hotel, Noria learnt the art of entertaining white men who came from across the seas. In return, they bought her drinks and paid her a lot of money...she did not find it necessary to continue working at the Bible Society. She had no need to preserve a respectable front. (89)

I am glad that this Xesibe's daughter (Noria) who used to give pleasure to all and sundry has talked sense into your head. (209)

Noria is constructed as a sex object. Excerpts above describe a female character that is, according to Szymanski et al. (2011), sexually objectified and only valued for its use by others. Noria is stereotypically constructed for the benefit of the male characters. Female characters in fictional texts are often constructed to promote male power. Noria's choice of leaving work at a Bible Society for prostitution in a hotel may indicate the dichotomy between the "good" work Noria did at the Bible Society and the "evil" work she was doing at the hotel. Juxtaposing the two types of work seems to be an attempt at escalating the stereotyped perceptions of Noria's "evilness" as a deviant. The use of stereotypes both in reality and fiction are meant to strengthen the iniquitous power relations between men and women by the dominant ideology.

Earlier in the narrative, Noria was derogated and humiliated by doing "dirty things" (80) with a boy from outside her village. Noria's humiliation came about as follows:

[Noria] Went to join the scrawny young man [Napu from a different village] and together they would disappear behind the aloes. The herdboys enjoyed those moments, and would tiptoe to the aloes, and peep through the thick pointed leaves. They would breathe heavily, and those who had already reached puberty would wet the pieces of cloth that covered their groins ...spying on his antics with Noria was certainly a much better experience than molesting goats in the

veld...Noria would slink back into her father's house, with pieces of dry grass stuck to the back of her head. (74)

Noria is constructed as an object for men's use and ridicule; herdboys watched live sex between Noria and her boyfriend. Only Noria suffers the humiliation in the village because the boy involved is nicely tucked away in some other village. Herdboys in Noria's village could ridicule her as much as they wanted because the boy Noria was having sex with is not one of their own. Why could it not have been one of their own men or boys engaged in live sex for others' entertainment? Excerpts above reveal that Noria was constructed for men's pleasure. Donovan's (1983) argument confirms that sexist ideology promotes the concept of woman-as-object.

4.3.4.5. Noria facilitates old man's project

Feminist criticism is ethical in that it confronts literature that depicts women as objects that are used to facilitate, thwart, or redeem the projects of men (Donovan, 1983). In Mda's *Ways of Dying*, Noria was only five years old when one old man called Jwara made her to sing for him for hours on end to enable him to create his figurines. The narrator explains Noria's involvement in Jwara's project as follows:

Then Noria sang. Jwara found himself overwhelmed by a great creative urge. He took an idle piece of iron and put it on fire. When it was red hot, he began to shape it into a strange figure. He amazed himself, because in all his life he had never known that he had such great talent. But before he could finish the figurine, Noria stopped singing, and all of a sudden he could not continue to shape the figure. The great talent, and the urge to create, had left his body. (30-31)

Toloki remembers that "he was eight and she five" (30) when the above incident happened. This Jwara's use of Noria to facilitate his project is the exploitation of a girl child, and inadvertently translates into the exploitation of women in general. According to Donovan (1983), women in some texts are constructed only to serve men's interests and to perpetuate patriarchy. Jwara would detain young Noria until her father would plead with Jwara to let her rest:

Please, Jwara, release our child. She has to eat and sleep. (29)

Depriving the young girl of rest and sleep is abuse and exploitation of the girl. The hint at sexual abuse by the old man is enhanced below:

If Jwara ruled his household with a rod of iron, he was like clay in the hands of Noria. He bought her sweets from the general dealer's store, and chocolate. (33)

If Noria was made to sing non-stop, as shown above, Jwara was supposed to give her a salary, and not sweets. It is the exploitation of a child. With regard to situations like Noria's, Mackinnon (1979) argues that central and intrinsic to the economic realities of women's lives is the requirement that women will market sexual attractiveness to men, who tend to hold the economic power and position to enforce predilections. Noria is in the text to serve men as a way of promoting male privilege. It was still Noria, later as a teenager, who was made to thwart Jwara's Project. Patriarchal Jwara needs Noria to complete his project. Noria was blamed for the old man's failed project. How Noria caused the project to fail is explained below as follows:

It is true that Noria was responsible for Jwara's downfall, and his ultimate demise. As she grew older, she developed other interests, and in many occasions failed to honour her appointments with him. Sometimes she would tell her parents that she was going to sing for Jwara. Instead, Toloki now knows, she went to charm taxi boys. Jwara's obsession could not be quenched, so he sank deeper and deeper into depression. He could not create without Noria. (101)

Androcentric fictional texts stereotype women who do not serve men properly as "evil" in accordance with the dualistic approach of western worldview (Donovan, (1983). Because Noria has stopped singing for Jwara, she is labelled evil as evinced in extract below:

For him [Toloki], Noria had acquired the looming stature of a wicked woman who destroyed his father [Jwara]. (101)

The picture painted in the narrative below seems to suggest that Noria and the old man's relationship was beyond that of "employer and employee", judging by how the old man behaved after Noria left her job of singing for Jwara. The excerpt below seems to deepen the suspicion of sexual abuse, which could have been taking place during her stay at Jwara's place:

Often he [Jwara sat in his workshop, waiting for Noria. Noria would not come. We believed that she had become too proud. Jwara sent her messages, promising her the world. The world, however, meant sweets and chocolates. Taxi boys had much more imaginative offerings. (101)

Noria is stereotyped as a woman whose presence in the narrative is only to serve men's interests. Even though she had stopped singing for old Jwara and left him with his figurines, she was made to go for Taxi boys who had more "imaginative" things to offer her. Noria has no subjectivity; she is only an object for man's use in perpetuation of patriarchy. Similarly, in Mda's *Little Suns*, the female character, Mthwakazi is used to facilitate Malangana's "project" even in her absence, as explained in the excerpt below:

Malangana was thinking of nothing but his desire for a woman. Even as he fought each battle his ferocity was fuelled by his yearning for her. She made him slay his enemy with so much vengeance for it was the enemy that took him away from her. (207)

Malangana's claim that he is driven to fight harder in battle when thinking of his girlfriend is not far-fetched in patriarchy. Malangana's way of thinking in the excerpt above gives credence to Farfan's (1988:8) assertion that:

The female sex serves primarily to soften the male and to inspire him to impressive acts of courage and military prowess.

Malangana's remark that "she made him slay his enemies" (207) shows that his girlfriend, Mthwakazi, is a mere tool in his hands to achieve his goals. Malangana could also be using Mthwakazi as a scapegoat as he claims that she makes him slay his enemies. Donovan (1983) argues that patriarchy is failing to come to grips with the problem of evil because it facilely projects evil upon women. Mthwakazi is a construct or maintaining patriarchy. Malangana blaming his girlfriend, Mthwakazi, resonates with Adam's blaming Eve for disobeying God's commandment in Genesis (3:11-12) of the Christian Bible:

Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat? Lord God said.

The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it. The man said.

4.3.4.6. Derogation of female characters

According to Bertens (2014), feminist critics show how fictional literary representation of women repeated familiar, cultural stereotypes that characterise a woman as an immoral and dangerous seductress. According to Donovan (1983), judgements by feminist critics that evaluate a female character's authenticity are made according to whether the character has a reflective, critical consciousness, where she is a moral agent, capable of self-determined action, or whether she is a self. Feminist criticism recognises that literature is an important contributing element to a moral atmosphere in which women are derogated.

Male protagonist, Radisene in Mda's *She Plays with the Darkness*, walked passed some shebeens that were full of men and women, but he only chose to derogatively describe women as follows:

Drunken women, who took pride in calling themselves *matekatse*, or whores, the devourers of men, whistled at him [Radisene] and in their musical voices invited him to rub his lanky figure against their hungry bodies. They crowned their invitation with graphic descriptions of the things they would do to parts of his anatomy if he were to walk into their secret chambers, and boasted that he would not survive the ordeal. (24)

In the excerpt above, only women are commented upon and labelled as drunk and to whores. Nothing is said about men's drunkenness in the same shebeen or about unruly behaviours, they could have also displayed. In the same narrative, an old woman, Grandma Maselina, who is a widow, is projected as taking pride in her youthful days as a whore in Johannesburg, as captured in the excerpts below:

She always welcomed visitors, and liked to tell stories of how she was once a whore in the land of gold, by which she meant Johannesburg and the mining towns of the Free State...whores who devour men ...'I use to eat men, my child', she would proudly announce. (102)

When Grandma “Maselina bragged about her days as a whore, Sorry-My-Darlie bragged about his days as a soccer star in Maseru”. (103)

The old woman is negatively projected by constructing her with a shameful past of being a whore while the male counterpart has a glorious past of being a soccer star. Bertens (2014) argues that often literary portrayal of women repeated familiar cultural stereotypes such as presenting a woman as an immoral and dangerous seductress in perpetuation of inequality between men and women.

Juxtaposing Grandma ‘Maselina’s bragging about being a whore with that of Sorry-My-Darlie’s (a male character) bragging as a soccer star is crucial to the narrative because Grandma ‘Maselina ends up in a salvific role to save the former soccer star at the close of the narrative. Donovan (1983) rightly argues that in most of western literary texts projects of redemption almost always depend upon a salvific woman. For Grandma ‘Maselina to play a salvific role makes her a patriarchal construct to promote male privilege.

The projection of women as immoral is also observed in Mda’s *She Plays with the Darkness*. A young boy in the text playing a toy guitar did the following:

Sang about mistresses and troubles they caused their men, about poisonous women who ran away with other people’s husbands, about modern wives who were too big-headed to obey their husbands, and about the desires of the body that remained unfulfilled because modern women had constant headaches. (100)

And he sang of “jilted lovers and unfaithful wives”. (101)

The complaints in the songs above are about women of various statuses in the community who are seen to be on the “wrong side” of serving men properly: “Women are mistresses who cause trouble for men”; “women are poisonous”; “too big-headed wives”; “unfaithful wives”; and “unfulfilled husbands”. The narrative above blames men’s woes on women.

According to Donovan's (1983) argument, it is patriarchal to put blame on women alone while men go free. The critic argues that in some Western literature women are the objects, the scapegoats, of much cruelty and evil. *She Plays with the Darkness* is in an African setting where, according to Gaidzanwa (1985), some practices mentioned in the excerpt above are permissible for men in African context but not for women. Gaidzanwa (1985:11) argues as follows:

The expectation of fidelity from sons and husbands is taxing on women since men are not penalized for adultery as strictly as women are.

Complaints registered in the song by the young boy could be revealing that the imagined society is a patriarchy, for example: the "all-powerful patriarch" does not receive the respect he should be getting from women in accordance with the dominant ideology of patriarchy; the song could be revealing that women are regarded as sexual objects for men; modern women, who have probably followed their ambitions, are regarded as not serving men properly as patriarchal societies expect them to.

In the young boy's song those referred to as "mistresses and poisonous women who run away with people's husbands" could only be independent women who have decided not to marry but chose to follow their ambitions. According to Bertens (2014), independence for women is rejected hence independent women may be called names such as "poisonous". The desired effect for repeating stereotypes in fiction is a perpetuation of the unequal power relations between men and women. A theme of immorality and whores pervades Mda's chosen texts. One other female character, Matlakala, in *She Plays with the Darkness*, is described as follows, as she was dancing:

As she made wild love to the stuffy air, she sang of her exploits when she used to run around with the Russians in Johannesburg. She boasted that she was a whore who had devoured many men, who continued to tell of the story of her prowess in their graves. (58)

Matlakala, only a peripheral female character, could not escape being made a whore, a predicament that the main female character is also in. Matlakala is made to be proud

of her days as a whore. Even now as she dances, she is said to be “making love” to the stuffy air. For saying that female characters constructed whores are proud of being whores is in line with Mackinnon’s (1979) argument against patriarchy that women have been educated to perceive themselves as sexual prey. Matlakala boasts of having been a “devourer of men”. De Beauvoir (1949) argues that patriarchal writers stereotype woman as “praying mantis” for the bad-woman category in dualism.

Matlakala is further derogated as she did her *famo dance* as recorded below:

She would shake her waist, kick her leg up and lift her dress to display her femaleness, around which a white circle called ‘spotlight’ had been painted. (58)

Matlakala’s derogation goes from what she did back then to the present. In her dance, she literally lifted her dress to show people in the hut her private parts. Her private part is decorated to probably make it look attractive to men.

Derogation of women continues: In *Ways of Dying*, notorious young men who were health assistants and were from outside the village, were described as follows:

[They had] A reputation of going out drinking every night and did naughty things with young women whose husbands were migrant workers in the mines. (35)

Patriarchy makes it a point that it has to be somebody’s wife who engages in immoral sex activities to make certain that women are derogated. It could be assumed that there were unmarried women in the village who could be some of those women doing “naughty things” with the young men from outside the village. Women degradation continues in *Ways of Dying*. At a funeral while mourners were eating, men would:

Gossip about how great and impressive the funeral was and who has been secretly sleeping with whose wife. (161)

Only women in the lines above get to be described as somebody’s wife sleeping with some men, yet the men they are supposed to be sleeping with are not specified as some women’s husbands or not. The excerpt is derogating women.

4.3.4.7. Female characters presented as “praying mantis”

De Beauvoir (1949) argues that patriarchal texts depict woman, among other things, as a praying mantis, which devours its partner when satiated with love. For the study, the “praying mantis” would be a female character who first got married but later left her husband to make a particular female character look bad. In *She Plays with the Darkness* Mrs Qobokwane, obviously a married woman ended up divorcing Mr Qobokwane who told Radisene, a leading male character, the following:

You know that Mrs Qobokwane left me too ...for a younger man? They go for younger men these days, and they call them teaspoons. (156)

Mrs Qobokwane is stereotyped as a wife of loose morals. The reason given by her ex-husband that she left him for a younger man digs her deeper into negativity. Mrs Qobokwane would receive negative connotation; she would be disliked and rejected which, according to Bertens (2014), is the desired effect by patriarchy to make women fear independence.

Tampololo, also a married female character in *She Plays with Darkness*, was married to Trooper Motsohi but she left him for Radisene. Mr Qobokwane confronts Radisene as follows:

We hear that you [Radisene] now share blankets with Motsohi’s wife [Tampololo]. You are a brave man indeed. (156)

Tampololo is a stereotype of an unfaithful wife in leaving her husband for Radisene. She is projected an immoral female character. However, Radisene seems to be getting some felicitations from Mr Qobokwane who labelled him as brave. Towards the end of the same narrative, even “good” and married Mother-of-the-Daughters with ten children, are raped by her former son-in-law, Motsohi. The perpetrator did not serve a jail term because the male magistrate unashamedly said the following as reasons for his decisions of letting the rapist go free:

The victim is an experienced woman who was not a virgin at the time of the crime, and she therefore suffered no serious injury. She was also drunk when the crime was committed. It is well known that drunken women sometimes invite such actions. (188)

Mother-of-the-Daughters is a “good-woman” stereotype who serves men properly by her status as wife but now the male magistrate turns her into a drunken seductress whose actions have invited her former son-in-law to rape her. At play in this context of son-in-law, raping mother-in-law could be what Barry (1979) refers to as a universal ideology which concerns the primacy and uncontrollability of a male sexual drive in which is rooted a patriarchal belief of male sex right to women. Mother-of-the-Daughters is a construction intended to shame and derogate women. Mother-of-the-Daughters as a rape victim is analysed further in another section of this chapter.

4.3.4.8. Female characters in salvific roles

In much of western literature, projects of redemption almost always depend upon a salvific woman (Donovan, 1983:214). The critic argues as follows:

Women in literature written by men are for the most part seen as ‘Other’, as objects, of interest only insofar as they serve or detract from the goals of the male protagonist. Western projects of redemption almost always depend upon a salvific woman.

(i) Grandma ‘Maselina’

In *She Plays with the Darkness*, it is an old woman, Grandma ‘Maselina, who plays the salvific woman to a younger former soccer star Sorry-My-Darlie. Hereunder follows the former soccer star’s present condition:

Since the accident on the soccer field he wet himself constantly, and the crotch of his threadbare pants was always soaking. In summer, flies buzzed around him everywhere he went. People [including Dikosha] tended to avoid him – except for Grandma ‘Maselina whose nose, people said, was too old to smell anything. (103)

Get away from here Sorry-My-Darlie, you are going to kill me with your flies...your smell will make me faint (104), Dikosha shouted at him.

Seemingly, for a woman to carry out a salvific role properly, the man has to hit rock bottom first. Sorry-my-Darlie was once a soccer star but now he cannot walk after an accident, and he stinks as he constantly wets himself. In his heydays, he appeared on magazines advertising roll-on, but now he is a stinking paraplegic in a wheelchair. In her role as saviour, Grandma 'Maselina did the following:

She called Sorry My Darlie into the rondavel and *showed him her treasures*. Chief among them was an ox-plough...never used, crockery...never used. "These cups and plates are for visitors", but somehow the visitors who came were never worthy of the crockery. (206)

"But today we [She and Sorry-My-Darlie] are going to drink tea in them, with lots of condensed milk", Grandma 'Maselina told Sorry-My-Darlie. (206)

The study assumes that the phrase "showed him her treasures" could be referring literally to the household crockery. However, this could also be read as a sexual connotation in that, her allowing this visitor who was worthy of her crockery could be allowed more access to Sorry My Darlie's body, that is, in terms of sexual intercourse. After the word, "treasures" is a full stop. The punctuation mark is a pause, which could be deliberate to allow room for imagination as to what could be happening inside the rondavel. An assumption could be that in addition to showing him her ox-plough and other things, she could have showed him her womanhood. The phrase "never used" enhances the sexual connotation further that she had probably not engaged in sexual activities in a long time. Whichever way Grandma 'Maselina is looked at, the fact remains that she is in the narrative to "save" male character Sorry-My-Darlie. Role of salvific woman makes her an object for serving men's interests in support of patriarchy.

Grandma 'Maselina is, according to Bertens' (2014) argument, a construction for patriarchal purposes. Bizarre behaviours such as that displayed by Grandma 'Maselina in her salvific role can be explicable through Rich's (1977:1773) argument against patriarchy that:

One form of false consciousness which serves compulsory heterosexuality includes the demand that women provide maternal solace, non-judgemental nurturing, and compassion for their harassers, rapists, and batterers, as well as for men who passively vampirise them.... [And "stinking burdens" such as Sorry-My-Darlie].

Grandma 'Maselina is a female patriarchal construct for the purpose of perpetuating the unequal power relations between men and women.

(ii) Noria

In *Ways of Dying*, Noria takes the role of salvific woman in accordance with androcentric literary texts whose purpose is to subtly manipulate women's thinking to accept men's domination over their lives. In the text, Noria is given a role to "save" Toloki after he failed to manage his life. Excerpts below explain Toloki's bad situation as follows:

It is strange for Toloki to be in a house [Noria's shack]. For many years, he has spent his evenings in waiting rooms. He has not slept in a house since his shack was destroyed by vigilantes many years ago. He had just started working as a Professional Mourner at the time. (145)

What do you see in him, Noria? He has nothing to offer you. (Noria was asked by Bhut' Shady after taking Toloki into her shack). (144)

He stinks! says Bhut' Shady. (144)

Noria herself confirms that Toloki stinks. She says the following to Toloki:

Please take a bath. Just because your profession involves death, it doesn't mean that you need to smell like a dead rat, Noria tells Toloki. (98)

Same as male character Sorry-My-Darlie in *She Plays with the Darkness*, Toloki in *Ways of Dying* is also said to be stinking. However, female characters, such as Grandma 'Maselina and Noria, are supposed to take them into their houses to care for them. Farfan (1988) quoted Mill's (1869) argument that in a patriarchal sense, it is a woman's vocation to take care of men. Female characters in salvific roles are thus constructed to maintain patriarchy. Still in her salvific role, Noria makes an invitation to Toloki that "leaves his (Toloki's) heart thumping at an alarmingly fast pace", as follows:

I am quite serious about it, Toloki. We can live together here [her shack] as homeboy and homegirl. (114)

All what really matter is that she cares for him, as a homeboy of course. (144)

Dusk has fallen over the settlement by the time they [Noria and Toloki] reach the shack. Noria opens the door, and they both enter. (144)

In addition to patriarchy “demanding” that women should take care of men, women themselves seem to take pride in doing so. In analysing Ngcobo’s *And They Didn’t Die* on the depiction of marriage, Mayadevi Shah (2008) concluded that various social opinions of women’s capabilities are internalised by the women themselves who are persuaded that being wives was their natural calling. In the case of Noria in *Ways of Dying* and Grandma ‘Maselina in *She Plays with the Darkness*, it was to get a man at all costs.

One peripheral male character, Bhut’Shady, tells Noria that Toloki stinks in the excerpt above. Noria herself tells Toloki that he stinks and he should take a bath. However, Noria shows her resolve in taking Toloki to stay with her in the following:

Not today, he doesn’t (stink). And he won’t stink again. (144)

And she (Noria) wipes his (Toloki’s) tears with the back of her (Noria’s) hand. (191)

The two excerpts above show Noria’s determination of taking care of Toloki. Noria seem to have accepted that she is a care-giver as patriarchy expects her to. Mill (1869) has argued in favour of patriarchy that it is women’s vocation to take care of men. For Noria to be in the narrative to serve men’s interests is part and parcel of the patriarchal construct. A disturbing part of the salvific role for female characters is that sex seems to be included in the role. Excerpt below seems to suggest that sex is part of the salvific role:

She [Noria] takes off all her clothes, unveiling her womanhood to him...he [Toloki] also takes off his clothes and unveils his maleness. They both kneel over the basin, and with their washing rags, bathe each other with the aloed water. They dazedly rub in each other’s backs, and slowly move down to other parts of their bodies. (192)

It can be hard to believe that the two in the excerpt above did not end up engaging in sex. For Toloki to go and stay in Noria's shack makes Noria sexually accessible to Toloki in line with Rich's (1977) argument that compulsory heterosexuality systematically ensures that the power of men over women is upheld.

Noria and Grandma 'Maselina's happy acceptance of their salvific roles may indicate that women do come to internalise the dominant ideology of patriarchy. With regard to women internalising male dominance over their lives Barry (1979:1771) argues that the effect of what she refers to as male identification is internalising the values of the coloniser and actively participating in carrying out the colonisation of one's self and one's sex. The critic explicates the meaning of "male identification" as follows:

An act whereby women place men above women, including themselves, in credibility, status, and importance in most situations, regardless of the comparative quality the woman may bring to the situation.

That Toloki has nothing to bring to their relationship is confirmed by Bhut'Shady words in the excerpt below:

What do you see in him, Noria? He has nothing to offer you. (144)

Even though Toloki had nothing to offer Noria as reflected above, Noria accepted him into her shack; another patriarchal reason for Noria to accept him could be that she places Toloki above herself in credibility, status, and importance, according to Barry's (1979) argument cited above on "male identification" which exemplifies the control of consciousness. According to Rich (1977), the extent and elaboration of measures, such as salvific roles for female characters, are designed to keep women within a male sexual purlieu. Noria is a tool for perpetuating patriarchy.

What can also be observed with regard to female characters assigned salvific roles in patriarchal texts is that not one female character gets to be saved by a male character; instead, a female character gets an opposite reaction to what a male character

receives. For example, in *Ways of Dying*, when Noria came back to her father's house after her lover Napu chased her out of their shack, she gets no sympathy from her father Xesibe who only says the following:

Now that the world has thoroughly thrashed her, she comes back to us. (79)

You see, Mother of Noria, it is all your fault. Now you are paying for spoiling this child. (76)

Excerpt above shows that women are usually blamed in patriarchal societies for whatever goes wrong, according to Donovan (1983). Noria's mother is blamed by her husband for having failed to raise Noria into a "good" woman who could stay married to her husband. With regard to lack of support for female characters, unlike male characters that have salvific women to support them when in trouble, the following conversation between Noria and Toloki shows Noria's suffering without support:

You led a difficult life. To eat you must draw water for shebeen queens, said Toloki.

I have been chewed, Toloki. Chewed, and then spewed, replied Noria. (144)

In the text under scrutiny, Noria lacks subjectivity, she is constructed as object for serving men's interests including Toloki.

4.3.4.9. Female characters as domineering shrews

According to Donovan (1983), female stereotypes symbolise either the spiritual or the material, good or evil. In the evil category are deviants who reject or do not properly serve man or his interests: the old maid or career woman, the witch or lesbian, the shrew or domineering wife/mother. The critic argues that several works, considered archetypal masterpieces of western tradition, rely upon simplistic stereotypes of woman.

(i) That Mountain Woman

In *Ways of Dying*, That Mountain Woman is constructed as a domineering woman. The way that That Mountain Woman is introduced to the village as a wife from outside

her husband's village shows some negativity of being an "Other". The negativity she receives as an outsider can be sensed in the excerpt below:

We wondered why Xesibe had to go all the way to the mountain to look for a wife, when our village was famous for its beautiful women...since we never had anything to do with the mountain people, we only know about events there from the stories that people told. (32-4)

Being an outsider, an "Other", That Mountain Woman is projected as a poverty-stricken woman before her marriage to Xesibe as the excerpt below tells as follows:

She [That Mountain Woman] was strikingly beautiful but was in rags. It was the unappreciated Xesibe who made her a person. (79)

The implication of the statement of a woman in "rags" shows poverty on the side of the woman, and that had it not been for her husband Xesibe, who "made her a person", she could still be poor. For her to be in rags before marriage could be a socialisation of women to marry, the desired effect being a perpetuation of unequal power relations between men and women. On the issue of poverty, Rich (1977) argues that in a worsening economy, the single mother trying to support her children confronts the feminisation of poverty. That Mountain Woman finds herself in similar predicament.

The following excerpts present That Mountain Woman as a domineering shrew:

That Mountain Woman had razor blades in her tongue. (30)

"Wicked mother" (138) uttered by her once son-in-law Napu. Xesibe also referred to her as "his caustic wife". (81)

Xesibe also made reference to his wife's "scabrous tongue". (74)

"You are a pathetic excuse for a father". The Mountain woman said to her husband. "Xesibe was ashamed, and his friends were embarrassed for him". (34)

That Mountain Woman told him (husband) to go empty his bowels out there in the dongas. (76)

We thought Xesibe would be "happy without his tormentor" (86). (These words were said after the death of his wife, That Mountain Woman).

That Mountain Woman is projected as a domineering wife. She does not seem to be serving her husband properly, she is thus in the category of female stereotype symbolising evil or bad as opposed to a good-woman stereotype who serve husbands properly (Donovan, 1983). Here follows a patriarchal view of a good-woman stereotype according to Gaidzanwa (1985:31), probably in an African context:

The women who are idealised are those who are obedient to their husbands even if the husbands are wrong and unreasonable. They are women who do not complain when they are badly treated. They patiently wait for their husbands to recognise their virtue and they may actually shield their husbands from the consequences of unreasonable or cruel behaviour.

That Mountain Woman can be viewed as not a “true” African woman described in Masenya (1986:170) that a “true” patriarchal womanhood is passed on to daughters by mothers who, themselves, have accepted total subjugation as a norm for their survival; and their teachings are as follows:

A true woman doesn't shout at her husband. A true woman doesn't refuse her husband anything. A true woman doesn't contradict his counsels. A true woman respects her husband as ruler of the house. She obeys and supports him in everything. She helps him accomplish his duties of providing and protecting the home.

In line with patriarchal womanhood teachings as elaborated by Masenya (1996) above, female character, That Mountain Woman, is not serving her husband properly as she is constructed a shrew. According to Donovan (1983), female stereotypes classified in the “bad/evil” category of dualism are deviants who reject or do not serve men properly. A domineering wife or shrew is one such deviant. Strong women, probably displaying some kind of independence are, disliked and rejected as argued in Bertens (2014) that female independence get strongly negative connotations. The message is that dependence leads to indulgence, reverence while independence leads to dislike, and rejection. Female character That Mountain Woman has a strong personality, which enables her to stand for herself and answer back. The negative connotations she receives are meant to discourage female independence in favour of helplessness and submissiveness to ensure the endurance of patriarchy.

That Mountain Woman's character sinks further into negativity when her prowess in using herbs for medical purposes is presented in a negative way. Her creativeness is turned into something, which would probably not be so appealing to some people to downright loathing in community circles. That Mountain Woman boasts of her ability to abort pregnancies after Noria ran away from home when discovering that she was pregnant. That Mountain Woman says the following about Noria's pregnancy:

Didn't she (Noria) know that her mother had all the herbs to destroy the stomach even in the fourth month? Was she not aware of the young wives of migrants, who made mistakes in the absence of their husbands, and comes to her for assistance? (76)

If That Mountain Woman could do negative things with herbs as claimed in excerpt (76) above, a possibility is that there could be other good things she does with the herbs than to destroy. The study has since learnt that the reason for presenting women's skills negatively is to play down their creativity and to relegate them as unimportant to preserve male power. Gough (1975) argues that characteristics of male power in a male-identified society include confining women physically to prevent movement and to cramp their creativeness. According to Gough (1975), the characteristics mentioned are some of the methods by which male power in archaic and contemporary societies is manifested and maintained.

By choosing only married women whose husbands are away at work to come for abortion, the excerpt verges on derogation of women by portraying them as immoral. Szymanski's et.al (2011) talks of sexual objectification of women in patriarchal texts wherein women are dehumanised, and are treated as commodity or objects without regard to their personality or dignity. Constructing female characters, which are sexually objectified, is thus serving men's interests in perpetuation of patriarchy.

As an "Other", as a woman from another village, That Mountain Woman is chosen for humiliation by having extra marital sex with another "Other" who is a man from outside

the village as well. Now, both men and women from the protagonist's village are spared humiliation. It is said That Mountain Woman was heavily pregnant with Noria when she went back to her village to deliver the baby. A fake doctor examining her tells her "you are a beautiful woman. I think I have fallen in love with you" (36). Caught in the sex act itself with the fake doctor, That Mountain Woman's father did the following:

Kicked the door down and rushed into the hut where they were greeted by a scene that left them sweating with anger and disgust...the bogus doctor was flung through the door like a piece of rag, his pants flew after him. (39)

The excerpt above is an example of humiliation dramatised. What can be more humiliating than a heavily pregnant, married woman having sex with a man pretending to be a doctor who is not her husband in a consulting room? That Mountain Woman is, according to Bertens's (2014) argument, a clear *construction* because the way she is portrayed has not much in common with how women in reality see and experience themselves. The purpose of female constructions in some texts is for the maintenance and perpetuation of patriarchy.

(ii) Tampololo

Another domineering female character is Tampololo, one of the ten daughters of Mother-of-the-Daughters in *She Plays with the Darkness*. Tampololo was once a wife to Trooper Motsohi. Her domineering character is taken to the extreme by being physical with her husband. In one incident she found her husband in a shebeen and reacted as follows:

Tampololo leapt at Trooper Motsohi and throttled him with both hands. She threw him on the floor, sat on him, and rained fists on his face. (26)

Tampololo was known to beat up her husband every day for the flimsiest of reasons. (27)

She jumped at me, grabbed my maleness and twisted it. I screamed in pain, and she rained fists on my face, Motsohi tells Radisene. (90)

If you must beat me at all, my love, please don't do it in public. You make me the laughing stock of my friends, Motsohi pleads to his wife. (27)

Mrs Qobokwane says the following to Tampololo who rescued trooper Motsohi from his wife's beatings:

One day you are going to kill this man. You will see where you are going to get another husband. (27)

Tampololo is projected a stereotypical image of a domineering wife. It is said that she left her husband's "beautiful face marred by her fists" (112). According to Bertens (2014), strong women are negatively portrayed in favour of passivity and submissiveness. On Athenian men and women, Lagerlof (2000) argues that women were expected to subjugate themselves to the state; men were expected to defend women in their servitude – any other role outside of the confines became a threat to their society. Strong female characters such as Tampololo are perceived as threats to patriarchy; hence, they are constructed as "evil women" to discourage female independence.

Another reason for the negative portrayal of Tampololo could be that she is educated. Patriarchy regards career women as not taking care of men properly even if married. Women who follow their desires and ambitions receive negative connotation, are disliked, and rejected (Bertens, 2014). Regarding the "bad versus the good" categories of dualism approach, Donovan (1983) argues that under the category of the good-woman stereotypes, that is, those who serve the interests of the hero, are the patient wife, the mother/martyr, and the lady. In the bad or evil category are deviants who reject or do not properly serve man or his interests; the deviants include the old maid/career woman, the witch/lesbian, the shrew or domineering mother/wife. In line with Donovan's (1983) argument, Tampololo is a construction to discourage female independence in perpetuation of patriarchy.

(iii)Nkgono

In Mda's same narrative *She Plays with the Darkness* another female character called Nkgono, Dikosha's grandmother, is projected as a domineering woman. Nkgono's temper is described as follows:

[Her] fiery temper was well-known throughout the village. She was always strutting around the compound, threatening to beat up somebody, to break someone's jaw, to make someone defecate. (39)

Nkgono is rumoured to have killed her wheelchair-bound husband, who had been paralysed from the neck down in an accident in the mines. After his lump sum compensation money ran out, a rumour ran around the village about her:

A terrible rumour circulated that she had killed her husband (40).

When this old female character is made into a villain, her dead husband was made into a war hero who, in his youth days, "fought in the big war of the world...he had been taken prisoner by the Germans ...like all black soldiers, Grandfather was rewarded with a bicycle and two guns" (40-41). Donovan (1983) argues that in some patriarchal texts women are the scapegoats of much cruelty and evil.

An old woman, Napu's grandmother, in *Ways of Dying* is suspected of being a witch:

[She] was a vicious woman whom Noria suspected of being a witch...at night when they (there was someone else with the old woman) thought that Noria was fast asleep, the grandmother stripped naked, and danced over her, chanting in some strange language. (77)

Old female characters, Napu's grandmother and Nkgono, Dikosha's grandmother, are suspects, the former is suspected of having killed her husband when his pension money got finished; the latter is suspected of being a witch. It probably comes not as a surprise to feminists such as Donovan (1983) who argues that in some western literature women are the scapegoats of much cruelty and evil because much western thought and literature has failed to come to grips with the problem of evil because it facilely projects it upon women. The assumption that an old woman is a witch, and that an old woman has killed her husband is propaganda furthering sexist ideology. De Beauvoir (1949) argues that the way old female characters are treated in some texts is a reflection on society's indifference to the elderly. According Bertens (2014) the desired effect for repeating cultural stereotypes on literary representations of women is to maintain the status quo of male power.

4.3.4.10. Female characters in menial jobs

Gendered roles dictate that duties such as cleaning the house, doing laundry, nurturing children, cooking for the family, and serving men belong to women and girls (Sephodi, 2017:34). Discrimination in a work place is condemned in Mackinnon (1979) arguing that women are horizontally segregated by gender and occupy a structurally inferior low-paying service jobs position such as secretaries, domestics, nurses, typists, telephone operators, child-care workers, or waitresses. Patriarchy suppresses women in economic, social, and political spheres in order to maintain the unequal power relations between men and women and to promote female dependency.

In Mda's *Ways of Dying* almost all female characters are stereotyped to do menial jobs. Noria's first job as a six-year-old was to sing for Jwara to enable him to create his figurines. Her friend Malehlohonolo was a "washerwoman" (179) in the city. As payment for her singing, Noria was given only "sweets and chocolates" (101). She was given no money as payment. The young girl was exploited.

Noria's jobs as an adult included the following:

She found a job as a "sweeper" in government offices in town. (86)

She was also required to "make tea and serve her big bosses". (87)

After she was fired at the government offices for breaking cups and saucers, Noria found another job as a "sweeper" at a Bible Society. (88)

Noria left the Bible Society to "work" as a prostitute at a hotel after a friend had introduced her to the trade. (89)

Noria's growth is stunted, according to De Beauvoir (1949), judging by the excerpts above. Her path to transcendence has been blocked. The feminist critic argues that patriarchy constructs woman as immanence; as stagnation and immersion in nature thereby impeding women's struggle to achieve existential freedom and autonomous subjectivity. Female character Noria goes from sweeping to prostitution. Her "roles"

shows her life regressing to being a sexual objectified character. Noria is denied selfhood and growth; she is constructed to promote the concept of woman-as-object. Noria is thus a tool for perpetuating patriarchy.

Violence, rape and sexual harassment against women

Feminism is opposed to violence perpetrated against women. On contributing to the fight against patriarchy, Gough (1975:1765) argues as follows:

What impresses itself is the fact that we are confronting not a simple maintenance of inequality and property possession, but a pervasive cluster of forces, ranging from physical brutality to control of consciousness...

Physical brutality against women as argued in Gough (1975) above is evinced in *She Plays with the Darkness* in a hospital ward in Maseru. Radisene describes the patients' injuries as follows:

Here there were women who had been scalded with boiling water in fights over men, wives and girlfriends who had been battered by their partners, and young girls who had been raped and stabbed with knives. (154)

Excerpt above shows brutality against women which mirrors the way women are mistreated in reality. Repeating stereotypes in fictional texts perpetuates male abusive power. One unnamed female character in Mda's *Ways of Dying* was employed as a child-care worker for Noria's child when she met with sexual harassment from Noria's father. What happens is reported in excerpt (90) below:

At night Xesibe (Noria's father) tried to creep between her blankets. He wanted to take advantage of her, but she refused. He had tried it before, and when she had refused him the first time and the second time, she thought that he was going to give up... But he began to threaten her with violence, and wanted to take her valuables by force, she said she was going to take her things and go, since she was not prepared to stay in a home where the man of the home could not control his raging lust. (90)

Excerpt above reports that the sexually abusive man began to threaten the woman with violence. According to Gough's (1975) argument, the abusive man, and his lot,

has been “taught” by patriarchy that he has sex right to women. The critic argues that through the lens of “sexual domination perspective” sexual abuse and terrorism of women by men has been rendered almost invisible. Constructing female stereotypes is meant to bolster male power.

A young female teacher, Cynthia, in Mda’s *She Plays with the Darkness* was raped. Excerpts (31) and (32) below explains the situation as follows:

“You are coming with us Mistress. We need few lessons in the privacy of our police van”, the policeman says to the female teacher. (31)

“Terribly assaulted and repeatedly raped by policemen”. (32)

In excerpt above the young female teacher is a victim of rape by officers of the law. In the other excerpt above the perpetrators are husbands and boyfriends. The men’s action is brutality against women. Barry (1979) argues against what men believe is an overpowering, all-conquering male sex drive which they assume give them sex right to women. Pushing forth the notion of male sex right to women is a perpetuation of patriarchy.

Mother-of-the-Daughters in *She Plays with the Darkness* is married and has ten daughters who are all married. Her former son-in-law raped Mother-of-the- Daughters. She was violated. What is concerning is that the community she belongs to sympathises with her husband and not with her as a victim. The male protagonist remembers her after the rape as follows:

Sitting on the stoep outside, shoulders stooped in shame, and both men and women passing her as if she did not exist, on their way to sympathise with her husband. (185)

Who could do this to Father-of-the-Daughters? One man demanded angrily. (185)

No man who rapes another man’s wife like that can go free. (188)

It was not her husband that was raped but the wife; however, no one showed her sympathy or gave her support. Barry (1979: 1770) understands the behaviour of male-

centred communities towards female rape victims, and came up with a concept she refers to as the rape paradigm, which she explicates as follows:

The rape paradigm – where the victim of sexual assault is held responsible for her own victimization – as leading to the rationalisation and acceptance of other forms of enslavement where the woman is presumed to have chosen her fate, to embrace it passively or to have courted it perversely through rash or unchaste behaviour.

Barry's (1979) rape paradigm concept brings out patriarchal societies' belief that a female victim of rape is somehow responsible for her victimhood. The critic also delineates what she calls a sexual domination perspective by which sexual abuse and terrorism of women by men has been rendered almost invincible by treating it as natural and inevitable. Where the rape victim Mother-of-the-Daughters was seated, it was as if she was not there; invisible. Villagers simply passed her by to go and support her husband. Subjecting female characters in fictional texts to violence perpetrated by men, as they do in reality, is a perpetuation of violence against women, which is a misguided way of trying to hold onto male power. Mother-of-the-Daughters is a female construction in an effort to sustain patriarchy.

At the rape trial, Mother-of-the-Daughters did not get support either, just as she did not get support from her patriarchal society. The magistrate presiding over the case was male. In her case the gender of the magistrate is significant regarding the issue of impartiality. Unfortunately, the male magistrate was biased in giving the verdict, which is as follows:

The accused has committed a rape, which is a hideous crime, But the victim must be flattered that at her advanced age she should be the subject of desire of a handsome young man". (187)

The victim is an experienced woman who was not a virgin at the time of the crime, and therefore suffered no serious injury. She was also drunk when the crime was committed. It is well known that drunken women sometimes invite such actions. I therefore sentence the accused to three months' imprisonment suspended for two years. (188)

Residents went quiet when they saw the perpetrator walk out of the magistrate's gate free "as the waters of the Black River". (188)

The sentence given to the rapist in Mother-of-the-Daughters' case is as good as an acquittal. The problem Mother-of-the-Daughters faced when the rapist was on trial was the biasness of the male magistrate. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) rightly argues that the struggle for African women is partly because of colonial and neo-colonial structures that often place African men at the apex social stratification. Excerpts (187) and (188) above confirm that the man at the top to judge the case has proven to be problematic for the women by traumatising her further in court and letting the perpetrator go free.

4.3.4.11. Power of the fathers

Aderinto (2017) argues, in her study entitled "*Patriarchy and Culture: The Position of Women in a Rural Yoruba Community, Nigeria*", that the Nigerian rural women continue to suffer subordination and the ability to fully realise their potential is greatly hampered. Her argument continues that perhaps the greatest pattern of subordination is the area of "who decides what"; and her findings generally revealed that males enjoy a domineering position in this area. Rich's (1977:57) describes patriarchy in African traditional social milieu as follows:

The power of the fathers: a familial, social, ideological, and political system in which by direct pressure or through tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and division of labour – men determine what parts women shall or shall not play, and the female is everywhere subsumed by the male.

According to Aderinto (2017), powers of males over females greatly hamper women's ability to fully realise their potential. Under the subheading "power of the fathers" the study analyses Mda's texts under scrutiny for the presence, if any, of predetermined roles for women; restrictions for women on what to eat and not to eat; or what women can do or not do; or what women can wear or not wear. In *She Plays with the Darkness* the protagonist says,

They [men] drank beer as they roasted those parts of meat that were reserved for men only (43).

In *Little Suns*, what women are prohibited from eating is confirmed in the following excerpt:

He [Malangana] reckoned this morning the women would have already prepared and boiled the head – the part of an animal that was reserved only for men – and the men were already gathering to sink their teeth into it. (43)

It is worth noting that it is women who have to cook for men the part of an animal which they are not supposed to eat, which may suggest that the same men do not mind women touching their meat and cooking it, but they (women) are not equal enough to partake in it. It may be assumed that women in the texts are oppressed and that they are only in texts under scrutiny to serve men's interests. Stereotyping female characters perpetuates patriarchy.

Even in reality, sometimes the so-called "power of the fathers" verges on the absurd: Ahikire (2008: 19) explicates a law passed by the government of Uganda (an African state) on how women should dress as follows:

Henceforth, women have been forbidden from wearing clothes like miniskirts and cleavage-revealing blouses ("tops") that supposedly excite sexual cravings in public...if you (women) are dressed in something that irritates the mind and excites other people especially of the opposite sex, you are dressed in wrong attire and please hurry up and change.

Men's domination of women in patriarchates is applied to all aspects of women's life in an attempt to keep them subjugated. As seen above, dress codes for women are determined by men in parliament. Rich rightly argues that the male everywhere subdues the female. In reply to patriarchal decisions such as those taken by the Ugandan parliament, Ahikire (2008) argues as follows:

While feminists wrestle with the challenges of de-politicisation, a climate of misogynist reaction has formed, justifying itself by defining "African culture" according to the interests articulated by influential but sadly conservative men.

In Mda's *Little Suns*, the following extract stands as confirmation of what women are supposed to do or not do. Repeating stereotypes in fiction, the same as what is

happening in reality, is a perpetuation of patriarchy. An extract showing restrictions for women in *Little Suns* is as follows:

Amakhumsha do not even allow their women to ride horses at all as it is ungodly for them to enjoy the highly suggestive movements of a horse. And when they had to ride, perhaps because of some emergency, they must sit with both legs hanging on the same side and the skirts covering the legs down to ankles. This is the etiquette that the English have introduced from the land of their Queen Victoria. (10)

Social roles assigned to women are captured in excerpts from Mda's texts under scrutiny as follows:

The following are extracts from *She Plays with the Darkness*:

Girls were going to draw water from the well or to wash clothes in the icy water of the Black River", herd boys were on distant parts of the hillside or on the veld". (4)

Women were hoeing in the fields, girls gathering wood in the forests. (71)

The two women (Mother-of-the-Daughters and Mother-of-Twins) together "brewed the beer of the world". (43)

From *Ways of Dying* the following scene is recorded:

Men were sitting under the big tree in front of Xesibe's house, playing the *morabaraba* game, and drinking beer brewed by That Mountain Woman who always had a good hand in all matters pertaining to sorghum. (33)

Others (women) brewed and sold beer. (136)

In *Little Suns* the following extracts are roles for women:

A few yards away five women are hoeing. (26)

And (he) rides straight to the hoeing women. (28)

Excerpts above may be telling more than about the characters' bucolic lives. That boys were on "distant parts" (4) of the hillside could be indicative of that boys, according to De Beauvoir's (1949) argument, are allowed to go far in striving for freedom as paternalism constructs them transcendence; while paternalism claims girls for "hearth and home" in an attempt to maintain patriarchy.

The imbalance of power relations between men and women is evinced in excerpts below from Mda's texts under scrutiny. *In Ways of Dying*, Jwara says the following to his wife:

You know I don't argue with women, Mother of Toloki. If you want to be the man of the house; take these pants and wear them. (42)

That Mountain Woman "has no respect for our ways, and talked with men anyhow she liked". (34)

When Noria insisted on going back to town with Napu, his grandmother says to him:

She [Noria] is not going anywhere, Napu. You cannot be controlled by a woman. (78)

Extracts above show domination of women. It is a situation which can be summed up in accordance with Aderinto's (2017) argument that in a "who decides what" area, males are in a domineering position. Extract (42) seem to suggest that wearing of pants is associated with power; the assumption is that a pair of trousers is a symbol of power. Excerpt (78) denies woman control. According to Donovan (1983) women are called domineering shrews when trying to be assertive.

When Noria thought that she "could get a job as a sweeper or as a woman who made tea" (85) in government offices her husband responded as follows:

My wife will not work, especially in those offices. That is where women meet men. (85)

Excerpt (85) above could be an attempt by the husband to keep his wife economically dependent on him to maintain control over her. Mackinnon (1979) argues that in patriarchal societies two forces converge which are men's control over women's sexuality and capital's control over employee's work lives. Another argument relevant for the extract above is from Barry (1975) arguing that some of the methods by which male power is manifested and maintained include confining women physically and preventing their movement. Bertens (2014) argues that the desired effect by male power is a perpetuation of the unequal power relations between men and women.

This chapter analysed Mda's selected texts to determine if a sexist ideology controls the texts or not. The analysis was guided by the feminist theory upon which the study is premised. The feminist theory enabled the researcher to judge whether female characters in Mda's texts are authentic or if they are *constructions* meant to perpetuate patriarchy. The analysed texts show that a sexist ideology is inherent in them and that female characters are constructed to promote patriarchy. The study safely concludes that Mda has constructed female characters from a patriarchal perspective.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN MATLWA'S TEXTS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, Matlwa's texts are analysed to determine if women are portrayed from an Amazonian point of view or if they are delineated from a patriarchal view. I have to point out that reading through Matlwa's texts, even before engaging in the actual analysis using the feminist theory, I met female characters that are different from what I knew to be female characters in fictional texts. I found Matlwa's female characters to be eerily real. How I saw Matlwa's female characters is confirmed in Pucherova (2022) that the value of the representation of the middle-class, urban, professional, and financially independent black women should not be underestimated in the context of South African literature, where this type of heroine had never before existed. When talking of Matlwa's female characters as being "eerily real", it is in reference to the reality that sexual abuse and rape suffered by the heroines in Matlwa's texts is what women, girls and little girl children endure in reality in South Africa. It is no wonder then that educated and financially independent female characters get raped in "fictional" texts just as it happens in reality. With regard to rape and violence against women both in reality and in fiction, Pucherová (2022) argues that the experience of male sexual violence as a response to women's emancipation is one of the most common themes in democratic South African women's writing, and so are Matlwa's texts.

Amazonian feminism is a branch of the feminist theory which underpins the present study. Hurwit (1999) explicates that Amazons of the ancient Greek mythology have been taken up as a symbol for women empowerment as a means of achieving the feminist goal of gender equality. According to Grahamstad (1999), Amazonism emphasises female prowess as a means of achieving the feminist goal of gender equality. Amazons have become the the *de rigueur icon* of a strong independent woman. What is of advantage to the literary world is that, according to Langdon (2001),

the amazon image is adaptable, adjusting to changing historical and social circumstances in both ancient and modern usage. It is of advantage to this study that the amazon image is adopted as a yardstick to determine if female characters are constructed from a feminist perspective or from a patriarchal view. Matlwa's texts selected for analysis are as follows: *Coconut* (2007), *Spilt Milk* (2010) and *Period Pain* (2017). Analysis of the texts is preceded by an overview of each narrative. Background of the writer is given.

Background of author: Kopano Matlwa is a South African writer born in Pretoria in 1985. She is known for her novel *Spilt Milk* published in the post-Apartheid era. At the time of writing this thesis, Matlwa had written three novels, all of which are written in the post-Apartheid era: *Coconut* (2007), *Spilt Milk* (2010), and *Period Pain* (2017). Her debut novel *Coconut* (2007) addresses issues of race, class, and colonisation in modern Johannesburg. That Matlwa herself grew up in post-Apartheid South Africa may suggest that her writing could be radically speaking back to the old order.

5.2. SYNOPSIS OF MATLWA'S TEXTS

5.2.1. *Spilt Milk* (2010)

Spilt Milk addresses racial prejudice. It is set in the South African new dispensation in a black school where black children were politicised against white people and any of their ideologies.

Tshokolo, also known as Mohumagadi, a headmistress of that primary school she had built, had in her past an incident which caused her bitterness. Fifteen years before, Tshokolo attended a mixed-race school where she had a sexual relationship with a white boy, William. She left school after one sexual incident with William. Tshokolo waited for Bill/William to contact her but to no avail. Bill, now Father Bill resurfaces in her life at the very school she is heading. Father Bill came to the school on a rehabilitation programme after he was caught making love to an unknown black girl.

The impasse between Tshokolo and Father Bill plays out in the narrative with the issue of race in the forefront. It took the death of one of their school boy-child to let go of their past frustrations and prejudice. The boy was knocked by a car in front of the school as he ran away from Mohumagadi/Tshokolo who was scolding the boy for being outside his class talking to Father Bill whom she had by then fired from “her” school. The boy’s accident brought a better understanding between Mohumagadi and Bill. The characters analysed are Mohumagadi/Tshokolo and Father Bill. The sub-characters (School children) are Ndudumo, Zulwini, Moya and Mlilo.

5.2.2. *Period Pain* (2017)

The narrative is set in democratic South Africa at the height of xenophobic attacks on foreigners who were attacked and sometimes killed for all sorts of accusations which included that foreigners were receiving food parcels and were stealing jobs from Black South Africans. Masechaba is a young medical doctor on internship. She is concerned and troubled by her work situation as she finds that not much effort is put to save patients’ lives in that particular facility. She constantly blames herself for their deaths. On hindsight, she feels she could do better for the patients than she is presently doing.

A foreign national, Nyasha, is also a female medical doctor working in the same medical facility. Nyasha is friends with Masechaba, and they rent the same apartment. Masechaba’s conflict reaches a climax when she is gang-raped by three men as she went for a night duty call. Much of the narrative dwells on how she is trying to cope with the whole ordeal. She later discovers that she is pregnant from that rape. She resolves to keep the baby girl and calls her Mpho, Gift. The characters for analysis are: Masechaba and Nyasha.

5.2.3. *Coconut* (2007)

The narrative is about the life of two girls in the South African new dispensation. The girls are struggling with the issue of identity. In Part One of the novel, Ofilwe is a young

girl whose wealthy family moves to the suburbs. She attends school in a former “white only” school. She speaks only English even at home resulting in her not knowing her black language. She finds herself not belonging to neither her black culture nor to the white culture. She finds herself between two worlds and belonging to none. Her brother Tshepo helps her to unlock her identity crisis by showing her where her problem was.

The other female character in Part Two of the narrative is Fikile. She is from a poor background and had to drop out of school to work in a restaurant in town. She was using a train and a taxi to reach her place of work. Her mother committed suicide; she does not know her father. She stays with her uncle who sexually abuses her. She leaves his place to stay on her own. She knows English well. She wants nothing to do with black people as she sees herself in future having accomplished a good life for herself away from black people whom she regards as noisy, thieves and rapists. She does not know where to belong. It took a total stranger in the train to convince her who she is – a Black person. The main characters are Ofilwe and Fikile.

5.3. CHARACTERISTICS OF AMAZONS

Amazon feminism is encompassed in the feminist theory upon which the study is premised. Amazons have been taken up by feminists as a symbol for women empowerment to promote the feminist goal of gender equality. Amazons appeared to possess the same rights and freedoms as men enjoyed (Hurwit, 1999). Gramstad (1999) argues that Amazonism emphasises women independence, female prowess, women’s agency and capacity for power instead of the common pattern of female victim-hood. The Amazon image is adaptable, adjusting to changing historical and social circumstances in both ancient and modern usage (Langdon, 2001). According to Stewart (1995), Amazons challenged the stereotype of docile femininity by exhibiting a vigorous and resourceful courage in battle. Tyrell (1986) opines that Amazons were thought to be presenting danger to patriarchal states like Athens because they threatened the status quo by introducing the concept of individual freedom to Athenian women. Meeder (2008) points out that in her search for the real amazons, she discovered an unimagined realm of strong, independent and self-reliant women

who held theirs in a sometimes brutal and savage world. Female characters constructed from an Amazonian image present an alternative to female stereotypes in the portrayal of women in literary fiction. Spencer (2009) argues that in re-interpreting their experiences from a female perspective through prose, the emerging young female writers in post-apartheid South Africa extend the range of female characters and experiences that have been portrayed in fiction. For the present study, the “new” range of female characters are Amazonian characters. Pucherova (2022) also argues that as black women’s voices are becoming audible, the literary range of South African female characters and experiences are widening. The widening of the literary range of female characters and experiences is a move from the stereotypical construction of female characters. Donovan (1983) argues that texts written from a feminist perspective present the “inside” of women’s experiences, and women’s response to events.

It is against this backdrop that Matlwa’s female characters are analysed. As outlined in chapter Two, Mda’s and Matlwa’s female characters are analysed employing the feminist theory to determine if female characters are constructed from a feminist-Amazonian perspective or from a patriarchal view.

Literature reviewed were those engaging the feminist theory. Only two of those studies reviewed are included in this chapter. Dlomo (2002) used the feminist theory to analyse selected texts by Bessie Head and Ellen Khuzwayo. Dlomo (2002) concluded that the writings of the two women serve a didactic purpose by empowering women with a sense of resilience and avoidance of victimhood, self-pity and helplessness. Dlomo’s arguments are in line with the precepts of feminism/Amazonism. The present study concurs with the empowerment of women. In the study entitled *Female Subversion in Zakes Mda’s novel the Madonna of Excelsior*, Kgoshiadira (2015) argues that Mda’s female characters subvert patriarchy by engaging in prostitution as a means of economic empowerment. The present study disagrees with this argument that female characters can subvert patriarchy by being prostitutes because, already, men erroneously believe that they have sex right to women. Prostitution can only further reduce women as sex objects for men’s pleasure. I say “further reduce woman”

because, maybe, woman is a sex object for men's gratification. Pucherová (2022:147) cited an "uncomfortable" definition by MacKinnon regarding objectification of women as follows: "woman as whore: one who exists to be sexually done to, to be sexually available on men's terms, that is, a woman". In Mda's *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses*, which is one of the selected texts for the present study, one female character tells her friend, "I am a whore" (8). The study argues that prostitution perpetuates patriarchy, and thus cannot be made part of women's empowerment programmes. The study employs the feminist theory to determine if female characters in Matlwa's and Mda's selected texts are constructed from either a feminist perspective or from a patriarchal view. Female characters in texts for prostitution are constructed in perpetuation of patriarchy.

5.4. ANALYSIS OF MATLWA'S TEXTS

5.4.1. *Spilt Milk* (2010)

5.4.1.1. Mohumagadi, a school principal

The main female character Tshokolo aka Mohumagadi is a head of school. She could be any woman alive; she could be a sister next-door. Mohumagadi is a female character holding a leadership role. Being a leader involves working in a public space. Roles of female stereotypes are usually limited to private spaces – their homes. The study can assume that Mohumagadi is an empowered female character. Ibinga (2007) argues that female characters that are assigned roles that have hitherto been the domain of men is empowerment of women. She argues that there is a potential for achieving larger liberatory space for actual women by transforming images of how women are represented in fictional texts. As a head of school, Mohumagadi is a transformed and empowered female character. Pucherova (2022) avers that South African women writers of the twenty-first century argues for women's right to self-determination outside of traditional identities of domesticity, subservience, wifehood, and motherhood. Belsy (1985) argues that female characters that are subjects, as

opposed to objectified female characters that are only acted upon, can insist on occupying a significant position in society.

From the onset of the narrative, Mohumagadi takes action and initiatives. She is not a passive female character. She is capable of forming projects. She is active, thus opposing the stereotype of docile femininity. The following excerpt from the narrative under scrutiny confirms that Mohumagadi takes initiatives as a subject:

And so Mohumagadi, because that was how she was to be addressed, called for a school to be formed. *Sekolo sa Ditlhora*. A school of excellence. A place where Mathematics would not simply be a tool taught to tally mortality rates, to compare debts and to add zeros to failing economies, but a means to add something to the nothingness, to create change, fill space, organise thinking and multiply results. (4)

Mohumagadi is not only a female leader but a visionary leader. In her ability to take self-determined action, not only was Mohumagadi planning to build a school, but she also planned what type of school it would be. She planned that the school will not be ordinary but a school of excellence offering mathematics to hone learners' thinking and reasoning ability. Mohumagadi has a vision of empowering Black learners to use their education to fight for better lives for Black people.

She also has conviction power which is helpful for good leadership. Mohumagadi manages to convince the community to support her dream of building a school that she will be headmaster. Excerpt below confirms that Mohumagadi has convinced the community to support her initiative:

Everyone was thankful she was focused on making the school great, and everybody, even the white newspapers, agreed that it was a good thing. (6)

Mohumagadi fights back at racist and oppressive political system. When Father Bill (a white man) joins Mohumagadi's school, she gives him a political reason why she has built the school. She tells him the following:

You know why I created this school, Father Bill? I created this school so that we (Blacks), for a change, could have the privilege of feeling sorry for people like you. (181)

She had built an empire, a school, a school where no little black girl would ever have to cry over some foolish low-life dirty white boy. A school of giants. (176)

Excerpts above suggest that Mohumagadi is fighting against gender inequality, racism and repressive political system through education. In addition to being in the education sector, Mohumagadi could be said to be a political and gender activist. Shah (2008) suggests that challenging patriarchy effectively requires challenging other systems of oppression that mutually support each other. Mohumagadi is a female character that is taking action outside the sphere of her private life. According to Pantel (1994) women are honoured and esteemed only in the private sphere where they are traditionally relegated. De Beauvoir (1949) argues that paternalism claims woman for hearth and home. In the text under scrutiny, Mohumagadi ventures out of the home to a public role.

Excerpt (21) below tells of Mohumagadi's prowess in leadership as principal of a school. Gramstad (1999) argues that Amazon feminism emphasises female prowess in their respective fields. The excerpt below confirms Mohumagadi's skilfulness:

She needed to focus on what up to this point she had done so well: run the school. (21)

As head of school, Mohumagadi is faced with multiple responsibilities in running the school as principal. One of her duties as leader of school is recorded in the sentence below:

She walked towards the podium where she wanted to leave her notes for the morning's assembly speech. (65)

It is part of a leader's duty to give speeches. Mohumagadi is here seen preparing herself to give a speech in the morning assembly which is normally attended by all learners and teachers. The study assumes that it takes courage for a speaker to deliver a speech. In the text Mohumagadi is given a voice to address people. She is constructed in opposition to female stereotypes that, according to Farfan (1988) are silent objects that are only acted upon.

Mohumagadi could fare well if compared to Amazonian characters. Davis-Kimball (2002) argues that Amazons, unlike Athenian women, exhibited vigorous, resourceful and high courage in battle with men, and that Amazons seemed to excel men in spirit. Mohumagadi seems to be courageous and resourceful. It can be remembered that she was not given a post of principalship, but she created a school to head it herself. She did not wait for the patriarchal system to build a school and then put a man to be its leader as patriarchal systems usually do. Even in an African context, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) argues that patriarchal system places men at the apex of social stratifications. Mohumagadi seems to be aware of how a patriarchal system works. So, for her to lead a school she had to be resourceful and build a school with the community where she takes the lead.

In modern times, work situations can be associated with battles such as those undertaken by Amazons while Athenian women stayed home. It can be argued that work places could become battle fields sometimes. Our patriarchal societies make it difficult for women to lead, particularly over men. The work situation could thus become a battleground for women leaders. Pantel (1994) argues that the moment women try to escape the confines of their private spaces where they were traditionally relegated, they run into the practically impenetrable wall of male prejudice and bastion of male pride. Women leaders such as Mohumagadi are likely to face challenges in their leadership roles from the male sector. Be as it may, amazonians are said to be courageous in battle.

The historical background of South Africa does not make Mohumagadi's leadership role any easier either. She has to amass courage for her to be successful in her role as leader. Though the narrative under scrutiny is written well in democratic South Africa, patriarchy, gender inequality and even racism persisted. The dawn of democracy in 1994 was not a magic wand. The democratic statutes meant well, but people's mindset remained in the past. The presence of Father Bill as a white man in 'her' school could cause racial tension if Mohumadi may suspect that Bill may be having a white supremacy attitude by regarding himself as boss or "baas" over Blacks.

Mohumagadi has to fight patriarchal attitudes of Black men at the school as, according to Fick (2008), black cultural systems are patriarchal. In the school, there is white Father Bill who may try to resist being led by a woman who is also black. Another hurdle Mohumagadi had to scale through is that the very same Father Bill was her boyfriend when they were young but had to change schools after they were caught making love. She never heard from Bill for about fifteen years until Bill found himself facing her at that school where Mohumagadi is head. She would need courage to successfully carry out her leadership role.

In venturing out of private life into a leadership role, Mohumagadi is defying docile femininity expected of women by patriarchy. In her research on ancient Amazons Meeder (2008) found that the role as wife and mother in patriarchal ancient Athens was considered the only civilised role for women; any other role outside of those narrow confines became a threat to their patrilal society. Amazon feminism calls for the construction of female characters that can hold their own against patriarchy. Such female characters are constructed from an Amazonian perspective in promotion of the feminist goal of gender equality. Mohumagadi's role in the text is that of leadership which plays out in the public arena. De Beauvoir (1949) argues that female stereotypes are constructed for hearth and home, but Mohumagadi's work is not home-based. In working in the public sphere, Mohumagadi opposes female stereotypes.

The three excerpts below tell more about how well Mohumagadi executes her duties, and her emotional state:

She considered it, deliberated with the idea that as head of the school it was her duty to make sure that everything was fine in that classroom. (111)

It was a rare event. She was usually on schedule, on target, on point, on time but seldom happy, simply happy. (120)

The woman, the black one, the one who was the principal, the one the boy (Bill) grew up knowing as Tshoki, the one who was always angry, the one called Mohumagadi, woke up that morning cold, shivering, stiff. (185)

The three excerpts above concern her leadership role, and to what her job entails. The word “principal” in excerpt (185), and the phrase “head of the school” in excerpt (111) attest to her leadership position. The phrases “on schedule”, “on target”, “on point”, “on time” in excerpt (120) refer to her skilfulness in executing her work as leader. Amazon feminism celebrates female prowess as exhibited by women in sports, leadership or in any space in which they excel. The excerpts above indicate that Mohumagadi is dedicated to her work and could be said that she excels in her high ranking job of being a leader.

The phrases “seldom happy” and “always angry” talks to her “inside” experiences. In reality people do get angry; if Mohumagadi can get angry as humans do, the suggestion is that she resembles people in reality. Mohumagadi’s emotional state is shared with the reader. Stereotypically constructed female characters rarely register their emotions, and can hardly talk. Stereotypically constructed female characters may thus be labelled as “empty shells” with no experience or emotion to share with readers. As a leader, Mohumagadi exercises authority in the school. Her authority can be observed as she plays her leadership role throughout the narrative. To Father Bill who had just gotten into her office without an appointment and sat down; she authoritatively says the following to him:

The culture here is that you make an appointment if you would like to see me, Father Bill; I prefer to have my mornings to myself. (99)

She stamps her authority in excerpt (99) above. She is disciplining Father Bill because she may feel that he does not show her respect expected for a leader. The above excerpt is not the only incident that she admonishes Bill. Excerpts below include angry thoughts about Bill. She was pacing down the corridor when Father Bill called out her name. She responded as follows:

“Father Bill, we do not yell at this school”, she said coldly before he could say a word. (70)

The rules were not going to change for this man, priest or not, and she hoped Miss L (secretary) knew better than to be intimidated by his skin. (100)

And if he thought he could come here and throw his colour around, then he was mistaken. (61)

And as long as the man was in her school he would have to learn that she was the boss and he was the employee. (100)

He could not be allowed to come to this school and do as he willed, that she was responsible for all the minds within those walls and what went into them, that it was for their sake and not her own that she went by that classroom everyday. (112)

Excerpts above seem to indicate that Mohumagadi feels she needed to stand firm to this man in case he thinks he has power over her as taught by patriarchy; or probably because he may think he is superior to Blacks as taught by the racist ideology of Apartheid; or even probably because he was her boyfriend fifteen years before when they were both school children. It could be anything, but she sounds angry at him and talks back at him to put him in his place. Mohumagadi is a subject and thinks for herself. She is in the text for herself, and not to serve men as stereotypes are usually constructed to serve men in perpetuation of patriarchy. Bill's response to Mohumagadi's authority shows that she has authority over him. The following excerpts bear testament to her effectiveness in commanding authority:

When Mohumagadi enters his class, he (Bill) stood up quickly and she waved her hand for him to sit. (165)

She was still beautiful as she was then. Scarier, but still beautiful; Bill admits. (76)

He thanked her for her time and apologised again for shouting and running down the corridor. (71)

The study deems it important to register Father Bill's reaction to Mohumagadi's authority because it could be used as one of the yardsticks to measure how successful she is in her leadership role. To get a man's respect, particularly a white man's respect, on considering the country's racist past and patriarchy, is important for Mohumagadi's success in her leadership role. If Mohumagadi could have been in a patriarchal text, she could have played a salvific role judging by Bill's looks of shabbiness. In some patriarchal texts when men fall from grace, it is usually a wife or a girlfriend who has to pick up the pieces. Bill was Mohumagadi's boyfriend some times back. Regarding a salvific role, Donovan (1983) argues that Western projects of redemption almost always depend upon a salvific woman. In some patriarchal texts Bill's sorry situation

could have “earned” him a saviour women but in this texts he is given no woman to “save” him, not Mogumagadi. Hereunder follows what describes Bill’s physical present condition:

“The man, he is so pale” (11), one child said.

“His hair, it has no colour” (11), another child said.

He (Father Bill) had been in trouble with women before and each time the church had forgiven him and sent him away on a retreat to reflect on his actions. (56)

The man, the white man, the priest, the one with blisters on his lips... (185)

Salvific women in patriarchal texts would have embraced him with no questions asked because they are solely constructed to serve even in absurd and awkward situations. However, Mohumagadi is not playing any role of saviour at all. She, instead, said the following about Father Bill’s distasteful situation:

You are a failure in every possible respect... you are a male whore. A whore; a regrettable human being, a mistake. (180)

Mohumagadi boldly calls Father Bill a whore which is almost unheard of in patriarchal texts for a man to be called a whore. The word *whore* is usually reserved for single female characters in patriarchal texts to discourage female independence. An independent female character such as Mohumagadi could have easily been herself being labelled *a whore* in patriarchal texts and not the other way round. In this text, Mohumagadi is neither a whore nor a salvific woman.

Feelings of frustration which Mohumagadi has are shared with the reader. Donovan (1983) argues that texts that are not controlled by sexist ideology present the “inside” of women’s experiences. The excerpt below presents how Mohumagadi feels:

She’d been done wrong before and those (Bill) who had hurt her had carried on without a word. Had moved on with their lives, feeling nothing, no pangs of conscience, no self-reproach, leaving her forgotten, still waiting for an explanation. (130)

Excerpt (130) shows that Mohumagadi has feelings and she shares her feelings with the reader. In the excerpt, Mohumagadi is hurt by Bill's lack of support after they were caught making love years ago and had to go to separate schools. As in real life relationships, parting ways hurts. Mohumagadi hurts; she resembles real people. Mohumagadi has a voice, she is not silenced. Having a voice equips her to speak, to speak up, and to speak back at oppressive situations. Bambara's (1996:255) perspective on the value of women's voices is as follows:

By denouncing any form of oppression against them, women empower themselves in order to resist their oppressors. Being silent could be interpreted as self-oppression, which affects the whole immune system and consequently the health of the person. Silence can be seen as a contribution to one's own oppression. Adopting silence in oppressive conditions makes room for the perpetuation of submissive cultural practices.

In accordance with the quote above, female characters equipped with voice are empowered. Farfan (1988) argues that female characters constructed from an Amazonian image are exemplary figures in the struggle for the emancipation of women in literature and society. Mohumagadi is equipped with a voice and she has a leadership role. It could be argued that she is an empowered female character constructed for women empowerment. In excerpts below Mohumagadi is angry at Bill and she confronts him. She is angry at Bill about their love relationship that happened outside the narrative some fifteen years earlier. Mohumagadi confronts Bill, and a heated debate ensued between the two. Mohumagadi, screamed at him for referring to their past together as "spilt milk". The following excerpts show Bill's reaction to Mohumagadi's tirades directed at him:

His soul was trembling. How could he fix this? He dropped to the ground. Grabbed her around the knees. He tried to hold her, to stop her, to explain. (169)

Get your hands off me, you piece of nothing. And get up from that floor, you coward. You pathetic coward! Mohumagadi fires at him. (169)

It is a fight; Mohumagadi lashes out at Bill, and his response to Mohumagadi's tirades could be described as pathetic! She kicks dust sending Bill to the ground grovelling. Mohumagadi is a subject and responds to events unlike an object that is only acted upon. Mohumagadi could be described as a warrior woman. Hurwit (1999) describes Amazons as warrior women. As a subject Mogumagadi takes action, speaks back,

and fights back. The study therefore argues that Mohumagadi is constructed as an Amazonian figure. Mohumagadi has power to hire and to fire an employee. Not only did she hire Father Bill but she also fires him for playing a video which she deemed improper to a class of learners after school. She confronts Bill as follows:

You never have any intention of doing anything, do you Bill? I want you out; I want you out of my school right now. (180)

We are doing something here, Bill, bigger than anything your pathetic little mind has thought of imagining. Something you could never be a part of. You have done enough damage. I think it's time that you go. (181)

Get out of my school, Bill. (181)

This lady does have power, and she is not afraid to exercise it. In the excerpts above, she does not fear firing a man, a white man, from his job. Mohumagadi displays Amazonian-like courage and fighting spirit. It can be difficult to associate Mohumagadi with a passive, controlled and voiceless female character. In fairness, Mogumagadi is an opposite of a female stereotype. It could be argued that Amazonian character is a recto while a patriarchal female construction is a verso in depiction of women.

Tshokolo aka Mohumagadi is constructed with freedom to choose whether she wants to marry or not to marry. The Amazons, on whose image Amazonian characters are constructed, are said to be hunters who waged war against men; lived as they chose and, more to the point, chose to live without men (Meeder, 2008). Amazonian counterparts, the Athenian women's important roles were only those of being wife and mother. Mohumagadi is free to think for herself and make choices.

On marriage, feminist critic Masenya (1996) argues that not every woman in society is a wife, therefore girls as well as boys, should be freed from marrying if they choose not to marry. Mohumagadi says her choice not to marry should be understood as having made a choice, but she only chose differently. The three excerpts below show the view that Mogumagadi has on marriage:

Some of the female staff with their husbands and large families often tried to introduce her to people, men. She remembered her dead mother's words: "Why

are you so different? You have everything going for you, you are intelligent, you are beautiful, you have no reason not to fit in, but you don't, you insist on living on the periphery. (95)

But they didn't understand there was no other alternative for her and not everyone was made for the three children, a husband and *ousie*. She had a white maid, a school full of exceptional children, a column in the newspaper, and no man to slow her down. (96)

They didn't see that some people needed to sacrifice their personal lives for something greater than themselves, and that it was labour of love. She was no more unhappy than the wife of some BEE giant who drove around in a fast car with a bunch of Grade Ten girls. We all choose. She just chose differently. (96)

Mohumagadi's view on marriage defies the practice of socialisation of marriage by patriarchy that takes place in reality and in fiction. Rich (1977) argues that socialisation of marriage amounts to compulsory heterosexuality. Her argument is that compulsory heterosexuality functions to ensure that women are sexually accessible to men. This argument suggests that marriage benefits mostly men than women. At this point in her life, Mohumagadi seems to be thinking that having a husband would be cumbersome. Probably because she is a career woman Mohumagadi may be feeling that having a husband would slow her down career wise. By the way, career women are labelled as "bad" in patriarchal contexts arguing that career women do not serve men properly. The excerpts above also highlight the issue of abusing women and girls by men who use sexual abuse and violence on women as a means of controlling them to sustain patriarchy. Patriarchal texts are usually mum on the issue of women and girl children abuse. Mogumahadi calls out to attention the abuse of women. She could be an activist against women abuse and violence.

It seems Mohumagadi has a somewhat welcoming view on motherhood than on marriage; as captured in the excerpt below:

She hated the fact that her house smelt of nothing...not of Domestos on clean tiles, not of children jumping on a bed, not even of the sun. Not that she wanted any of that. She just wished it smelt of something. (95)

The excerpt above seems to suggest that Mohumagadi does think of having children, but perhaps cautiously so. However, Mohumagadi's creator seems to be aware that patriarchy uses motherhood to keep women busy with nursing children at home. According to Mishra (2013), post-colonial feminists argue against motherhood as an institution of women control. They want to remove age-old constrictions laid on women's lives, and live on par with men. Mohumagadi could be making informed decisions about marriage and having babies. She does not receive socialisation of marriage as dogma that patriarchal societies insist upon for patriarchal reasons.

In choosing not to marry, Mohumagadi has for now chosen independence in leading her life as opposed to the usual traditional dependency on men. A female character's independence is celebrated in Amazonian texts, but discouraged in some patriarchal texts wherein unmarried and independent female characters are labelled as whores. In this text Mohumagadi is unmarried and seems to be independent and she is not called names as she would probably be in androcentric texts. Bertens (2014) rightly argues that unmarried female characters get negative connotations to discourage women independence and promote women dependency on men in perpetuation of the unequal power relations between men and women.

Mohumagadi's sexual feelings are shared with the reader. Female stereotype's feelings or emotions are rarely registered. In this text, Mohumagadi's feelings or sexual desires are registered. She imagines she is with Father Bill (her one-time boyfriend of fifteen years earlier):

She curled her back as she felt the shudder of warmth come down her spine and in between her legs. And sucked in the inside at the sudden pleasure of it. Tiny tingles danced in the depths between her thighs. She switched on the radio, dismissing the warmth that made her want to part her legs. Turned the volume up when she felt her palms get damp around the steering wheel. "How primitive," she said to herself. And with that, the desire was gone. (138)

Her sexual desires could be indicative that she represents real people to whom sexual desires may be a "normal" thing. For Mohumagadi's sexual desire to be described in the text under scrutiny would probably suggest that women's sexual desires are not

considered taboo to be swept under the carpet. It could be argued that nature itself might have given both men and women equal sexual desires. What men want, women want. An English saying, “what is good for a goose is good for a gander”, is probably the right way to go in feminism because their goal is to achieve gender equality. Mohumagadi is accorded an opportunity to tell the reader her sexual desires.

Mohumagadi is so advanced in her fictional life that she even has a car of her own, and she drives it herself. In one of the chosen texts, it is claimed that one main female has never seen a car except a lorry; which is a little far-fetched. Here Mohumagadi drives herself. I do not think it would be an exaggeration to say that Mohumagadi is an empowered female character. Amazons are said to have owned horses and also rode them, and they could fight on horseback. Owning a car in modern times could be similar to owning a horse in ancient times. For Mohumagadi to own a car suggests that she is able to move freely from one place to another. With regard to movement of women, Gough (1975) argues that it is characteristic of male power in archaic and contemporary societies to confine women physically to prevent movement. In owning a car, it could be argued that Mohumagadi has freedom of movement as men who own cars do.

Thoughts and actions of the female character are shared with the reader. Mohumagadi fondly thinks of this white man, Father Bill, present here in her school. It can be remembered that Bill was her boyfriend years back. As she was thinking of him, Mohumagadi does the following:

She stuck her hand out and ran it slowly across Father Bill’s car. As soon as she did it, she quickly pulled her arm back in, rolled up her window, switched on her engine and drove away. What was she doing? Even if it was possible, she couldn’t go back, back to where they were, back to where they had been, so what was she doing? She kept glancing nervously in her rear-view mirror, foolishly afraid that someone had seen her and was following her to stop her and tell her that they had. How pathetic. She felt so pathetic. (123)

“He (Father Bill) is a past page in your life Tshokolo. A past page; and nobody reads a book backwards,” she said out loud to herself. (123)

Mohumagadi takes the reader along with her by sharing how she really feels about Bill. It can be seen that she still has feelings for Bill. At the moment she feels stupid in showing her true feelings of fondness for Bill. Unlike “empty shells” constructs of patriarchal texts that have no inside story to tell, Mohumagadi lays it bare. Perhaps a gentle touch to his car may feel like she is touching him. Bill seems to occupy her thoughts:

She laughed again, this time at herself for ever having being in love with this person (Bill). He wasn't even her type! She had been a child, a foolish child in love with first white boy who had ever given her attention. (101)

This can be seen as conflict within her. She thinks of him with fondness but then again seems to contradict her feelings through what she thinks of the whole thing. In reality it could be an acceptable reaction in not knowing what to make of a situation in which one finds oneself. If she were in a patriarchal text, she would probably not be having conflicts about their relationship; she would be “living happily ever after” as a salvific woman because her man would be back after fifteen years of absence with no communication whatsoever. But Mohumagadi thinks for herself, and takes actions accordingly.

Mohumagadi does get angry. While driving one time, a male driver showed her a finger after she lost concentration at the robot failing to move in time, thus delaying the male driver. She was angry at the driver; saying the following to herself:

He was probably just an unschooled, feather-brained, feeble-minded half-wit who didn't recognise a woman doing great things for society when he saw one. She hated him. She hated them. She hated all of them. They were all the same, Bill, the Fathers at the church, all of them. (127)

She loses concentration on the road, she seems to be angry with everyone. These are genuine feelings that real people have. It may sound bizarre, but it is true that in some texts, female characters, from beginning to the end of the narrative, never get angry, and never feel anything. Mohumagadi shows confidence in her worth in knowing that she is doing great things for society (127). Doing great things for society is in line with women empowerment in society and in fictional texts.

At some point, Mohumagadi was so angry at Father Bill for playing a video that a group of four learners (two girls and two boys) have recorded their private parts for a school project on different stages of puberty. Here follows Mohumagadi's angry reaction towards Bill is described as follows:

She (Mohumagadi) wanted to grab him, shake him, smash him, crush him under her foot and spit on him. (178)

The words "grab, shake, smash, crush" may be symbolising a battle in which she defeats him. Mohumagadi does not seem to fear Bill. According to Hurwit (1999), Amazons were powerful women who waged war against men. Mohumagadi does not seem to fear confrontation. Her problem with Father Bill finally reaches boiling point. She is a subject, and she takes action. She confronts Bill about their sexual encounter that took place when they were young, fifteen years before. Her anger mostly stems from the fact that Father Bill never contacted her for all those years. Their confrontational conversation went as follows:

It's all just spilt milk now, Tshokolo; no point crying over it.

Spilt milk? Spilt milk? Are you crazy? Are you insane? You want to call fifteen years of pain, Bill, gut-wrenching pain; fifteen years of lack of sleep; fifteen years of fear; fifteen years of madness, agony and rage, spilt milk? So I should just forget everything, is that what you are suggesting, Bill? All those promises you made in '94, I should just forget them? I should just forget the fifteen years you took from my life? (168)

To Father Bill, their relationship is similar to the proverbial "spilt milk". Bill's response makes Mohumagadi raging mad. Real people would probably be angry too at his lack of concern. The study assumes that were she constructed to do his bidding as some patriarchal texts do, she would have simply embraced him the first day she saw him arriving at her school. But Mohumagadi is not a passive unthinking puppet; and so she engages Bill hard. It can be seen that Bill is in trouble for referring to their past relationship as "spilt milk". Mohumagadi is here standing up for herself against a man, a "patriarchal god" that women are supposed to worship.

Mohumagadi does not keep silent at what she considers unfair or unjust. She rightly raises her voice against what she perceives as unfair or abusive practice. Mohumagadi refuses to submit to men's abusive practices. In Ibinga (2007) it is rightly argued that adopting silence in oppressive conditions makes room for the perpetuation of submissive cultural practices, and that silence can be seen as a contribution to one's own oppression. Fortunately for Mohumagadi, the text she finds herself in has equipped her with a tool to fight – her voice.

The female character also has feelings of regrets. As a subject, Mohumagadi expresses her thoughts of regrets to the reader. The reader is not left in the dark about what she thinks and feels. She regrets the sexual encounter she had had with the white boy Bill, now Father Bill, fifteen years earlier. Her regrets are mixed with anger towards herself and towards the boy. The excerpts hereunder bear testament of her anger and regrets:

She remembered how pathetic he had made her feel. So embarrassed. So rejected and unloved. She had been shunned, unable to accept that such a thing could happen to her. (163)

She was the clever one who knew her times tables before he knew his. She was the talented one who used big English words like “consequences” when Bill and the rest of the boys came in hurt. She was the one who grew up knowing she was different, set apart, special. (163)

To be reduced to nothing by a boy, who didn't deserve her anyway, but one whom she would still take back if he changed his mind – He'd made her into a sorry, weak, needy, regrettable character. He'd taken all the love she had inside of her and made her hate herself. (163)

And look, who was he now? A nobody. An absolute nobody, a person who would not be missed by the world if he died. (163)

In the excerpts above, Mohumagadi shares her “inside” experiences in clear terms. The reader understands and somehow “feels” with her what she feels. Mohumagadi shares with the reader what would usually be called private thoughts. It could be that the voices, as opposed to silences, that women should have to speak up, may include voices to share experiences with. The vivid thoughts she shares are a mixture of feelings about how she felt then, at the time of the incident, and how she feels now. It is quite a journey for her. Her experiences seem so real that it could be possible that

readers may relate to her experiences. The realness of her feelings or experiences opposes how stereotypes are. In this regard, Bertens (2014) argues that stereotypes are *constructions* since they do not have much in common with the way women see and experiences themselves. With Mohumagadi, women can see themselves in her.

In the text, Mohumagadi is accorded a chance to reflect upon her “own” life. The action of self-reflecting defies the patriarchal notion that women are simply vehicles for the growth and salvation of the male protagonist (Donovan, 1983). It can be seen that Mohumagadi is a subject, and not an object. Objects are not given time to reflect on their lives, probably because they do not have a life of their own to begin with; they are in the text only to sustain patriarchy. Mohumagadi is angry at herself and she is angry at Bill. Mohumagadi also cries when it hurts. She remembers her reaction to her troubled relationship with Bill years ago. It is explained as follows:

Mama Twiggy had been the one to pat her back...Mohumagadi sat crying and starring out of the windows, waiting for Bill to return. (80)

In excerpt above, Mohumagadi is seen crying because it hurts. Crying when it hurts is a human reaction. The “machines” that are constructed in some patriarchal texts neither think, feel nor cry. Mohumagadi even receives support from people around her for the pain she is going through. In the excerpt above, she receives support from a character called mama Twiggy. Support, care or attention is rarely given to female constructions in patriarchal texts. In what she names “sexual domination perspective” Barry (1979) argues that a victim of sexual assault is held responsible for her own victimisation; a woman is presumed to have chosen her fate through unchaste behaviour. In the present text, Mohumagadi is receiving support. To be given support could suggest that the text she is in is not controlled by patriarchy.

Mohumagadi is free to give her opinion. Mohumagadi has the ability to point out men’s failures and to give her political views. Hereunder Mohumagadi points to Bill’s failures:

Life hurts Bill. You people are used to having us apologise for our opinions, sugar coating the truth for you so it is easier to swallow. Well I’m not about to do that, Bill. You are a failure in every possible respect and have no right to tell me

anything about my school or my staff or my children or how we do things. You are a male whore. A whore; a regrettable human being, a mistake. (180)

It may sound strange that she calls him a whore because he is a priest. But the reason he finds himself in Mohumagadi's school is because he unrepentantly slept with women in the mission. This is quite a reversal of roles where in misogynistic texts only women are labelled as whores. Hardly can one ever come across a male character labelled a whore in patriarchal texts, but single women are almost always labelled as whores. Opinionated and politically minded Mohumagadi continues to tell Bill a piece of her mind as follows:

The truth, Father Bill, is no Smartie; it happens to be a great big suppository that gets shoved up your rectum. You have had your chance, years to study us and pick us apart, examine us under all sorts of microscopes, generation after generation and enough is enough. (180)

Strong words such as these above can only come from a strong and courageous character. Mohumagadi is a powerful character that opposes a patriarchal notion that women are "passive and weak" (Stewart, 1995). Mohumagadi is no weakling; she tackles Bill squarely as an equal, no less. She strongly condemns racism. She is concerned about racial prejudice and oppression of Blacks. Her anger could also be directed at the patriarchal system which Bill represents as a man. Mohumagadi is active and is vocal against oppressive conditions which women are subjected to. Amazonian characters are active against patriarchy. Amazonian characters are constructed in fictional texts as means of promoting the feminist goal of gender equality.

Mohumagadi is brave enough to speak her mind even on issues which might be considered controversial. Mohumagadi's thoughts are as follows:

The way she saw it, God and His Bible, which suspiciously held servitude in high esteem, had no place in this school of change. God was not there when we were chained, when we were raped, when we were cheated and beaten for all those centuries past, so why only now does God want to involve Himself when it appears that we are winning? No, to Mohumagadi God was solely for weddings and bedtime stories and certainly for work. (7)

Mohumagadi seems to think that the Bible expects Blacks' servitude to Whites while also expecting women's servitude to men. Her thoughts are similar to Masenya's (2009) argument that the bible was used as a weapon of subjugation in colonial times. She wants change to take place. She has a voice to speak against subjugation, be it racial subjugation of Blacks in a South African context or patriarchal domination of women. Mohumagadi raises her voice against oppressive conditions affecting Blacks by racism, and women by both racism and patriarchy.

The female character in the text under scrutiny speaks back to what she considers to be oppressive systems: politics, patriarchy, racism and religions. She is even suspicious of the deity God's motives. While Mohumagadi is aware of problems around her and speaks up, patriarchal female characters are made to be totally oblivious to oppressive conditions under which they may be living; they hear nothing and see nothing. Mohumagadi's actions are convincing that she is constructed a subject. The passive female characters are objects meant for perpetuating patriarchy. Female characters that take action are modelled on an Amazonian perspective for empowerment of women and advancement of feminist goal of gender equality.

In the excerpt below, Mohumagadi seems to be complaining about Bill's promotion of some colonial religious ideologies which she believes promote servitude. Mohumagadi's determination to act is confirmed as follows:

A large, angry, anxious, afraid part of her did not want to just sit there and do nothing while he (Father Bill), a threat to her world, her planet, her universe, moved freely within her school. (112)

Mohumagadi is determined to take action against Bill whom she regards as a threat to her world. She admits that she is afraid to take action and that she is angry and anxious, but she is determined to do it. She needs courage to do it. Mohumagadi has the ability to act against anything that threatens her existence. Being aware of the threat to her survival gives Mohumagadi courage to fight. Were she not aware of the threat she is referring to, like stereotypes would not, she would not need courage to

do anything. Because she is aware of the threats, she fights. Georgoudi (1994) argues that Amazons' fights against men were to ensure their survival as a free tribe of independent women who were not prepared to live as Athenian women did under patriarchy. Mohumagadi feels threatened by the presence of Bill in her school. She seem to associate Bill with racism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. She takes action against any threat to her life.

Some sunshine does come into Mohumgadi's life in the form of love. Other than being wives, mothers or girlfriends rarely anything is said about love, mostly in patriarchal texts. It can be remembered that Bill was pelted with all kinds of insults after referring to their ended relationship as "spilt milk". Bill blurted out to Mohumagadi the following:

Please, Mohumagadi. I'm sorry, so sorry. Please. I love you, Tshokolo. (181)

Whether Bill may mean it or he may be saying it to appease Mohumagadi is neither here nor there. Just mentioning the word "love" to her is enough to assume that she is worthy of love; and not a mere object to be used and discarded as he has done fifteen years earlier. Throwing in the element of love could be indicative that some contemporary texts do see the value and worthiness of women; worthy of love; worthy of their partner's love. Bill's love for Mohumagadi could be medicinal to her, taking into cognisance the anger she buried inside herself for many years. Mohumagadi demands accountability from Bll. She could be feeling that he cannot get away with it; he has to account for his actions against her.

Father Bill's love for Tshokolo/Mohumagadi is also recorded in the incident which took place fifteen years earlier after his sexual encounter with Tshokolo. Bill's thoughts about Tshokolo are registered as follows:

He remembered, vividly, that day when Fathers had made him pack his bags. As he left the place of his upbringing, he told himself that even if he had to force it, he would cry for her every day, for what they had, for what was once new and beautiful and true and had now been lost. (78-9)

Father Bill then paints a beautiful picture of his love for Tshokolo. The fact that love is included in their relationship suggests that Tshokolo was not used as a sex object

because they seem to have had an emotional attachment to each other. Eventhough women are arguably used, but when love is included in the relationship the stark reality of being used is cushioned, not much. That there was love between the two can also be confirmed in what Bill describes as their time together back then. It can be observed that he is not describing the sexual act itself, as male characters in patriarchal texts usually do. He describes their togetherness as follows:

He had not wanted to forget how it felt to be with her, to lay his head in her lap, to smell her hand, to rest his heart against her shoulder. Had not wanted to forget why their being torn apart made him, a man, a grown man, a man of God, wail like a little boy. (79)

The text makes references to love, and falling in love. Talking of love in this text seems like an antithesis of most androcentric texts wherein the word “love” is rarely mentioned. Meeder (2008) argues that in ancient patriarchate Athens woman was simply a fertile ground to be sown, acting as a vessel to hold a developing life, nothing more. There is no mention of loving the vessel that holds the developing child. In patriarchal view, woman is simply an object that is passive and only acted upon. Mohumagadi does not seem to belong to the passivity view of women.

Talk of love can also be observed in the excerpt below as Tshokolo was given advice fifteen years previously by an elder woman at the mission school she attended:

You are doing yourself a disservice, my child, by falling in love with these ones. All these Christian ones, they won't ever love you as much as they love their God and their church, and how can you ever compete with that my child? What chance do you stand against God? They will sacrifice you for the sake of a Bible study lesson. (81)

And, worse, they die young, they often die young and it's just the way it is. It's us selfish, moody, greedy, dirty people who live long miserable lives. They are here for just a moment, like a beautiful sunset, and then are gone as if they never were and only you are left with the painful memory of their existence. (81)

Not only are the two female characters, Mohumagadi and the elder woman, permitted to love and be loved in this text, they are also allowed to tell of their experiences and memories, both beautiful and sad. In talking to Tshokolo, it can be deduced that the elder female character was also sharing her own experiences on love. It seems she

had suffered a loss of a white loved one, probably a priest, through death. The elder woman seems to think that the priests die too soon. For the two women to share their experiences is an act of supporting each other and empowering each other. Female characters that share their “inside” experiences are empowered female characters.

In reading the experiences and memories of the elder female character in the mission school one learns. Her experiences are given as advice to Mohumagadi. Donovan (1983) argues that literature on its most profound level is a form of learning, arguing as follows:

We learn, we grow from the knowledge of life, of psychology, of human behaviour and relationships that we discover in worthwhile works of art.

The quote above refers to literatures that are worthwhile works of art from which readers can learn. Amazonian texts could arguably be referred to as worthwhile works of art as their female characters are empowered, and readership can learn from such texts.

5.4.1.2. Ndudumo’s mother, a writer

Ndudumo is a boy who attends Mohumagadi’s school. Mohumagadi does meet her learners’ parents from time to time. Ndudumo’s mother is now visiting the school. She is only known as Ndudumo’s mother. She has managed to transform her life into something bigger by becoming a writer who became famous almost overnight. The excerpt below attests to the transition of her life:

As Mohumagadi put on her warm school principal face and greeted Ndudumo’s mother with a hug, she could not help but marvel at the 360-degree transformation the woman had made. From a struggling graveyard show disc jockey to overnight celebrity [as writer]. It was stupefying. (105)

Working as a graveyard show disc jockey and then become a famous writer is quite a transformation for this woman. Mohumagadi puts it that she has been struggling but

has become a celebrity overnight through her writing. Ndudumo's mother has transformed; she is now a famous writer. She is not stagnant; she is constructed for growth. She is an empowered female character. Texts that adopt Amazonian perspective construct female characters that are empowered in order to promote the feminist goal of gender equality. Ndudumo's mother is an opposite of a stereotypically constructed female character.

Ndudumo's mother is transcendence. Her growth is attributed to that she is constructed as transcendence which is opposed to constructing female characters as immanence in patriarchal texts where woman's growth is stunted. On transcendence and immanence, De Beauvoir (1949:1404) argues as follows:

Patriarchy constructs woman as immanence, as stagnation and immersion in nature, thereby impeding women's struggle to achieve existential freedom and autonomous subjectivity. Man is constructed as transcendence, as continually striving for freedom and authenticity.

Even as a struggling graveyard show disc jockey, Ndudumo's mother, now a writer, was already active outside the home. By being a radio station disc jockey before she became famous, she was definitely not for "hearth and home" as she was working in the public space already. Ndudumo's mother defies patriarchal roles; she is one empowered female character. Her story goes further. She became an international celebrity when her book was published. Her fame came about mostly because of what she said in her speech when launching her book. She says the following to the crowd:

God loves to see us happy. God loves to see us f***. A single phrase from a tiny speech [delivered by the female writer], something to do with liberal views on sex changing mind sets on HIV, delivered at a small venue to a few fringe people, but the sentence [God loves to see us f***] was radical enough to catapult her from her obscure five-thousand-rand-a-month radio job to international publishing sensation, motivational speaker and face of Kinky Hair. (105)

So, the female character could be radical in her speech! She dares to use lingo reserved for men such as "what the f*** are you doing?" Seemingly, our female writer could not care less. She has freedom of speech and freedom to language. What she says in the speech shows freedom to say whatever she wants to say. Using the "f-

word” can be assumed to be a language mostly used by men; but Ndudumo’s mother is brave enough to use it in a public speech.

Ndudumo’s mother even chooses which surname to use for herself. She is free to choose whether to use her maiden surname or her husband’s in the book she has written. Her daughter clarifies her mother’s situation with surnames as follows:

We have different surnames because she chooses to write using her maiden name; she believes that is where she begun and thus that is where her writing should begin. (23)

The female writer has self-consciousness which makes her aware of the necessity to protect her public image. She admonishes her ten-year-old girl child against negative behaviour that she displayed at school with her friends. The mother wrote her daughter a letter that reads as follows:

Please sweetheart, try to have more self-control. This kind of stuff all comes back to me and does nothing for the public image I am trying to maintain. (26)

It is doubtful if a construction can ever be concerned about things like public image probably because they are constructed to have none to protect. Only subjects can be concerned about their public images as some real people would do.

Her fame has however brought the writer some negative publicity because of her choice of words in her speech. She touched a raw nerve of people, some men and even some women, who are not accommodative to active women in their patriarchal societies. Women who do not conform to patriarchal demands are met with dire consequences. Here below follow negativity towards the female writer:

She really did become quite topical. Ms Controversy, as some liked to call her. The kind of woman everyone was happy to talk about but nobody really wanted to meet. Being around her often got you into trouble, purely by association, because what would any decent person be doing around such an indecent woman? There were many theories about her; there was no man; there were too many men; she was sexually abused as a child. (106)

Regarding strong and independent women receiving negativity, Bertens (2014) argues that female independence gets a strongly negative connotation, while helplessness

and renouncing all ambitions are presented as endearing and even admirable. Patriarchy despises and rejects strong, famous and/or successful women. For being the fighters that they were against patriarchy, Amazons were, according to Stewart (1995) regarded as enemies of patriarchal states like Athens because they were threatening the status quo by introducing the concept of individual freedom to Athenian women. The negativity that the female writer in the text gets could be the result of the community's fear that she could influence other women to venture out of their homes in search of something more than being stay-at-home women.

The attack on the female writer is a patriarchal weapon of silencing strong women. Langdon (2001) affirms this reality for women as follows:

The Greece [patriarchy] could not deal with the female "Other" [Amazons], with natural power of woman, so women became an inconvenience to them. Labels such as "barbarian" or "slave" keep people in their place and at arm's length. Labelling people helps to keep them at a distance.

The female writer is suffering the "consequences" under patriarchy for her fame, creativeness, and independence. Patriarchy's control and fear that it instils in women become clear in excerpt (106) that other women dare not go near the female writer lest they themselves be regarded as indecent. It can be argued that patriarchy rules people's lives without any rules written. Independent women send fear to men, and women under the spell of patriarchy. Still seeking explanations of why the successful writer is "attacked" by the community, feminist critics offer their views on why successful women are not well-received in spaces which men believe are theirs. Meeder (2008:5) argues as follows:

Women were, and still are "honoured and esteemed" in the private sphere where they were traditionally relegated. But the moment they tried to escape those confines, they ran into the practically impenetrable wall of male prejudice and the bastion of male pride, hence the basis of patriarchy.

It is thus expected that women in reality or female characters in fictional texts that are independent and successful will be met with an impenetrable wall of patriarchy; hence the harassment and name-calling of strong women, and female characters. The study

argues that the writer is modelled on the Amazon image. De Beauvoir (1949:1414) rightly argues in favour of active and independent women but points to the danger such women may encounter from patriarchal societies when coming into public arena. She argues as follows:

With man there is no break between public and private life: the more he confirms his grasp on the world in action and in work, the more virile he seems to be; human and vital values are combined in him. Whereas woman's independent successes are in contradiction with her femininity, since the "true woman" is required to make herself object, to be the "Other".

The patriarchal notion of woman as "other" is still practiced in the twenty-first century. Patriarchy gives men power to control women in all aspects of their lives. In excerpt (106) above women fear befriending Ndudumo's mother because of the negative things said about her which are meant to discourage other women to follow in her footsteps. The fear other women had shows that patriarchy has a way of controlling women's thinking. Women need to "fight" to free their minds from the clutches of patriarchy. Ndudumo's mother seems independent and courageous. She is not a passive female character. Female characters that are in fictional texts for themselves are subjects that are constructed from an Amazonian perspective.

The female writer is not afraid to write about sexual issues. Ndudumo's mother has just received international recognition. In the following excerpts, her daughter, [Ndudumo], explains how active her mother is, and what she wrote about as follows:

Yes, Mama has been very busy since the launch of her book; the response it has received has been overwhelming for us all. We are so delighted. (22)

Anyway, my mother, Ntombovuyo Pooi, wrote a book on the sexual emancipation of black women, a sexual awakening of sorts, a wonderful, timely book that has really just liberated our African sisters. (23)

The explanation given above by the ten-year-old Ndudumo shows that she is an empowered little girl as well. The writer's message in the book is about empowering women as the title of the book suggests: "*Sexual emancipation of black women*". That the book is emancipatory adds to that the female writer has a voice to denounce any form of oppression against women. Bambara (1996) argues that women empower

themselves in order to resist their oppressors. Gramstad (1999) argues that Amazon feminism has taken up Amazons as a symbol for feminist empowerment. Ndudumo's mother is an empowered female character; the book she wrote empowers the reader. Here we talk women empowerment. Female characters constructed from an Amazonian view are empowered.

Ndudumo's mother is now a public figure. She confirms how busy she is outside her home. She was replying to the principal, Mohumagadi, who suggested calling her daughter Ndudumo to come and greet her in the principal's office. To that suggestion, Ndudumo's mother replies as follows:

“Not now,” the famous mother said, “I've got to rush off to a lunch meeting. (108)

According to excerpt (108) above, former grave-side worker, now a famous writer, runs on scheduled times, and has lunch meetings. An active, and busy lady and definitely not for “hearth and home” as De Beauvoir (1949) prefers to put it. Mohumagadi, Ndudumo's principal, has said it well that the writer has made a 360 degrees turn. Ndudumo's mother is active in the public arena. Stereotypes are usually busy in their private spaces.

The writer and Ndudumo have cognitive powers that are denied female stereotypes in patriarchal texts. According to Lagerlof (2000), patriarchal Athens thought that women did not have cognitive powers of men. The famous female writer in this text under critical focus is proving the patriarchal claim false. She is active, she thinks for herself, and she has created a book. Ndudumo herself, the ten-year old daughter, is quite knowledgeable for her age. It can be observed in excerpt (23) above as she explains what her mother's book is all about. Ndudumo and her writer mother are in the text as subjects; they are in the text for themselves as women and not in it to serve men. Female characters such as the two are constructed from an Amazonian view.

5.4.1.3. Moya's Mother, a diplomat

One other school girl in Mohumagadi's school is Moya and she is about the same age as Ndudumo. Moya is talking with Father Bill about her family. Some of the things she told Bill about her family are the following:

We only came back from Switzerland last year, and she [her mother] hasn't been the same since. She started locking her bedroom door after she heard that one in four women here get raped. Ma is a diplomat, it was better there, Father Bill. (142)

Moya tells that her mother is a diplomat. From the information above, it can be deduced that Moya and her mother are well-travelled. The female character is not confined to one place but occupy public space. Stereotypes are usually confined to their homes or one place. This particular female character has travelled over the seas. The daughter makes no mention of a man in her mother's life. She seems to be independent of man. She is a career woman which may suggest that she is not dependent on a man for her financial well-being. Having a career has removed Moya's mother from the category of female stereotypes whose job is to serve man. Amazon feminism calls for the construction of female characters that can stand on their own and not depend on others, particularly men. Female independency is promoted in Amazon feminism.

Crime in South Africa is alarming at this juncture. The issue of abuse, rape, femicide and violence against women is so prevalent in South Africa that texts written around this period cannot escape it. Before the dawn of democracy in 1994, racial discrimination, oppression of Blacks and the system itself, apartheid, found their way into literature because that was what occupied people's and writers' minds at the time. Goldman (1977) correctly argues that literary works cannot exist in isolation from the society that produces them.

Moya's mother fears being raped in her own home. After coming to South Africa from Switzerland she started locking her bedroom door, and probably every door in the house including the gate. The reality of violence against women in South Africa is

discussed in chapter two of this study. Moya's mother fears being raped, and in one other chosen text by Matlwa, *Period Pain* (2017), a female medical doctor is actually raped. It is a cause for concern for South Africans, in particular women, feminists and feminist critics. The female character's fear is genuine in a South African context. Nkealah (2016) rightly argues that the state, has failed in its role as protector of the human rights of women because, with its own rule of state patriarchy, the state cannot sympathise with women genuinely. The fear of being raped makes the female character an authentic female character who resembles women in a South African reality.

Moya's mother responds to events. After hearing about the rapes, where statistics say that in every four women, one is raped, she started taking action of locking her doors at night. The rapes evoke fear in her and she responds accordingly. It may be argued that her response looks similar to how women in reality would react. Bertens (2014) argues that patriarchal *constructs* are those female characters that do not resemble reality. In the text under critical focus, Moya's mother responds to events accordingly and takes action. The writer, Matlwa, has not created a utopia for the female character where she finds herself living "happily ever after"; we see Moya's mother in constant fear of being raped, just as women in South Africa would. The study argues that Moya's mother is an authentic female character modelled on an Amazonian view.

5.4.1.4. Zulwini's mother, a company's CEO

Management positions in companies were traditionally reserved for men. In a South African context, positions of company leadership were reserved for white men during the Apartheid era. After the fall of Apartheid Black men took over leadership roles, mostly politically and socially, while the economy largely remained in white hands. Trout (2021) rightly argues that when Apartheid system collapsed in 1994, the capitalist system did not; consequently, the struggle continued against capitalism and patriarchy as the transfer of power was amongst men. It may well be noted now in the study that not one female character in Mda's selected texts is in a leadership position. Belsy (1985) argues that unlike an object that is acted upon and passive, an

Amazonian character may speak and may insist on occupying a significant position in society. For the the writer to have constructed a powerful female character speaks of empowerment of women. Amazon feminism advocates for women empowerment through constructing Amazonian characters in fiction as a means of promoting the feminist goal of gender equality (Meeder, 2008).

Zulwini, son to the female CEO, is a young boy in Mohumagadi's school of excellence. The conversation the CEO has with her son tells us more about her powerful position. The conversation is presented as follows:

Zulwini my baby, I love you. Mama was just made CEO of Maatla Power House. Do you know what that means, baby? That means things are going to be good for us. Very good. (158)

The excerpt above speaks of a woman who has just been promoted to CEO position of a company. The female character is a career woman who has been promoted to a leadership role. She is in the public domain; she has "escaped" the relegation zone – home, where patriarchy expects women to be. She is an empowered female character. Zulwini's mother is an opposite of female stereotypes that only do menial jobs such as cleaning offices. In *Sexual Harassment of Working Women*, Mackinnon (1979:1768) argues as follows:

Under Capitalism, women are horizontally segregated by gender and occupy a structurally inferior low-paying jobs position in the workplace (such as secretaries, domestics, nurses, typists, telephone operators, child-care workers, or waitresses).

The inferior low-paying jobs mentioned above are not for Zulwini's mother; she is instead a CEO of a company. Zulwini's mother is a female character that defies patriarchal barriers that block prospect of success for women socially, politically, and economically. For Zulwini's mother to be promoted shows growth in the workplace. The female CEO is thus constructed transcendence; nothing of the immanence constructions by paternalism which condemns women to obscurity, according to De Beauvoir's (1949). Amazonism emphasises women's agency and capacity for power as opposed to patriarchy whose constructions display the common pattern of female

victimhood (Gramstad, 1999). The study can boldly argue that the CEO is an empowered female character, and not a stereotype.

In the text under critical focus, women, even young girls, are treated respectfully. Father Bill apologises to ten-year old Ndudumo for delaying to give her a letter from her mother which he had asked for from the principal's office. Father Bill says the following to Ndudumo, a young girl:

I [Bill] asked Mohumagadi if I could have this [letter]. I thought you might want it. Sorry I'm only giving it to you now. (120)

It may not be an exaggeration to say that one hardly comes across the word "sorry" addressed to women in patriarchal texts, let alone to a black little girl by an adult male, a white adult male for that matter. In giving recognition to the young girl, it could be argued that the little girl is in an Amazonian text. Amazonian texts are likely to construct Amazonian female characters. Female stereotypes hardly receive respect because they are simply objects in patriarchy.

On the issue of respect for women in reality and in fiction, Meeder (2008) argues that men in patriarchal Athens respected strong women while at the same time decrying their temerity and audacity. In line with this argument, it could be argued that strong women attract respect to themselves, even from their detractors. It could also be argued that men fear strong women as argued in Meeder (2008) that men have nothing to fear in women, and that instead men have everything to gain from accepting their sisters as full partners equal to the challenges of life.

5.4.1.5. School Project

Two ten-year olds girls, Ndudumo and Moya, and two ten-year olds boys, Zulwini and Mlilo, attend school at Mohumagadi's school of excellence; and they are in the same class. In an afternoon detention class under Father Bill, the four children were given a project to write on the various stages of puberty. The girls are as active as the boys in

doing the school project. Some contributions made by girls towards the project are as follows:

Ndudumo said it would be okay to film ourselves because only Dr Masemola would see it and she's a lady and a mom and wouldn't care about our privates and stuff. (172)

In the excerpt above, one girl, Ndudumo, is suggesting that the four of them should make a video of their own private parts and use the video for their project. The fact that the two girls are working on the project and contributing towards its successful completion, together with the two boys, is evidence that they are active little girls. The excerpt above evinces the reasoning power and intelligence of the girls.

For the two girls, Moya and Ndudumo, to be involved in the school project may prove empowering to the girls. The two girls display cognitive powers that patriarchal texts deny its female characters. Hurwit (1999) argues that in ancient Athens women were expected to be passive and submissive; and that they were thought not to have the cognitive powers of men. In present text, the two girls are active, and they are intelligent judging by their brilliant contributions to the project. Intelligence is celebrated in Amazon feminism. The two girls defy stereotypical constructions of young girls.

The principal of the school, Mohumagadi, was walking on the passages at her school when she saw images on the projector screen in one classroom. It was the four children and Father Bill watching a DVD of the final product of the project. Mohumagadi saw the following images on the screen:

A vagina and then a penis and a finger pointing at the testicles appearing up the wall. And the images were all of children. Baby vaginas, baby penises, baby testicles. A baby finger pointing at them all. (176)

The genitals displayed belonged to the four school children, Ndudumo, Moya, Zulwini and Mlilo who were involved in the project. In the excerpt above, the two school girls are using their bodies as a learning aid. The four school children, boys and girls alike, are given an opportunity to freely express themselves. The children are so advanced

in their thinking than it would have been the case traditionally. The writer has taken into account changing times when creating the present fictional text. In the current world of technology, it would be good for literature if writers take into account that today's children are no longer as naïve as adults would like it to be. The writer of this text has let the children be, and they came up with brilliant ideas. It could be Amazonian "to free children to learn." Perhaps we should not dwell too much in the past. Boys and girls in the text are equal. I argue that the issue of analysing texts with words such as mentioning names of private parts should not be scary in the twenty-first century where technology, curriculums, literary texts are in the "new" world. Pucherova (2022:143) refers to the emerging woman writings in South Africa as "unprecedented literary landscape".

In addition to having innovative minds, the young girls in the text under critical focus are empowered to stand up for themselves. Ndudumo is seen responding and standing up to her male classmate at what she regards as unfairness toward her. Her reactions are registered in the excerpts below as follows:

"Oh shut up, Zulwini, this conversation didn't even involve you so I don't know why you think it's necessary to involve yourself," Ndudumo spat back. (117)

"Well at least my mother isn't a slut," Zulwini [boy] mumbled. (118)

"What?" Ndudumo gasped. "What did you just say, you little narrow-minded, pious, Bible-bashing piece of nothing? What did you just say about my mother?" (118)

Zulwini did not respond. He got up, trembled, quivered, shuddered, and then sat back down. (118)

Ndudumo [girl] stood up for herself and her mother. It is an old trick by patriarchs to call strong and independent women "sluts". Bertens (2014) argues that the reason for harassing strong women is to discourage female independence in perpetuation of the unequal power relations between men and women, and to maintain control over women. Ndudumo's mother is called a slut in excerpt (118) above by a ten year old boy. It can be remembered that Ndudumo's mother has just become a famous writer. Ndudumo is standing up for herself and her famous mother against a boy who behaves

as his patriarchal 'fathers' do in abusing and humiliating women. Little Ndudumo can be seen as a courageous girl fighting patriarchy. Her actions are similar to amazons as pointed out by Pantel (1994) that amazons were strong and self-reliant women who held their own in sometimes brutal and savage world. When Ndudumo, confronted the ten year old boy Zulwini, he "trembled, quivered, and shuddered". The boy feared Ndudumo's wrath. Amazons are said to have been "fearsome". Davis-Kimball (2002: 121) confirms Amazon's fighting spirit as follows:

Though men in ancient Greece normally saw women as delicate and submissive creatures, they viewed Amazons as a tribe of militant females fully capable of engaging men in combat on horseback.

Ndudumo has done just that; engaging Zulwini in "combat". She is a strong character, fully capable of standing up against this boy Zulwini. The study argues that Ndudumo passes as an Amazonian character, not at all submissive. Female characters in the text under critical focus are strong women and girls. Hereunder Meeder (2008:51) argues for strong women as follows:

Even in what we consider misogynistic or patriarchal cultures there is an undercurrent of the strong woman, a being that men fear because the shadow of her strength is always there, threatening to overpower their idyllic and fragile superstructure...Amazons, whether myth or reality, represented a very real threat to their [ancient Athenian men] "men only" club.

Young Ndudumo can even speak out her mind, even if what she is saying may seem a little above her years. Nevertheless, she voices her opinions to Father Bill as follows:

Don't lie, Father Bill. A priest is not supposed to lie. Because people like you are always going around telling kids that being a virgin keeps you more beautiful and that even in marriage the number of times you hump should be kept to a minimum. I think you are lying. You set rules that you can't even keep yourselves. That's all my mom is trying to say. Why does that make her a slut? (121)

There it is, she has spoken her mind to a man, white man Father Bill. Ndudumo is a subject with a voice to speak. She questions the priest about things she has doubts about on grown up matters. All female characters in the present text are subjects; they are active; they take charge; and they have voices and thus defy patriarchy. The

female characters in the present text oppose objectified female characters that are constructed in perpetuation of patriarchy. The study argues that all female characters, including small girls, are empowered. The female characters are in the texts for themselves, and not to be in the texts to serve men. I argue that these females are constructed from an Amazonian perspective.

Show of emotions and taking action are characteristics of an authentic character. No show of emotions, silence, and passivity (Hurwit, 1999) are characteristics of female stereotypes deliberately so constructed in order to maintain the patriarchal status quo. Amazon feminism celebrates female prowess as a means of promoting the goal of gender equality (Gramstad, 1999). The study argues that Mohumagadi and the school girls in the text under critical focus are constructed to subvert patriarchy and to promote women's emancipation and thus contribute to the feminist goal of achieving gender equality.

5.4.2. *Period Pain* (2017)

5.4.2.1. Masechaba, a medical doctor

The leading character in the text mentioned above is a female medical doctor named Masechaba. Being a doctor, whether medical or philosophy, was traditionally a profession followed by men. Women tended to be nurses or school teachers. In the text under critical focus, a female character is given a role that was hitherto regarded as a profession for males. It can be assumed the power of control that patriarchy has on women could have made women fear becoming medical doctors. In the present text, Masechaba is boldly a medical doctor. It is an important and respected profession in hospitals and communities. Even at a young age Masechaba has freedom to choose what career she wanted. Masechaba's choice came about as follows:

I was 120% sure that a medical doctor was what I wanted to be. It was a good profession, she [mother] said, and she had no doubt I'd make a great physician who would one day help a lot of people. (21)

Masechaba makes a choice to become a doctor. In saying that she is 120% sure that she wants to be a medical doctor shows her determination to become one. Masechaba is given a professional role of medical doctor, unlike stereotypes that hardly have professional jobs except for menial jobs such as domestic work. The role Masechaba is given is empowering her. Amazonian feminism calls for the construction of female characters that are empowered for the promotion of the feminist goal of achieving gender equality.

Amazonianism celebrates women prowess and independence. Patriarchy terribly discourages women independence by calling professional women all sorts of names and labelling them “bad” women versus the “good” stay-at-home women. Professional women are accused of not serving men properly. In the patriarchal dualism approach the stay-at-home women are regarded as “good” because it is believed that they serve men properly. In fighting patriarchal distorted views such as the above, feminists have taken up the Amazon image as a *de rigueur* icon to present authentic female characters as opposed to stereotypes.

As the narrative begins, Masechaba shares her experience regarding her first menstrual cycle. Female readers can relate to her experience. Masechaba shares her experience of her first bleed through the vagina as follows:

When I first started to bleed, I thought Ma would kill me. (11)

I later learned at Sunday school that jugs of serum periodically pouring from one’s vagina was no divine punishment at all, a physiologically necessary and healthy part of a woman’s life that should not only be welcomed, but celebrated. (12)

Nonetheless, I prayed relentlessly that God who parted the Red sea and dried it right up for the people He loved might consider blessing me with a season of dry panties. (12)

This text under critical focus is unique in that women’s issues such as monthly bleedings for women are not only mentioned. The issue of detailing women’s

menstruation shows that women's concerns matter. Arguably, not many fictional texts would be bothered by women's bleeding through the vagina; perhaps "it" could be of concern in "its" dry season. Without beating about the bush, Amazon feminism is concerned about women's concerns, from bleeding to childbirth. Masechaba is letting the reader into her experiences around her menstruations. What can be more genuine for some women in reality than the bleedings? She takes the reader through the stages of trying to come to terms with the frustrations she feels towards menstrual cycles as follows:

I remember telling Ma that I wanted it [vagina] taken out, cut away from me and incinerated in the large chamber at the hospital behind the hill. (12)

Ma said I was speaking nonsense that these were things women were to endure, and that if it was removed from me I would one day regret being unable to bring life into the world. (13)

What did I care for bringing life into the world when I couldn't have a life of my own? When I lived hostage to a beast in my pelvis that could split its head at any moment of its choosing, and angrily spill its contents onto the floor at any second of its liking without provocation? (13)

Though angry and frustrated with her menstruations, Masechaba nonetheless shares her experiences with the reader. She associates her ordeal with a beast in her pelvis. On critically analysing Matlwa's *Period Pain* (2017), Puchero (2022) rightly observes that the heavy bleeding and debilitating pain Masechaba suffers are both socially and mentally trying. Masechaba narrates her experiences vividly. Some women could relate to what she is going through. Cixous (1980) argues that the language used in capturing exact women experiences, unlike male-centred language, subverts fixity and closure in language. As Masechaba grows to womanhood, she takes us with her through her period pains, a phenomenon unique to women. She explains the following:

It's been a while since I bled like this, since drops of serum and cells of haemoglobin have dripped past my thighs, day after day, so that all that's left coming out is water. It's been years since I've felt such rage for the dysfunctional flesh within my pelvis, years since I've wanted to stick my fist all the way up my vagina and yank the demon out. (97)

Masechaba is given time to explain how she feels regarding the functioning of her body. She is not wasting anybody's time because it is her story; she is the story. Though she does not understand the happenings, she tells it the best she could. When she was young, Masechaba even thought there was a beast in her pelvis, a demon which splits its head and spill its contents to the floor at any time of its choosing. She wanted to pull the thing out with her bare hand. De Beauvoir (1949:1410) attempted to explain the complexity of a woman's body as follows:

A mystery to man, woman is considered to be mysterious in essence. To tell the truth, her situation makes woman very liable to such a view. Her physiological nature is very complex; she herself submits to it as some rigmarole from outside; her body does not seem to her to be a clear expression of herself; within it she feels herself a stranger. Indeed, the bond that in every individual connects the physiological life and the psychic life is the deepest enigma implied in the condition of being human, and this enigma is presented in its most disturbing form in woman.

The quote above only confirms the complexity of the physiological nature of women. No matter how complicated, Masechaba is not afraid to talk about issues which are usually regarded as private matters. Masechaba talks women issues that benefit women. She is not silenced; she is even pleading with God to do something to alleviate her menstrual pains. Speaking openly about women issues show that times are changing. Literature should change with the times, not lag behind. Spencer (2009:67) argues that the emerging women writers in post-apartheid South Africa are constructing "new and different" ways of being female and thereby presenting alternative ways of looking at self and society. For literature to be in line with changes that are happening in societies and globally is important for staying relevant to the times.

Not so long ago, women were expected to hide their pregnancies, probably for men's sake, in large dresses with gathers on the shoulders, but not anymore. Women are taking charge of their lives. Menstruations, pregnancies and giving birth is part of them, and they share their experiences; they talk about it; it is no longer taboo. Female characters that are subjects discuss what is of concern to them; they are not silenced

stereotypes. The present text that Masechba is in allows her to be the whole woman that she is, menstruation, pregnancies and all.

Masechaba is in the text as a Self that she is, and not as an object. Even when it came to her acceptance of the reality of her body with its vagina and its blood, Masechaba shares that experience as follows:

I've actually come to like it, this trickle of blood coming out of me day after day. It colours the bath water a pretty pink. Sometimes when a tiny clot comes out, the water goes dark maroon. (102)

Women in reality may likely relate to her experience because she has something in common with them. On stereotypes, Bertens (2014) argues that they have not much in common with the way women see and experience themselves. Pauline Pantel (1994) points to that amazons were not cartoon characters as Greek mythology has taught people to believe; amazons were an extended tribe of flesh-and-blood nomads of unique customs. For the present study, it is argued that Masechaba is modelled from an Amazonian image.

Masechaba continues to share her various experiences and feelings below. Stereotypes, on the other hand, have nothing to share because they are in texts not for themselves but are in texts to support male protagonists. Masechaba is now pregnant and she shares the following:

I felt a beating in my stomach, as though my heart had grown so weary it had sunk to the pit of my thorax. It turns out that the sporadic thuds I'd been feeling came from the body of another, a little baby, living, growing, and thriving in the darkness. (145)

Nobody dared rouse me from my bed. I paid no mind to my lack of energy, lack of appetite, the urge to retch at the sight of Jungle Oats. What difference did it make? What difference did anything make? I only wanted to be dead. (145)

Masechaba is a victim of rape and her pregnancy is a product of rape. On analysing other fictional texts, Samuels (2002) concludes that rape is a means of social control

over women and an attempt at maintaining male supremacy. As the narrative is in a South African setting, Masechaba could not escape being raped regardless of her status. What is important for authentic female characters is to bounce back to life after traumatic experiences such as rape. One such tool for bouncing back is to share one's experiences, and self-determination. Amazonian texts offer their female characters opportunities to share their experiences, whatever they may be, while rape victims are silenced in patriarchal texts. In reference to the silences suffered by female characters, Samuelson (2002:94) says "silence is being drawn like a blanket". Pucherova (2022) points out that fiction, amazonian fiction for the present study, can be a space where rape can be imagined and discussed and where rape survivors can be empathised with. Matlwa's text offers Masechaba to share her traumatic experiences.

The last part of the excerpt above tells the reader how she feels about the pregnancy. As a subject, she shares her feelings with readers, thus revealing her "inside". The feeling "I only wanted to be dead" could ring true to people in reality who may have been faced with similar traumatic experiences. For Masechaba to say that she only wanted to be dead is understandable when taking into account that her pregnancy is a result of rape. In a South African context, femicide, violence and rape are a stark reality for women. Masechaba's rape in the present fictional text mirrors the real situation of the society in which the writer resides. Masechaba could be just another woman in South Africa. What has happened to Masechaba is what South African women face constantly. How genuine can Masechaba be than this?

Patriarchal texts hardly tell of women's pregnancies or menstruations but only mention that a female character has, for example, ten children without acknowledging that giving birth to a child is a process: menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth. The issue of omitting female characters' experiences such as menstruation, pregnancy and giving birth in patriarchal texts is argued in Lagerlof (2000) as follows:

Women [in ancient patriarchal Athens] were not even recognised as life-givers – that role was owned by men. Woman was simply the fertile ground to be sown, acting as a vessel to hold a developing life but who took no actual part in creation.

In patriarchy, women who are raped are thought to have brought it to themselves; or they are simply called whores. Gqola's (2015) "rape culture" is part of patriarchal culture where rape is made possible by people's acceptance of rape as a normal expression of masculinity. On rape, Barry (1979:1770) came up with the concept she refers to as the "rape paradigm" where the victim of sexual assault is held responsible for her own victimisation. In feminist texts female characters tell their experiences as part of healing and empowerment. Female stereotypes are instead silenced and shamed. In her analysis, Samuelson (2002:89) makes a reference to that "rape and childbirth are relegated to the blank spaces between two paragraphs" in patriarchal texts.

Masechaba details a process of delivering a baby as she watched Nyasha help a woman deliver her child in hospital. Nyasha is also a female Black doctor working in the same facility as doctor Masechaba. She says the following:

I watched her [Nyasha] one night, joking with a mother who was a heartbeat away from losing a perfectly healthy baby. The baby's umbilical cord had slipped out of the woman's vagina during labour, and Nyasha stood for four hours with a damp cloth in that bloody cavity, keeping the cord moist until a theatre space opened. (39)

In the process of giving birth to her child, the woman was probably more concerned about her baby's life. Matlwa is writing about women's concerns. Women in patriarchal texts are given neither space nor voices to talk of "woman things" because they are not in the texts for themselves but are simply vehicles for the growth and salvation of the male protagonist. Masechaba and the other females in the text are engaged in what are uniquely female experiences as dictated by nature. Women in reality could relate to the experiences of the female characters. Of these "women only" experiences De Beauvoir (1949:1409) in *The Second Sex* argues as follows:

Men are unable to penetrate her [woman] special experience through any working of sympathy: they are condemned to ignorance of the quality of woman's erotic pleasure, the discomfort of menstruation, and the pains of childbirth.

For women to write about their "special experience" they, according to Cixous (1980), need a "special language" in order to resist male dominance of culture. She argues that women have to find their own linguistic space; a form of language that subverts

fixity. The present text has extensively used women's "special experiences" by constructing female characters that share their special experiences: the discomfort of menstruation, and the pains of child birth. Masechaba has laid bare her "special experiences". Female characters that are constructed to subvert the patriarchal status quo are Amazonian characters as opposed to stereotypes.

Being a medical doctor Masechaba is a career woman. In Amazon feminism, female characters are empowered by assigning them leadership roles and professional careers. They are given roles that are reserved for men in patriarchal standards. In addition to being a female medical doctor, Masechaba is able to share her "special experiences". Female characters that are constructed in opposition to stereotypes are an alternative on representation of women in fictional texts.

5.4.2.2. Nyasha, a surgeon

In the same text that medical doctor Masechaba is in, there is another Black female medical doctor, Nyasha working in South Africa. She is a foreign national from Zimbabwe. Nyasha is introduced by Masechaba as follows:

I noticed her because she had beautiful, jet black dreadlocks and a quiet confidence that was fearsome to behold. She was a medical officer in the Obstetrics & Gynaecology Department...if it wasn't for her foreign nationality; she would already be a consultant obstetrician-gynaecologist, because she was a surgeon *extraordinaire*. (39)

That Nyasha is described as "surgeon *extraordinaire*" shows skilfulness in her job but Masechaba is concerned that is not promoted to a higher position because she is a foreigner. Nyasha is regarded as an "other". On "othering", Fanon (1963), a black anticolonial intellectual in France pointed out despite his intelligent, high level of education, and mastery of the French language, he was regarded as "other", as alien and dangerous. Masechaba is politically minded and is aware that foreigners like medical doctor Nyasha is unfairly treated.

Amazonism celebrates women prowess (Gramstad, 1999). Amazons in Ancient Athens enjoyed the same rights and freedoms that men enjoyed. Female characters that are modelled on the Amazonian image have freedoms to follow any career of their choice. That Masechaba and Nyasha have chosen “respectable” and high paying jobs show that they are constructed in defiance of limitations placed on women’s path to success and independence by capitalism and patriarchy because it is men who are usually at the apex of the economic strata. Mackinnon (1979:1768) argues as follows:

Under Capitalism, women are horizontally segregated by gender and occupy a structurally inferior low-paying service jobs position in the work place...sexual harassment perpetuates the interlocked structure by which women have kept sexually in thrall to men at the bottom of the labour market.

Masechaba and Nyasha are constructed as subjects to subvert patriarchal and capitalist systems such as the above. Feminists fight oppressive systems from various fronts, including literature particularly the depiction of women in fictional texts. Feminists have adopted the Amazonian image for their female characters that oppose female stereotypes. The desired Amazonian character is constructed for subverting systems that oppress women as means of achieving the feminist goal of gender equality. Masechaba and Nyasha are thus constructed as subjects, not objects; they are active; they have voices; and they take charge. On subjecthood for female characters, Belsy (1985:27) argues as follows:

To have power to give meaning is to exist as a subject. Unlike an object that is only acted upon and passive, a subject may speak, write and act and in so doing may insist on occupying a significant position in society.

As subjects, the two female characters have managed to occupy significant positions in society. It can thus be argued that the two female characters are constructed from an Amazonian view. Nyasha is equipped to articulate political opinions of her own. She is angry at racist white men and says the following:

White men think they can just smile at a black woman and she’ll oblige. They think we should be flattered that they even see us. No, not just flattered, honoured. It makes me sick. Even the morbidly obese ones, who could never summon the courage to approach one of their own, think we’ll just drop our panties at the sight of their skin. (53)

Nyasha is a doctor who is not oblivious to the political situation in South Africa. She is working in South Africa at a time of democratic rule. She knows that Apartheid rule is vanquished but she sees white people's attitudes remaining. She is angry at white men who still have white supremacy attitudes by thinking that Black women will no doubt have sex with them. She is even angrier at the fat ones who stand no chance of having sex with white girls. Nyasha is political minded; and in her individual way she speaks at racism and its concomitant white supremacy. Nyasha is not a stereotype; she is equipped with knowledge to respond appropriately to the racists and patriarchists who erroneously believe that women are the emotional and sexual property of men.

Nyasha is also angered by a racist white patient in a facility where she is a doctor. Masechaba explains what made Nyasha angry:

Just the other day Nyasha came home upset about a white patient she had admitted who asked if there was a girl who could help him carry his bags to the ward. Nyasha was outraged by the use of the word "girl" and went off on a tirade about how arrogant white South Africans are...That's why South Africans will continue to live under the illusion of freedom, unaware of how we remain captive to white supremacy. (41)

Nyasha's anger towards the white patient shows that she is not ready to accept the dominant status quo, be it patriarchy which perpetuates inequality between women and men or racism which perpetuates white supremacy. Nyasha speaks against oppressive racist practices. Stereotypes, on the other hand, accept and promote oppressive status quos. Nyasha fights against victimhood. Fighting against victimhood is supported in Georgoudi (1990) quoted in Meeder (2008:7) as follows:

Primitive man used his physical superiority over woman to abuse her sexually. Rebelling against the violation of her rights, primitive woman had a need to evolve toward a purer civility and became an Amazon, resisting the male by force of arms.

The quote above talks of primitive men sexually abusing primitive women who then rebelled against the violation of their rights. The primitive women who rebelled against

sexual abuse were amazons whose image feminists are adopting to construct Amazonian characters in opposition to female stereotypes. The quote may be referring to ancient people, but it is probably not a surprise to anyone because sexual abuse is still happening today. Stereotype female characters are condemned to accepting abusive situations without a word of protest. Stereotypes are deliberately silenced as a means of sustaining patriarchy. Nyasha is a female character that rebels against racism and patriarchy in whatever form it comes.

Nyasha also complains about Black girls who seem to go against their Africanness. She questions the mentality of Black South Africans in general, and Black girls donning artificial hair specifically. She laments to Masechaba as follows:

We know that we hate ourselves as black people. That we know. But now we're exposing ourselves to white people, too. Now we are exposing this dark stain of self-hatred on our race. We're giving them evidence that we are indeed a foolish, self-loathing people. A thing to be pitied. (50)

Nyasha is angry at the effects of colonialism which she assumes has made Black people hate themselves because, in her eyes, they want to look like white people, and thus lose their Africanness. Nyasha resembles women in reality where a reaction of getting angry is quite "normal".

Nyasha directs her tirades even at God. She talks to Masechaba about suffering that Blacks, women, and foreigners have to go through. Nyasha says the following to Masechaba:

Why does your god make it so hard for us to love him, Chaba? Why play these games? Create this world, bring us here, only to watch us suffer? Why does he hide? Is he a coward? Why doesn't he come out here and see the mess he's made, come see how his creation is doing? (51)

Nyasha seems to be angry at God. She knows that the questions she asks Masechaba will not be answered. The unanswerable questions only show the degree of her anger towards God. In asking questions to God Nyasha is joining feminists such as Masenya (2009:134) who question Christian religion as follows:

Why do African peoples continue to cling to the Book [Christian Bible] which has been successfully used by the powerful for, among others, their humiliation, land dispossession, racial segregation, slavery, patriarchy/kyriarchy, domination, imperialism and neo-imperialism? Why do African women continue to cling to a book which men have used in the past as well as in the present to perpetuate their oppression and marginalization in the name of God?

Questions which women and female characters alike ask God are a sign of frustration for women on account of oppressive conditions in which they find themselves. Feminism speaks out against oppression, injustices and abuse of women. Feminist critics further fight for a fair depiction of female characters in fictional texts, hence the “birth” of an Amazonian character for independent and empowered female characters opposing stereotypes of patriarchal texts. Masechaba and Nyasha are independent, also of parents, and are career female characters working in public space. Masechaba confirms their independence as follows:

So I moved out of home. Nyasha and I rented a flat close to the hospital... You can't live under your mother's roof forever, and anyway, it's not like I was far away. A person needs space. (39)

These female characters are empowered to live life on their own; cutting loose from parents; and it is worth noting that there are no men mentioned. Their parents are not handing them over into marriage, but the girls are out to live on their own. Masechaba's independence is also evident in that she owns a car. According to Gough (1975), one of the methods by which male power is manifested and maintained in archaic and contemporary societies is to confine women physically and prevent movement. In moving out of her mother's house; in being a career woman; driving a car, and lastly, having no husband is indicative of Masechaba's independence. That she is not married, or yet, is quite a factor which defies socialisation of marriage in patriarchal texts. For Masechaba to have a car implies that she has freedom of movement. The excerpt below confirms that she drives the car herself:

Sometimes, in the very early hours of the morning when I'm driving home from a split-call and it's just me and the night lights on the empty highway, I let go of the steering wheel just for a second and push down hard on the accelerator... (69)

While Masechaba in Matlwa's text is owning and driving a car, one female character in Mda's selected text for the study, *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995), is said to have never seen a car. Freedom of movement is one of the characteristics of

Amazons; they owned and rode horses as nomads (Meeder, 2008). Masechaba is independent and has freedom of movement; she even drives her car fast!

Masechaba is a victim of gang rape (the issue of rape is discussed previously in this chapter). The feminist text *Masechaba* allows her to share experiences such as rape. While female characters in patriarchal texts are silenced and even blamed for being victims of rape and accused of being promiscuous, Masechaba has a voice to detail her experiences. She unpacks her ordeal as follows:

Sometimes when I'm forgetting, drifting into mindlessness, I'm jolted by a breath on the back of my neck, a breath like the one that breathed on me before grabbing me from behind and bringing my legs to the floor. (98)

Maybe if they'd been drunk, I'd feel a little better about it all. But they weren't. There wasn't a drop of alcohol on their tongues. I know because those tongues were in my mouth, their saliva down my throat. (113)

One first put his penis in my mouth and I had to suck it because I was scared...It felt like something was tearing inside...the second or third penis in my vagina grated like a fork against a brick. (132)

Masechaba has just shared the horrible details with the reader. Because Masechaba is not a silent victim; because she has a voice, she is able to share with the reader the gruesome, humiliating details. In addition to the horrifying details, she also shares her emotional pain about the rape incident in question form as follows:

There is no vocabulary for the pain I feel. How do I construct a sentence that explains that they made me into a shell of myself? Not "like" a shell of myself, but an actual shell of myself? How do I explain that what they stole from me is more than just my "womanhood"? How do I explain that the languages at my disposal can't communicate the turmoil I have inside? That it's more than my "dignity" they stole, it's more than a "violation" they subjected me to? That it would have been better to die than to be spooned out and left that way? (109)

The questions Masechaba asks above are for emphasis of what she feels which she explains so vividly. She takes the reader through her ordeal step by step. The reader ends up feeling with her and feeling for her, if empathy and sympathy can go together. Eze (2015) argues that feminist empathy is an approach that employs the riches of

empathy as a social and liberatory virtue which focus on the pains of Africans but also can enhance human flourishing in African communities. Masechaba indeed receives support from people around her because they empathise with her. Feminist empathy approach is applied in feminist texts to empathise and sympathise with victims. Masechaba shares her “inside” without sparing any detail. Her experiences are similar to what some women in reality may experience. Masechaba had thoughts of committing suicide after the rape ordeal. She takes us into her thoughts as follows:

In the mornings I sit on the edge of my bed. I imagine it's a tall building, or a bridge, a cliff, a roof, the balcony of a skyscraper. I fantasise about what it would be like to fly off and come crashing to the floor. (103)

Masechaba shares feelings which may not be alien to some readers, taking into account the nature of violence against women in South Africa, as explained previously. It makes her a genuine female character if some women in reality may see themselves in her. Masechaba starts having regrets probably as some people in reality might. She is thinking that she was probably responsible for the misfortune that befell her. She started to think of where she might have gone wrong:

Maybe this is all my doing. I should have voted. I shouldn't have let that white boy play with my vagina. I should never have started that petition. I should have gone to the cemetery. I shouldn't have written all this blasphemous crap in this journal...I wasn't focused; instead I was daydreaming about Francois, who didn't even know how to pronounce my name properly. (108)

Although Masechaba is an empowered character that has the ability to introspect, one also sees patriarchy at play in that she believes she is to blame instead of the men that raped her. She talks to herself trying to find out if she has done something that she is being “punished” for? All sorts of scenarios come to her mind. It could probably be part of the healing process for the empowered female character. Masechaba is capacitated to question what she does not understand. In search for answers, she goes to the high deity; she asks and talks to God as follows:

Is it because I didn't wear my rosary to work? Are you mad with me? Is it because I didn't vote? Or is this about Francois? I only let him finger me, Lord. That's all we did. Surely You can't be so cruel? (92)

Or is this supposed to be the “thorn in my flesh”? This is no thorn, Lord, this is a dagger! (92)

Me, Your child? You [God] watched them rape me and didn't blink, didn't even blink. You, God, watched them tear me apart, divide me among themselves, and You stood and stared. (88)

Why do You want to see us grovel? Why must we break first into millions of pieces before You shovel us off the floor? Why must we shutter first before You react? Why must we pray for things that are obvious? Wasn't it obvious that I needed You to save me? (88)

These questions to God seem real to any person who might have been in some kind of big trouble in their lives, and asking for intervention from a higher deity. Stereotypes are objects that hardly question anything or anyone. They are simply there to serve men's interests, quietly. Masechaba discovered towards the end of the narrative that she has learnt something from her ordeal. As real people would sometimes do, Masechaba is trying to find what little something she can retrieve from her shattered life. Masechaba shares what she thinks the pain she went through has taught her as follows:

If anything, it's taught me humility, I think I had a big head. I thought I was special, immune, and exceptional. That these sorts of things wouldn't happen to me. But I'm not. I'm just another South African rape statistic. There's nothing extraordinary about my story, it happens everywhere, every day. It doesn't matter that I'm highly educated, a doctor, that I started a petition that made the newspapers (131)..... I have a vagina. That's all that matters. (131)

It takes a strong personality to try and find a little something positive to hold on to after a traumatic experience. For survival, a character needs to be strong. Masechaba is constructed a strong character that has survived her ordeal. Female characters are empowered to empower women to survive rape or perhaps not to give up in life until one meets with death. Donovan (1983:215) rightly argues that literature on its most profound level is a form of learning, "We learn, we grow from the knowledge of life, of human behaviour and relationships that we discover in worthwhile works of art". The present text that created Masechaba aims for readers to learn and grow from her experiences. Puchero (2022) argues that fiction can be a space where rape can be discussed and rape survivors can be empathised with.

Masechaba gets support from people around her after the rape. Stereotypes in patriarchal texts are not supported. Barry (1979) argues that victims of sexual assault in patriarchal societies, as well as in patriarchal fictional texts, are held responsible for their victimisation. Instead of further victimisation as it happens in patriarchal texts, Masechaba receives support for her ordeal; and she also tells how she feels about the support she receives as follows:

The visitors pour through the door. I feel like an animal in a zoo. Ma says they only want to show me their support; it's better not to be alone for too long. But they irritate me, saying stupid things like, "Everything will be okay, don't worry, everything will be okay." How do they know everything will be okay? Why do they say stupid things they have no evidence for? (93)

I'm so sick of hearing about Job [of the Bible]. Everybody wants to tell me about Job. The story of Job isn't comforting. I don't care if it has a happy ending. It doesn't make feel any better to know that he had everything replaced in the end. Some things can't be replaced. (96)

She [Nyasha] said she was sorry for what happened to me, but that I should rise above it and be like the forefathers of the nation, who denied themselves for a greater cause. (127)

Some of the interns had written a letter of complaint to the National Department of Health. They passed it around from one departmental morning meeting to the next, asking for signatures to support the letter stating that security on the hospital premises needs to be improved. The superintendent had ordered pepper spray and whistles for everyone to wear at night. (93)

As a subject "self", and not an object "other", Masechaba is considered a person worthy of other people's attention, sympathy and support. Masechaba's supporters took action by trying to improve security in the hospital precinct. Pepper sprays and whistles were ordered for all to wear at night. A subject's life matters while objectified female characters are not supported. Masechaba receives support in her time of need. However, Masechaba lets the reader know about her thoughts that she is not so very happy with the visits; she feels like a trapped animal. Telling her about Job who lost everything did not help either. What is important is that the female character shares

her thoughts. Sharing of thoughts, feelings or experiences is characteristic of female characters constructed from an Amazonian perspective.

Albeit Masechaba receives support after the rape incident from people around her, her colleagues and her psychiatrist, she desperately attempts to console herself. Masechaba talks to herself, sarcastically so, one would add. Because Masechaba is not a silent victim, she lets the reader into her self-talk about the rape as follows:

Ma is right. A good Christian wouldn't mourn this loss the way I am doing. It's only flesh, after all. It was only a penis, a couple of penises, entering a cavity that man decided to call a vagina. It's only muscles, blood vessels, nerves, mucus. It doesn't think, it doesn't remember, it just responds to thrusts and vibrations. My heart still beats, air still fills my lungs, my limbs move fine. So why do I feel so hollow? (111)

The above excerpt depicts the ironic tone with which patriarchy can victimise rape survivors, minimise their ordeal and further expect them to move on. One can only appreciate that this Amazonian text gives her the platform to share her experiences which are sometimes so painfully private. As representing real women, some would relate to those detailed descriptions of sexual encounter probably from their own experiences. What Masechaba conveys is not only physical pain but emotional pain as well. The attachment women make of sex and emotion, probably unlike men, is evident through Masechaba's experiences which she shares with the reader. In the excerpt below, emotions of despair can be detected in what Masechaba shares with the reader. The text under critical focus presents the "inside" of women's experiences, and the reader learns of women's responses to events. Masechaba felt like the sky had collapsed on her. She tells how she felt after her ordeal. Capacitated female characters do just that – share. In androcentric fictional texts female characters are objects that facilitate men's projects; and as such, they do not share anything of their inside experiences. Texts written from an Amazonian point of view empower their female characters. Masechaba's psychiatrist gives the following medical information for rape victims:

After rape one suffers a loss of the former self, and it's normal and important to mourn. There are five stages of bereavement: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, and that my desire to sing praise to my

[Masechaba's] God after I'd just been raped was a textbook example of extreme denial. (115)

Indeed, in worthwhile texts we learn and we grow. Donovan (1983) argues that literature on its most profound level is a form of learning. In extract (115) above readers gets health information. Masechaba shares her resolution to get out of depression before she realised that she was pregnant; she says the following:

I can't lie here forever. I have to get up and move past this. It's done. There's no point kneading it any further. (142)

Masechaba shows determination to accept a situation which she could not change. As outlined in chapter Two, South Africa has a high rate of violence and rape against women which includes femicide. Women, in general and rape victims/survivors in particular, could be empowered by masechaba's resolution to accept her situation. Amazons are said to have been self-reliant, strong, and courageous women fighters. It could be argued that Masechaba shows courage and self-determination in handling her situation.

Before the rape incident, Masechaba became an activist against xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals. As constructed a subject Masechaba responds to events; she takes action, and she has a voice to speak up. On the other hand, stereotypes do not respond to events around them, they remain silent objects that are only acted upon. In the present text, Masechaba responds in anger to xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals as follows:

I'm annoyed. Here I am trying to do a good thing, trying to stand up for something I believe in. and the people around me who should be supporting me, who should be proud of me, are telling me to stop because the community will be irritated? Really? Who gives a f*** about the community? What's happening is wrong, and if we don't stand against what's wrong, who will? (82)

Masechaba is a subject and, thus is able to take action. Masechaba is rebelling against the bad treatment of foreigners. She is so angry that she uses the "f"-word. She is a medical doctor but circumstances has arisen that make her a political activist, raising her voice against what she perceives as injustice against foreigners.

The situation that Masechaba faces of being warned by the community not to side with foreigners against community members who were attacking foreigners, is similar to Stewart's (1995) argument that Amazons were regarded as rebels in their community as they challenged men's domination; the amazons were women thought to be presenting danger to patriarchal ancient states like Athens because they threatened the status quo. In the present text, it is Masechaba who is regarded as a rebel and a threat for siding with foreigners, derogatively referred to as "kwere-kweres", against the community. Stakes are against Masechaba – patriarchy thinks that she should be in her private space, home, to start with; and that women are supposed to be timid, submissive, and passive. In Masechaba's case, patriarchy may probably think there was something "wrong" with this woman who shouts and swears. For defying patriarchal status quo, women are "punished" as consequences of their defiance. Masechaba's "punishment" was rape; two of the three men who raped her were employees at the hospital she is a doctor; the very men who should be protecting her are her rapists. Puchero (2022:158) sums up the men's terrible actions against Masechaba as "their xenophobia, racism, and objectification of women stand in sharp contrast to the values of the 'Rainbow Nation' – the "new" South Africa. The feminist theory upon which the study is premised calls for support of the victim. In accordance with the precepts of feminism, Masechaba is a warrior who stood up against injustices of "othering".

Masechaba has now given birth to a baby girl. In Amazonian texts, female characters are not suddenly called mother-of-ten as is the case in patriarchal texts wherein the processes of getting babies are totally ignored. It can be argued that for texts to ignore women's "special experiences" is to undermine what really concerns women. Amazonian texts even get to the nitty-gritties which only women who are mothers would know. Masechaba lets the reader into that unique emotional space with her baby as follows:

She's beautiful, Mpho [in reference to her new born baby daughter]. Sometimes I find myself losing whole hours of a day because of all the time I spend just staring at her. Staring at her for no reason at all, other than just that she's so painfully beautiful. Those big, loving, forgiving, shiny black eyes. That toothless smile. I don't think I've ever known anything like her in my life. (156)

[If I can be allowed to share my experience: when holding my first child and looking at her, I simply cried].

Masechaba shares her priceless emotional reaction and attachment to her child. Unlike their patriarchal counterparts, Amazonian characters are allowed to function holistically as representatives of real women. Amazonian characters are the opposite of stereotypes that have very little in common with women in reality. All the four Amazonian characters: Masechaba, Nyasha, and both their mothers, are active in the public arena. The four Amazonian characters defy stereotypes. Masechaba is now a mother, but still a career woman; this is characteristic of a female character that is constructed from an Amazonian perspective. Female characters in the present narrative are constructed to subvert patriarchal tendencies in whatever form. The present narrative affirms and promotes women empowerment, women prowess, and women's agency and capacity for power in promotion of the feminist goal of achieving gender equality.

5.4.3. *Coconut* (2007)

5.4.3.1. Fikile

Fikile is a young Black girl in modern day South Africa. She has grown up in white suburbs away from her Black people. Being Black but growing up with white people causes her to struggle to find out who she is – identity crisis. The present text gives young Fikile a platform to dream of her future. For a young girl to be given a chance to dream is unusual in fictional texts. Girls of her age are sent to draw water from the river or in one of the chosen text for the study, some young girls are taught how to prepare their vaginas for their future husbands so that their marriages are successful. It can be argued that literature, particularly fictional texts, should flow naturally with the changing times. Young Fikile is in a text that she herself is the subject of the story; it is about her growth; it is about her future. Feminists have taken up the Amazon image to construct female characters that takes lead of their lives; the story is about themselves wherein they are not supporting any men or serving men's interests as is

the case in patriarchal texts. Female characters constructed from an Amazonian perspective are in it for themselves. Fikile has started about her life by dreaming of her future. Fikile tells of her dreams and self-determination of what she wants to do for her life as follows:

I have been possessed by a spirit of vigour in the night and today will go with courage and determination, my mind is attentive for any opportunity that may come my way. Perhaps today will be the day, that day, the one I will call “the day my life turned around”, the one I will look back at when I am rich and famous living in Project Infinity and laugh and shake my head and take a sip of a frozen martini and think to myself, did you ever imagine it would be like this? (109)

This young female character has dreams about her life as the excerpt above shows. Fikile is determined to succeed in life. Her determination to succeed shows that she is a transcendence character; her path to success is not blocked by patriarchy. Conspicuous by his absence is a future “husband” in her plan. Hardly can one come across a fictional text in which there is no husband. Feminism is concerned mainly with women’s lives and their well-being, including that of their children. Fikile has the ability to share her feelings and opinions with the reader, unlike patriarchal female characters who are almost always silent objects in whatever situation they find themselves; they suffer silently in a bad situation. The young female character in the present text shares her opinion on how she feels about women and men as follows:

Women are not so bad. They bore me with their questions about how I manage to keep my figure so slim or the stories about their harsh white bosses at work or the long tales of their various illnesses, aches and pains, but I still prefer them...The men disgust me. All of them are a bunch of criminals. A bunch of uneducated criminals. They look like they want to rape me and I know they would do it if there weren’t so many people around. (129)

In Fikile’s thoughts, the crime factor, particularly violence against women, rape to be specific, comes out. Fikile shows her constant fear of men’s actions against women. In a South African context, it would be hard to find a realistic fictional text that does not refer to violence against women as literature partakes in the matrix of cultural dominance. Unlike stereotypes that are used for perpetuating male power, Amazonian characters are able to bring to the fore issues that concern them as women. I do not think that serving men’s interests can be included as one of her concerns. Amazonian

texts construct female characters that are subjects and have voices to tell their story and experiences.

Fikile is free to give her opinion as given in excerpt (129). Fikile is angry at men and does not trust them. She thinks men are criminals; she thinks they can rape her if given a chance. She fears men's violence against women; she fears that she can be raped at any time. While men are usually constructed as heroes in patriarchal texts, in the present text young girl Fikile condemns them. She tells it like it is; there is no sugar-coating of issues in Amazonian texts. Amazonian texts give their female characters determination and zest for life. Amazonian texts seem to be aware that to be successful in life one does not have to start with abject poverty. Young Fikile is determined to make something of her life. Her determination is registered in the excerpt below as follows:

There is this new drive that has taken charge of me: it urges me to take command and create my own destiny. I am certain of where I am going and know exactly what it is I want out of life. I have worked hard to be where I am and have little tolerance for those who get in my way. (137)

Fikile is determined and she is certain of where she wants to be in life. She is determined to create her own destiny, probably would not be satisfied with a title of "Mrs so and so". There is no element of passivity in Fikile. She takes charge of her life. Fikile is active and she is assertive. Female characters such as Fikile are deliberately constructed in opposition to the traditional portrayal of women as objects for the purpose of maintaining patriarchy. Female characters that take charge of their lives are constructed from an Amazonian image to subvert the patriarchal status quo as a means to promote the feminist goal of gender equality. In patriarchates, women are expected to be passive and submissive; they are expected to stay at home and nurse children. However, Amazonians are active and assertive. In telling the reader that she has worked hard to be where she was shows that Fikile is not stagnant but that there is growth.

Fikile explains where she is at regarding her job. She is such a clever young woman that is able to convince herself that things will change for the better for her. She has the ability to motivate herself. She is her own motivational speaker. She explains as follows:

Working as a waitress is not very glamorous but I have to start somewhere. At least I am not packing plastics at Checkers or cleaning toilets. At Silver Spoon Coffee Shop I get to mix with the who's who of this country. Everybody from big-shot businessmen to surgeons and celebrated television producers. They all start their days at the Silver Spoon. (141)

She is independent and that works against patriarchy which promotes women dependency on men. Saying that she had to start somewhere, meaning the bottom, indicates that she is determined to grow. In getting herself a job, Fikile is opting for independence. In excerpt (117) below, Fikile details her path this far. She explains it as follows:

A reminder of how far I have come, from the naïve orphan child living in a one-bedroom house with her incompetent Uncle in another decrepit township to the charming young waitress... (117)

Fikile is definitely a progressive character, boasting that she has come a long way – from an orphan to a charming young waitress. That is growth. Fikile is a strong character that is not afraid to call men what they are. She calls her uncle incompetent. Fikile may be an orphan but she is determined to stand against odds than feel sorry for herself. She says the following:

I have realised that there is no gain in feeling sorry for oneself, it is really a shameful thing to do, common to the likes of Uncle, who sit and nap their lives away and then cry into the night expecting the rest of us to comfort them as if they did not bring their wretched state upon themselves. (110)

Amazonism empowers female characters and promote independence for women. Fikile is wise enough to know that feeling sorry for oneself brings no gain. Instead it is her uncle who is feeling sorry for himself. Fikile says that he brought it unto himself. In patriarchal texts it is a woman who is blamed for having brought misery to herself while men are pitied by giving them a woman playing a salvific role for him. His niece

will do no salvific role. Fikile calls her Uncle's failure as of his own making. Here below she explains what really happened [the excerpt below is included because Fikile will respond to it]. Fikile says the following of her uncle:

Uncle failed dismally and was excluded from the medical school at the University of Cape Town because he was an idiot. Simple. Uncle was an idiot and got what idiots got. He probably didn't study for any of the tests because he idiotically thought he was too smart to study. Absolute idiot. (127)

Amazonia texts do not cover up man's weaknesses and failures as most patriarchal texts would do especially where there is a salvific woman waiting for him to come home. However, Fikile puts his failure squarely on his shoulders in this Amazonian text. She repeatedly calls him an idiot. Her choice of words in describing him as an idiot could also be indicative of her anger towards him for sexually abusing her. Taking into account that he abused her sexually, her anger towards him is justified. Fikile is dissatisfied and angry with her uncle. The excerpt below confirms the absence of a salvific woman for this male character. There is no female character waiting to console him as is mostly the case in patriarchal texts. He cries alone; Fikile explains as follows:

He lay in bed for weeks sobbing and eating whatever Gogo put at his door and that was the end of it, the end of Uncle the smart one, the one who spoke the white man's language, the one who would save us. (126)

It can be observed that neither his mother [Gogo] nor his niece [Fikile] is his comforter. His mother only puts food at his door; not at all playing a salvific role as is usually the case in patriarchal texts. The niece is instead even sarcastic about his failures. Fikile's response to her uncle's failures opposes what female characters would respond in patriarchal texts. A salvific woman would be waiting for him with open arms after he would have squandered everything. In the present text, neither Gogo, his mother, nor Fikile are playing the role of salvific woman. This female character is aware of her intellectual abilities. She believes she could have done better than her uncle; she could have become a doctor had she been given a chance such as given her uncle; her insistence on that had they chosen her for university, she could have done well could be suggesting that she is aware that the reason she was not chosen was because she is a girl. She complains as follows:

If only they [a white family, the Kinsleys who sent her uncle to university] had invested that money in me instead of Uncle. I knew I was clever, more clever than Uncle would ever be and more grateful. I knew that if I was given half the chance Uncle had been given, I would never have turned out to be a disappointment. (124)

Fikile continues sharing her dreams. Here follows what her dreams are as she shares them with the reader:

Someday I will own a king-sized bed with a solid-wood headboard dresses in decorative ironwork and red leather...I will have the money to do so. It really is only a matter of time until I'm out of this hole, gone and gone for good, never to return again. (116)

Her dreams may seem small, but they reveal her age which is about seventeen; her dream also reveals what she does not have at the moment. What is of importance though for this Amazonian character is that she has dreams unlike constructions in patriarchal texts who have no tomorrows. As authentic characters representing real women, Amazonian characters think of the future. Fikile does not want to stay in the same level of life but wants to progress as she is not constructed a stagnation but as transcendence. She says the following:

I do not let a single opportunity slip me by without giving it some serious consideration. Like this waitressing job at Silver Spoon. It isn't exactly spectacular living but it is a stepping stone which allows me to mingle with the A-list, who will someday be friends and neighbours. (176)

The issue of growth or progress for the young female character is again stressed. Fikile considers her job as a waitress only as a stepping stone to some better jobs. Characters that are constructed as transcendence continually strive for freedom and autonomous subjectivity (De Beauvoir, 1949). As a subject, Fikile shares her experiences. The reality of sexual abuse of girls and women is recorded in the present text. Sexual abuse, rape and violence against women is rife in South Africa. Gqola (2015) argues that the endemic violence against women in South Africa is one of the constitutive elements of society that has been normalised and made part of the patriarchal culture. In the excerpt below Fikile details how she suffered sexual abuse at the hands of her uncle as follows:

Uncle would then take my little hand and gently slip it into the loose tracksuit pants he wore at night. Uncle was gentle. In fact, people often would say, "Oh Uncle, he's such a gentle man. Not a single violent bone in him." But the snake inside Uncle's pants was always awake. It was always hot and rubbery and would sometimes stick to the palm of my hand as Uncle moved my hand up and down it. It was at this point that Uncle would begin to sob, first slightly, as if only for himself, and then louder and louder, until he cried out in agony for all the world to hear. Then he would fall asleep. (114)

The details Fikile gives above are eerily real. Amazonian texts empower their female characters. The empowerment for this victim of sexual abuse is that she is given a voice to tell her ordeal. Stereotypes are silenced; they seldom share their feelings; they do not share their experiences; little or nothing is learned from them. An Amazonian text presents the "inside" of women's experiences. In the present text, abuses and violent acts against women are not "swept under the carpet", so to speak. Fikile is thus not a silent victim as in patriarchal texts where women are objectified and silenced. An Amazonian character tells her story.

Amazonian characters respond to events; they take action. Meeder (2008) argues that Amazons, after whose image Amazonian characters are constructed, were strong and self-reliant women who had survived the sometimes brutal and savage world. After the sexual abuses, Fikile took action about her abusive situation; she did something about her uncle's abuse. She took this action. She says the following:

When I crept into our bedroom I was suddenly overtaken by the notion to sleep on the floor and not get into the bed where uncle was waiting for me to comfort him. I slept on the hard cement floor that night...I slept like that the night after and the night after that...uncle never said a word about the new sleeping arrangement...I have been sleeping on this floor for five years now. (115-6)

Unlike a silent object that is acted upon, Fikile is a subject that has taken action regarding her situation; she responds to events. Patriarchal constructions do not respond to whatever is said or done to their person. In the excerpt above, we see Fikile moving out of the bed she used to sleep in with her uncle and start sleeping on the floor. This sleeping arrangement of a grown man sleeping with a young girl in the same

bed was already abusive on its own before he even started his abusive acts. Fikile is capable of taking resolutions. Now at the age of eighteen Fikile tells of the resolution she took five years before:

Yes, five years since that night I decided it was not my responsibility to lull Uncle to sleep by rubbing his dick. (116)

Fikile is an independent young girl who is able to take tough decisions for herself through her ability to read situations which calls for decision-making. Hereunder follows one such a decision:

I had seen pictures of another life, a better life, and I wanted it. So I walked out of the school gates and never went back. That was 1999, the beginning of grade ten. (168)

Excerpt above shows Fikile's courage and determination. She takes a bold step of leaving school at a young age and by so doing she also moved out of her abusive uncle's home. Fikile is capable of taking action to address the problem she explained in (168) above. An Amazonian character has cognitive powers to think and act. As an empowered female character Fikile does not suffer in silence because she has a voice. Giving voice to female characters is crucial, specifically to female characters because they mostly suffer in silence in patriarchal texts. Bambara (2004) quoted in Ibinga (2007) argues that keeping silent in oppressive conditions makes room for the perpetuation of submissive cultural practices, and that silence can be seen as a contribution to one's own oppression. As a subject Fikile takes action; and because she has voice she shares that experience. Fikile does not cry about a problem, she instead she devises a plan to solve the problem. When she started work her uniform was not complete, she was given an ultimatum by her boss that she will be fired if she continued going to work without uniform. What follows below shows her determination to get uniform. Her words of determination and wisdom were:

But I soon pulled myself together and made a plan. There was no way a single pair of silly jeans was going to stand in the way of me and Project Infinity. Sometimes in life you have to push the boundaries, be creative, stretch your resources and take the road less travelled to get what you want. (119)

The words above are those of wisdom and determination from an empowered female character. She is equipped with thinking abilities. The determination she has to keep her job; and her thinking abilities, all show empowerment of women. Amazonism emphasises women empowerment. Here follows the action Fikile took to keep her job after her boss gave her a last chance to come to work without uniform otherwise she be fired.

I could hear blood rushing past my ears. I refused to lose this job. I knew what I had to do. I calmly removed from the shelf the first size 32 black jeans I saw; I folded them into my bag and walked out of the store. (122)

Fikile had just stolen a jean from a shop probably as an act of desperation? The reader is aware that it is a wrong route to take for whatever reason. Fikile is a daring young woman, who would be brave enough to pull a stunt that daring, but Fikile just did. She did it with fear but she did it. Fikile even tries her hand at leadership. The boss at the restaurant she was working had just discharged orders to her staff and left. Fikile must have summoned courage to say the following to the kitchen staff:

You heard her, stop standing around, and bake bread! (145)

We are by now aware that Amazons were courageous women who would engage men in battle. Young as she was, Fikile was courageous enough to instruct those workers. It is worth noting that the staff, waiters and those working in the kitchen were both females and males. There were no gender role stereotypes. Fikile answers back at a white man making advances at her. The white man had left some money in the restaurant where she waits. She says to the white man:

But I'm no whore, I made that clear to him when he came in for the first time on Monday, flashing his money around and calling me "baby". He left a couple of hundred rands and his phone number and got up and left. I ran after him. "Sorry sir" I said, "you seem to have left some of your belongings behind". (170)

While most female characters in some patriarchal texts are called whores, Fikile makes it clear that she is not one. She is able to do this because she has voice to defend herself, and to stand for her rights. The white man, probably racist and

patriarchal, assumed that Fikile was a whore; typical of patriarchy. Fikile is a Self; she is a subject that can speak. She does not keep silent because, as argued in Ibinga (2007), silence can be seen as a contribution to one's own oppression. Quite an Amazonian character this Fikile. The White man made further assumptions to Fikile. He assumed that Fikile might go with him if he promises her lots of money. The White man goes on:

Come with me. How much are they paying you here? I'll give what you make in a year, today. I'll even double it. Triple it. You don't belong here. (175)

How patronising! How patriarchal! How racist! It is my assumption that had Fikile, as an Amazonian character, answered back at that moment; she could have answered in a manner similar to how I have just written. But Fikile did not say anything at that moment, she only later asked herself:

But I am not for sale, am I? (175), she asks herself.

This is a loaded question. Racism and patriarchy seem to have taught this man that, she could go with him as he so demanded, and that he could indeed buy her. The white man's obscured mentality is that woman is object, and probably more of an object if she is black because of white supremacy thinking. The white man sounded so certain of his racist and patriarchal commands that our little Amazonian character starts to question herself in contradictory terms: she starts her response first with confidence, "But I am not for sale", but quickly in the same breath asks, "Am I?" This confusion in her head, and probably as beginner in the outside world, could be because of a reality dawning on her that this kind of situation could be happening to women out there; things similar to women trafficking perhaps. The white man symbolises all sorts of discrimination, domination and violations against women. This Amazonian character brings them to the open because she is a subject.

Commuting by train, Fikile met a man with his little girl in the train. The father's remarks about his little girl to Fikile shows that even little girls in Amazonian texts are given

freedom to think, to choose, to lead, to be who they want to become. These words by the father bears testament:

And just by looking at Palesa, you can just see that she is such an inspired little girl with so much to offer the world. (189)

This is empowerment for girl children. A father, the patriarch of the family, is this time around, in this Amazonian text, seen to be enthusiastic about his little girl's contribution to the world. The father is thus placing no impediments on her path to achieve existential freedom and autonomous subjectivity. Amazonian characters share their experiences; the reader learns what goes on inside these characters unlike patriarchal female characters that are silent. In the excerpt below Fikile is reflecting upon her life:

I need to spring-clean my head. There is a real big mess up there but I am too afraid to go in because I do not think I have the strength to handle the task of tidying it all. It is a long time since I was there last. I am scared of what I may find. (177)

I am tired of the fear, the anxiety, and the endless debates within my head, the empty feeling in my chest and the knot in my stomach. (181)

Works such as this Amazonian text which presents the "inside" of women experiences is considered significant to feminist critics, and thus to women. According to Stewart (1995), Amazons challenge the stereotyping of women central to patriarchal literature where women are merely objects serving men's interests.

The culture's moral view of women is of feminist significance as well. Hereunder young Fikile is treated considerately by a white young man whose friend caused a scene at the restaurant she works:

I am sorry. This job obviously means a lot to you. I am really sorry. Please don't cry. I'll go and speak to your boss. Do you want me to speak to her? I really do hate to see such a beautiful girl so sad. (183)

There is a patronising tone in saying that he hates to see such a beautiful girl so sad, further necessitating the question: Does it is okay to see other not so good looking

girls sad? Is it really respect? This is an Amazonian text. Amazonism strives for gender equity for both society and fictional literary texts. Fikile is also surprised to receive niceties from a stranger, a man, whom she met in the train that morning, and whom she meets again in the train as she goes back home in the afternoon. She responds as follows:

That's a first! I never thought anybody around here would refer to me as "the nice lady". Such a strange man, I think to myself. How can he call me the "nice lady" after the way I treated him this morning? (185)

Fikile has displayed characters of the Amazons: she is strong, courageous, and active, and independent. She thus defies patriarchal stereotypes of docile femininity.

5.4.3.2. Ofilwe

Ofilwe is another young girl who grows up in white suburbs. She struggles with issues of fitting in and identity. She stays with her parents, the Tlous. After church as the Tlous were driving home, their daughter Ofilwe says the following on issues regarding marriage and family:

I wonder what my own family will be like. Unlike some of my female friends, I do not have a picture of an ideal husband in mind nor am I certain whether I even fancy one. (19)

Ofilwe is a young girl who displays liberal thoughts on issues of husbands and marriages. While in patriarchal societies and patriarchal texts marriages are socialised, Fikile seems to have liberated thinking on issues of marriage. She is allowed to think for herself, she is free to differ with others. And in explaining that she and her mother used to talk a lot unlike now, Ofilwe again talks of marriage, particularly about children as follows:

Mama knew that I wanted to have four children whom I would name Cloud, Claude, Claudia and Claudette but did not want the trouble of a man in my houses. (55)

The young girl Ofilwe exercises her freedom of choice in determining what she wants for herself even at that young stage. The mother does not try to redirect her daughter's view on marriage and family. The daughter has the freedom to think of what she wants for herself in future. Ofilwe seems to think husbands cause trouble for their wives. She seems to be opting not to have a husband but to have children. According to Hurwit (1999), Amazons possessed the same rights and freedoms that men enjoyed. They had freedom of choice, and they even chose to live without men unlike Athenian women who had no choice but to marry. Athenian men were expected to defend women in their servitude. Any role outside of those narrow confines for women became a threat to their society. Ofilwe is exercising her rights to think for her herself if she wants to marry or not to marry.

Masenya (1996) concurs with the Amazonian ideology of allowing women freedom of choice on marriage, thus freeing them from shackles of patriarchy stemming from socialisation of marriage. Ofilwe's mother met with challenges in her own marriage. Her mother, Ofilwe's grandmother's reaction and response to her daughter's marital problems show that her daughter, Ofilwe's mother, wanted out of her marriage because of her husband's infidelity. The problem she was facing, and what action she wanted to take, is recorded in the grandmother's words as follows:

Koko (grandmother) said Mama needed to stop acting like a spoilt child. Koko said that John – Daddy – was a man and that men do these things with other women, but that does not mean he does not care for Mama. Koko said that Mama lives a life that many women from where she comes from can only dream of and that she cannot jeopardise that by "this crazy talk of divorce" ... "without him (husband) my girl you is (sic) nothing." (12-13)

As it can be judged, Ofilwe's grandmother's thinking is patriarchal. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) has rightly argued that the struggle African women face are also impart to the way they have internalized patriarchy and have come to endorse the system themselves. Ofilwe's grandmother is one such woman. She thinks that her married daughter will be nothing without her husband if she divorces him. However, her daughter, Ofilwe's mother, is a fighter of oppressive systems. As a little girl Ofilwe dreamt of a career she wanted to follow. Even at a young age, Ofilwe was already

opting for independence by becoming a career woman. She says the following about her envisaged independent life:

Mama knew that I desired to be an astronaut one day, and have a house in the southern hemisphere and another in the northern hemisphere so that I could avoid the winter. (55)

Ofilwe is a young Amazonian character who has freedom to have any career of her choice as opposed to the stereotypical identity that only promotes woman as object or woman as “Other”. The young girl is also knowledgeable which shows empowerment. Ofilwe tells of her dreams and her convictions; she is a subject and has a voice. Ofilwe’s mother is treated fairly by her husband after he has negotiated with her to stop working as a nurse. What follows next shows that she is appreciated as woman, and in her role as wife and mother; she was paid for running the household even though she had a domestic worker. Housework in one’s own home is mostly not considered “work” and as such, in most cases than not, women are not paid for such work. But Ofilwe’s mother was paid. Young (2003:134) avers that:

Postcolonial feminists are not interested in dismantling family order, custom, and tradition. They seek balance, mutual respect and harmony. They want to rear family and family relations but not at the behest of their counterparts or co-partners. They prefer balance and harmony maintaining all the feminine differences visible. They want to remove age-old constrictions laid on women’s lives, and live on par with men. They expect emotional support from their partners.

For Ofilwe’s mother to have left her nursing job and got paid by her husband for staying with their children at home seems to have been a negotiated issue between wife and husband. This kind of negotiation is in line with Nnemeka’s (2004:4) Nego-feminism in which she argues as follows:

Most African cultures have a culture of negotiation and compromise when it comes to reaching agreements. In Nego-feminism, negotiations play the role of giving and taking. For African feminism, in order to win challenges, feminists must negotiate and sometimes compromise enough in order to gain freedoms. African feminism works by knowing when, where, and how to detonate and go around patriarchal land mines. This means that Nego-feminism knows how to utilize the culture of negotiation in order to deconstruct the patriarchy for the woman’s benefit.

One equally young girl working as waiter in a restaurant promotes woman as moral agent in this text as young Ofilwe condemns what she believed to be immoral behaviour. She was flirting with an old white man. Ofilwe says the following of the waiter's behaviour:

Is she not embarrassed? Does she not wonder what the rest of us will think of her hanky-pankies with that Oupa? The grey-haired, pale man with the blue eyes she has been speaking to looks like he has been in that suit since Friday morning. Stale. The type you know is pathetically desperate. (22)

Women derogation in patriarchal texts nearly always goes unnoticed by the female characters themselves because they are simply objects with no seats of consciousness. However, Amazonian Ofilwe condemns what she considers immoral behaviour. The two young female characters, Fikile and Ofilwe, as well as Ofilwe's mother, are active, thus defying passivity of patriarchal texts; they are subjects, selves, thus opposing objecthood and victimhood of female characters in patriarchal texts.

In chapter Five Matlwa's female characters have been analysed employing the precepts of feminist theory which enabled the study to determine what constitute a female patriarchal construct or a female constructed from a feminist perspective.

CHAPTER SIX

6. AMAZONIAN CHARACTERS VERSUS PATRIARCHAL CONSTRUCTS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter six brings together analysed female characters from Mda's texts in chapter four with analysed female characters from Matlwa's texts. The aim of the study is to determine whether female characters from both writers' texts are from a patriarchal view or from an Amazonian perspective. The feminist theory, together with its branches, enables the study to determine if female characters are amazonians or stereotypes in chapters four and five. The purpose of bringing together the female characters of both writers in this chapter is to detail aspects that make a character to be a stereotype or an Amazonian. For manageability, titles of texts are abbreviated as follows:

Matlwa texts: *Spilt Milk* henceforth [SM]; *Period Pain* [PP], and *Coconut* [CC].

Mda's texts: *Ways of Dying* [WD]; *She Plays with the Darkness* [SPD]; *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* [GSD], and *Little Suns* [LS].

6.2. MATLWA'S FEMALE CHARACTERS AND MDA'S FEMALE CHARACTERS

This section reflects on aspects that differentiate Matlwa's female characters from Mda's female characters in the selected texts.

6.2.1. Aspects in Matlwa's texts

The vast majority of female characters in Matlwa's texts address issues that are of valid concern to women. Personal issues which are of importance to real women as part of their being, are addressed.

6.2.1.1. Bleeding from the vagina

(i) Matlwa's texts:

Matlwa's female characters experience what real women would experience such as "bleeding" from the vagina. These are areas that are totally disregarded in Mda's texts under critical focus. Yet one would imagine that areas such as these could be of more concern to women than patriarchy would have us believe. Patriarchy objectifies woman to keep her busy with the "master's work", and to distract her from focusing on herself as a "Self", and not as an "Other". An Amazonian character is authentic; she has a reflective, critical consciousness, where she is a moral agent, capable of self-determined action, where she is a Self, not an "other". Amazonian characters are representatives of real people. According to Pauline Pantel (1994) Amazons were "flesh-and-blood" and that they were not cartoon characters as Greek mythology taught us to believe.

Masechaba in Matlwa's PP shares her lived-experiences which some real women she represents could relate to. The extract below is for confirmation that Masechaba does bleed:

When I started to bleed, I thought Ma would kill me. I was a naughty child, putting my fingers where I shouldn't, feeling parts of my body I had no business touching...I knew immediately that it was my punishment from God, and hid the evidence. I hid it for days...it was uncomfortable, but nothing compared to the discomfort I knew would come with confessing to Ma that I had sinned and was bleeding as a result...I knew for sure that this was the beginning of my end. (11)

Masechaba is real; she bleeds as most women would. Masechaba is a Self, and talks of self. She is not facilitating any man's project. She is an Amazonian character. Real women can relate to Masechaba's experience as they themselves may probably remember their reaction to their first menstrual cycle. Masechaba also shares how she came to understand what the bleeding was all about, as follows:

I later learnt at Sunday School that jugs of serum periodically pouring from one's vagina was no divine punishment at all, but a physiologically necessary and

healthy part of a woman's life that should not only be welcomed, but celebrated.
(12)

Amazonian texts present the "inside" of women's experiences and women's responses to events. Masechaba has "trouble" with her menstruation and complains about it. Amazonian characters have abilities to respond to events, to act, to speak because they are subjects, and have voices. As a subject Masechaba can even complain if she wants to. Amazonians have voices to speak. Mda's female characters are denied voice. Toni Cade Bambara (1996) rightly argues that silence in oppressive conditions makes room for the perpetuation of submissive cultural practices. Masechaba, then at a younger age, appealed to God about her menstrual "problem" as follows:

I prayed relentlessly that the God who parted the Red Sea and dried it right up for the people He loved might consider blessing me with a season of dry panties.
(12)

Masechaba's "problem" was not trying to get a man to marry her, as patriarchy tries to channel women's thinking through socialisation of marriage, and through what Barry (1979:1772) refers to as "Early female indoctrination", far from it. Masechaba is troubled by her womb just as some real women would indeed be troubled and would worry about hysterectomies and mastectomies above patriarchal expectations on women. Masechaba continues sharing her problem as follows:

I remember telling Ma that I wanted it (womb) taken out, cut away from me and incinerated in the large chamber at the hospital behind the hill. (12)

And:

It's been years since I've felt such rage for the dysfunctional flesh within my pelvis, years since I've wanted to stick my fist all the way up my vagina and yank the demon out. (97)

The issue of bleeding is what most women would have to deal with; how they have to learn to be comfortable with themselves, and how they have to face the world "looking happy" while they "leak" below and probably feel miserable like Masechaba. Masechaba is just like a real girl next-door, if not in-door. In sharing her lived-experiences, Masechaba is an Amazonian character for women empowerment.

(ii) Mda's texts

Mda's female characters do not represent real women; they are instead constructed for roles perpetuating patriarchy. Bertens (2014) rightly argues that the way female characters are routinely portrayed in patriarchal texts makes them *constructs* because they have not much in common with the way real women see and experience themselves.

6.2.1.2. Child birth process

(i) Matlwa's texts

Amazonian texts give women an opportunity to be the women that they are. They can have sex, they get pregnant, and they give birth to children as most women do. In the present text an incident of a woman giving birth in hospital is detailed. This is one of the major areas of real concern for most women. If women in a text are in it for themselves as subjects, this is one area which cannot be neglected. As a doctor herself, Masechaba watched doctor Nyasha help a woman give birth to a baby, and she explains as follows:

I watched her one night, joking with a mother who was a heartbeat away from losing a perfectly healthy baby. The baby's umbilical cord had slipped out of the woman's vagina during labour, and Nyasha stood for four hours with a damp cloth in that bloody cavity, keeping the cord moist until a theatre space opened (39).

Amazonian characters are subjects; their lives matter, and their babies' lives matter, hence the sharing of experiences. The woman in labour is at the heart of the process of giving birth to a child. If the woman is of importance, and she is in the text for herself, then that crucial moment of giving birth should be captured. Matlwa's texts cover such areas that are crucial to women's lives. Amazonian characters find "home" in Amazonian texts because they are given real existence for "Self" and not "Other". Amazonian characters are themselves empowered, for the sake of empowering women to ultimately achieve the feminists' goal of gender equality.

Female readers who may have given birth to a child themselves would probably try to imagine how that woman who was at a brink of losing her child was feeling like at that moment. The woman in question was probably very concerned about whether her baby would survive or not. At that point, she would probably not be worrying about whether her husband has eaten or not eaten. Patriarchy is so way off the mark in knowing exactly what is important to women. Sharing the experience of this woman in the process of delivering her baby is important; and Amazonians share experiences. Patriarchy that is imposed on women is an ideology that does not seem to care much about women. The issue of giving birth to a child is taken seriously in Amazonian texts to the extent that even how the child is to be delivered is made known. Masechaba in Matlwa's Amazonian text takes us through the birth of her own child in PP, a product of rape, as follows:

They would have to deliver the baby early via Caesarean section, due to the risk of uterine rupture. I had been added to the theatre list for that evening. (148)

And:

Sometimes I find myself losing whole hours of a day because of all the time I spend just staring at her (her now delivered baby). Staring at her for no reason at all, other than just that she's so painfully beautiful. (156)

Unique women experiences such as those above of giving birth to a child, and admiring her, are captured in Matlwa's text. Women's lives and their experiences are of importance in Amazonian texts for women empowerment. Masechaba goes through process of giving birth to a child because she represents real women; she stands in the stead of the woman race. In phallogentric texts, women's importance lies only in their contribution to perpetuating patriarchy.

(ii) Mda's texts

Female characters are simply heaped with large numbers of children per one woman. For example, Nefolovhodwe's wife in *WD* was simply given "nine children" (132); and in *SPD* another female character, Mother-of-the-daughters, was given "ten daughters" (11). Pregnancies of women and births of children are disregarded; they do not seem

to be worthy of discussion in patriarchal texts. Masenya (2009:140) argues that patriarchy alienates women's own experiences; valid concerns of women become relegated to "things of the world" that must be shunned. However, menstruations, pregnancies and childbirths are of serious concern to women. If texts do not address such issues, the argument would be that women are in the texts only to support male characters; women's valid concerns are alienated. Constructs are totally denied their womanhood and are instead kept busy with the "master's" work and are in texts to prop up his now shaky ideology of patriarchy. Amazonian characters, as seen above, do bleed, get pregnant, and give birth to children. Personal issues such as the above are ignored in Mda's texts.

6.2.1.3. Woman's sexual desires

(i) Matlwa's texts

Amazonian characters also have sexual desires that some real women may experience. In *SM*, Mohumagadi's sexual desire as she was thinking of her boyfriend of fifteen years back, who now finds himself at "her" school, is captured as follows:

She curled her back as she felt a shudder of warmth come down her spine and in between her legs. And sucked in the inside at the sudden pleasure of it. Tiny tingles danced in the depths between her thighs. She switched on the radio, dismissing the warmth that made her want to part her legs... "How primitive", she said to herself. (138)

Writing about women's sexual desires is probably taboo in traditional patriarchal texts. Sexual desires for women are mostly avoided in patriarchal texts, including bleeding, pregnancy and giving birth. These are issues that most women would experience in reality. Patriarchal texts reserve sexual feelings for men thinking that it is only men who are entitled to sexual desires. Matlwa's Amazonian characters are, however, breaking such taboos by showing that sexual desires are given, regardless of gender.

(ii) Mda's texts

In Mda's texts female characters do not seem to share sexual desires. Stereotypes do not share experiences; they are only silent objects that are acted upon. However, their

male counterparts are given that opportunity to share. After having had sex with Mthwakazi, male character Malangana sang praise of how beautiful the sex was; he says that he felt he could take the girl's organ home with him; but the female character did not say a word.

6.2.1.4. Leadership roles, education and income

(i) Matlwa's texts

In Matlwa's texts women are educated, are professionals, and are accorded leadership roles. Mohumagadi in *SM* is a school principal. Ndudumo's mother in *SM* is an internationally acclaimed writer. Moya's mother in *SM* is a diplomat in Switzerland. Female protagonist Masechaba in *PP* is a medical doctor; her friend Nyasha is a medical doctor as well. For women to be educated; to have professions and assume leadership roles in the public sphere is to empower them socially and financially. Amazonian characters are created in texts for women empowerment as a means of achieving gender equality.

(ii) Mda's texts

Most female characters in Mda's texts are not educated. Noria, the first female character in *WD* did not finish primary school. She worked in various menial jobs. She was a sweeper in government offices; a sweeper in church, and ended up a prostitute in a hotel (89). Mother-of-the-Daughters in *SPD* was not educated, and she was not working outside her home. Mother-of-Twins in *SPD* was not educated either; and she worked at a community project. Mthwakazi in *LS* was not educated; her job was to dig roots. She sometimes worked as a care giver, and sometimes a sweeper. Woman and Lady in *GSD* are not educated; they used to work as kitchen maids before the start of the narrative. Lady joined prostitution. Dikosha in *SPD* passed standard six, but she did not proceed to secondary school because a bursary was only given to her brother. Dikosha was not employed but had a patch of cabbages to work on. She later

became a prostitute. Female characters in Mda's texts tend to do menial jobs with low income. It could mean that the women are financially dependent.

6.2.1.5. Women's experiences with gender violence

According to Donovan (1983:214), Amazonian texts present the "inside" of women experiences. Female characters are authentic or Amazonians if their inside experiences are presented in texts.

(i) Matlwa's texts

A female medical doctor, Masechaba, in Matlwa's *PP* is raped by three men in the precincts of the hospital where she works. The writer does not create a utopia for female characters, but she makes them face real challenges that are suffered by women in reality; hence the authenticity. Masechaba describes in detail the act of raping her as follows:

It was my mouth they forced open, one first put his penis in my mouth and I had to suck it because I was scared. It felt like something was tearing inside. The second or third penis in my vagina grated like fork against a brick. (132)

Masechaba in Matlwa's *PP* is a subject; she has an existence of her own. She represents real women; she is "flesh and blood"; she is an authentic female character; she is an Amazonian character. Amazonian Masechaba receives support after the rape ordeal from her friends and colleagues as real communities would usually do. The rape paradigm concept applied in patriarchal texts for female rape victims is opposed in Amazonian texts. As a subject, and can speak, Masechaba comments about the visits and she feels about the visits as follows:

The visitors pour through the door. I feel like an animal in a zoo. Ma says that they only want to show me their support; it's better not to be alone for too long. But they irritate me, saying stupid things like, "Everything will be okay, don't worry, everything will be okay." How do they know everything will be okay? Why do they say stupid things they have no evidence for? (93)

I'm so sick of hearing about Job. Everybody wants to tell me about Job (of the Bible). The story of Job is not comforting. I don't care if it has a happy ending. It does not make me feel any better to know that he had everything replaced in the end. Some things just can't be replaced. (96)

Masechaba also contemplated taking her own life. Hereunder follows how Masechaba felt after the rape:

In the mornings I sit on the edge of my bed. I imagine it's a tall building, or a bridge, a cliff, a roof, the balcony of a skyscraper. I fantasise about what it would be like to fly off and come crashing to the floor. (103)

I wish they had just killed me. (113)

Masechaba continues sharing her inner story of pain:

There is no vocabulary for the pain I feel. How do I construct a sentence that explains that they made me into a shell of myself? Not "like" a shell of myself, but an actual shell of myself? How do I explain that what they stole from me is more than just my "womanhood"? How do I explain that the languages at my disposal can't communicate the turmoil I have inside? That it's more than my "dignity" they stole, it's more than a "violation" they subjected me to? That it would have been better to die than to be spooned out and left that way? (109)

Young Fikile in Matlwa's *CC* is given a chance to share her experiences: painful experiences. Young Fikile in Matlwa's *CC* has a voice to speak, and she is a subject. Fikile is a young Amazonian character. Fikile describes sexual abuse perpetrated by her uncle on her. Fikile details the sexual abuse as follows:

Uncle would take my little hand and gently slips it into the loose tracksuit pants he wore at night...the snake inside Uncle's pants was always awake. It was always hot and rubbery and would sometimes stick to the palm of my hand as Uncle moved my hand up and down it. It was always at this point that Uncle would begin to sob, first slightly, as if only for himself, and then louder and louder, moving my hand faster and faster and harder, until he cried out in agony for all the world to hear. Then he would fall asleep, blowing trumpets through his nose (114).

Female characters in Matlwa's texts share their experiences with the reader.

(ii) Mda's texts

In Mda's text *SPD*, Mother-of-the Daughters is also a victim of rape by her former son-in-law. The female character neither receives support nor says anything about the rape. She does not share about how she feels inside; she is voiceless; she is silenced. The inability of female stereotypes to share what they feel inside, could be interpreted that they are merely "empty shells". Barry (1979:1770) talks of a *rape paradigm* where "a female victim of sexual assault is held responsible for her own victimisation – as leading to the rationalisation and acceptance of other forms of enslavement where the woman is presumed to have "chosen" her fate, to embrace it passively, or to have courted it perversely through rash or unchaste behaviour." Rape victim Mother-of-the-Daughters in Mda's *SPD* is not supported by her people nor the courts. The male magistrate indeed held the female victim of rape responsible for her victimisation. The male magistrate says the following in court.

The victim is an experienced woman who was not a virgin at the time of the crime, and she therefore suffered no serious injury. (188)

The victim must be flattered that at her advanced age she should be the subject of desire of a handsome young man. (187)

She was drunk when the crime was committed. It is well known that drunken women sometimes invite such actions. (188)

Mother-of-the-Daughters is an object that is only acted upon. She does not share her experiences nor opinions. She is a silent victim. Mother-of-the-Daughters is thus a tool that is used to perpetuate a patriarchal notion that rape women call it upon themselves to be raped because of how they are dressed or how they "behave". The male protagonist says the following about the silent victim, Mother-of-the-Daughters:

He remembered her sitting on the stoep outside, shoulders stooped in shame, and both men and women passing her as if she did not exist, on their way to sympathise with her husband. (185)

Ibinga (2007:26), rightly argues that adopting silence in oppressive conditions makes room for the perpetuation of submissive cultural practices. The community only supported the rape victim's husband. One man asks the following questions:

Who could do this to Father-of-the-Daughters (the husband to the victim)? To such an important personality in these parts? A man known far and wide for his generosity and his modesty, even though he's the wealthiest man in the village? (185)

Above, support is directed at the patriarch. The woman, the object, is of no consequence; she is important primarily for her contribution to perpetuating patriarchy, otherwise none cares.

6.2.1.6. Marriage and independence

Female characters in Amazonian texts and patriarchal texts have different views on marriage. According to Hurwit (1999), Amazons of ancient Greece waged wars against men, and chose to live without men. Masenya (2009) argues against patriarchy that girls and boys should be allowed to choose to marry or not to marry. However, in patriarchal texts marriage is socialised from a young age. Rich (1977) argues that patriarchy's insistence on marriage, between woman and man, is because the union functions to ensure that women are sexually accessible to men.

(i) Matlwa's texts

Female characters in Matlwa's texts under critical focus are not married, and seem to be against the idea of marriage. In *SM*, Mohumagadi, the school principal, is not married, and she is independent. In *PP*, Masechaba, the female medical doctor is not married, and thus not dependant on a man. Again in *PP*, Nyasha, a medical doctor is not married either; she lives life independent of men. In *SM*, Ndudumo's mother, an internationally acclaimed writer, is not married. Moya's mother in *SM* is also not married. Young women Ofilwe and Fikile in *CC* are not married as well. Young Ofilwe's view on marriage is as follows:

Unlike some of my female friends, I do not have a picture of an ideal husband in mind nor am I certain whether I even fancy one. (19)

Amazonian characters are given freedom of choice.

(ii) Mda's texts

Some patriarchal texts socialise marriage. Socialisation of marriage involves grooming young people, particularly girls, for marriage. Young girls grow up knowing that they have to get married, and they know so with no questions asked. The reason for this is that girls and women receive the concept of matrimony as dogma. It is almost a priori conception that they have to marry. Barry (1979) calls the concept "Early female indoctrination" where patriarchists may use even wedding pageantry to attract girls into marriages. The example below confirms how young people, in Mda's *LS*, are channelled into the narrow confines of objecthood:

Weddings were the highlight of any teenager's years because of the singing and dancing. And, of course, cavorting with the opposite sex. Weddings begot weddings (69).

Another aspect confirming that girls are socialised for marriages at a young age is evinced in Mda's *PD*, where girls are engaged in activities of changing the natural look of their vaginas. A reason for the disfigurement of the vagina is given as follows:

Young girls were encouraged by older girls and young women to pull the pages the book that contained the mysteries of life, until they were long. As the girls played their games, out of sight of everyone else, they pulled each other like that, every day, until the pages were stretched and hanging out. The longer they were, the happier the future of the girls would be, for girls were taught that when they got married these long pages would please their husbands, and their marriages would last forever. (123)

Young girls are taught by society to prepare for their marriages and how they have to please their husbands. This is indeed indoctrination of women. These young girls are constructions for promoting oppressive traditional practices in perpetuation of patriarchy.

6.2.1.7. Ability to form projects

An authentic character has a self-defined critical consciousness and is capable of forming projects, as opposed to stereotypical identity. As subjects, authentic characters take action; they take charge (Donovan, 1983).

(i) Matlwa's texts

Matlwa's female characters are capable of forming projects, whether adult or young girls. In *SM*, a group of four primary school children, two girls and two boys, successfully carried out a project on "stages of puberty". The girls came up with a brilliant idea that they should instead make a video of their own private organs to see the stages of puberty. The completed project is projected on the screen. The following is what the principal sees on the screen as she passes by the class:

A vagina, and then a penis, and then a finger pointing at testicles appearing on the wall. And the images were all of children. Baby vaginas, baby penises, baby testicles, a baby finger pointing at them all. (176)

The principal, Mohumagadi, heard Ndudumo's (a ten-year old girl) voice - subjects have voices unlike constructs that are voiceless – explaining the images on the wall as follows:

Puberty in girls starts at an average age of ten-and-a-half years. It begins with the development of the breast bud. The contours of the papilla and the areola then become separate from the rest of the breast, as demonstrated by Moya's breasts. The areola then regresses as demonstrated by my [Ndudumo's] breasts. The pubic hair begins to develop at stage two of breast development, initially with just sparse hair, as you can see in Moya, and later with thick, coarser, curlier hair, as you can see in me [Ndudumo]. (177)

The children engaged in this project are authentic characters representing real little girls. In using their own bodies as teaching aids show that they are intelligent. One other Amazonian little girl, Palesa in Matlwa's *CC*, is an inspired young girl as confirmed by the words of her father saying the following:

And just by looking at Palesa, you can just see that she is such an inspired little girl with so much to offer the world. Compared to other children; she is miles ahead. (189)

Mohumagadi in *SM* has completed a project. She is not only a school principal of *school of excellence*, she also initiated that the school be built. It is a successful project because the school is complete, and she is managing it well. Amazonian characters such as the young girls and Mohumagadi are presented as a means of empowering women to achieve the larger goal of gender parity. Donovan (1983) rightly argues that

literature in its most profound level is a form of learning in worthwhile works of art. The four primary school children have managed to teach well the stages of puberty.

(ii) Mda's texts

Instead of engaging in worthwhile projects, girls in Mda's *SPD* are secretly taught to pull long some layers of their vaginas, also pulling each other, until those parts are stretched and hanging out, disfiguring their vaginas. The reason for such disfigurement is given as follows:

The longer they are, the happier the future of the girls would be...when they got married these long "pages" would please their husbands. (123)

These girls are obviously constructed to maintain the dominant ideology of patriarchy. Women objectification is promoted.

6.2.1.8. Women's lives matter

Amazonian texts care for its women. Female characters in Amazonian texts are important as women for themselves. After Masechaba's rape incident in *PP*, she was supported and measures were taken to protect women against further incidences of rape around the hospital. The following measures were taken:

Some of the interns had written a letter of complaint to the National Department of Health stating that security on the hospital premises needs to be improved. The superintendent had ordered pepper spray and whistles for everyone to wear at night. (93)

While Mother-of-the-Daughters suffered further victimisation at the hands of the courts and her community, Masechaba is supported by her community and the hospital where she is a doctor; her case was still under investigation. The measures that were taken by the hospital for women's safety going forward is in line with what real communities would do for its women. People around Masechaba who knew about her case were concerned and sympathetic. Abuses taking place in Mda's selected texts, hardly anyone cares; people in the text do not bat an eye. Implications of such actions by communities in Mda's text are that women's lives do not matter in patriarchy.

6.2.1.9. Cognitive powers for Amazonians

Amazonian characters have cognitive powers to think and to take decisions for themselves. According to Hurwit (1999), women in Athens, a bastion of male privilege, were thought not to have cognitive powers of men. Masechaba (in Matlwa's *PP*) has cognitive powers to come up with a resolution to her problem as follows:

I can't lie here forever. I have to get up and move past this (rape). It's done. There is no point kneading it any further. (142)

Masechaba has cognitive powers that empowers her to pick up the "shattered pieces" of her life.

Some of Mda's female characters are objects that can not think for themselves. In Mda's *WD* a woman is childishly treated by her husband. He sent her to buy a tin of beef. The situation unfolded as follows:

The spaza shop had run out of canned beef, so the woman bought chicken pieces instead. When she got home her husband said he was too hungry to wait for chicken pieces. The couple returned them to the spaza shop, and asked for a refund. (108)

The excerpt above confirms that patriarchy treats women as children. In the excerpt a husband seems to think that his wife is unable to think for herself.

6.2.1.10. Demand for accountability

Mohumagadi alias Tshokolo, demands accountability from her former boyfriend Bill whom she had not seen for fifteen years. She demands answers from him by asking the following questions:

Are you crazy? Are you insane? You want to call fifteen years of pain, Bill, gut-wrenching pain; fifteen years of lack of sleep; fifteen years of fear; fifteen years of madness, agony and rage, spilt milk? So I should just forget everything, is that what you are suggesting, Bill? All those promises you made in '94, I should just forget them? I should just forget fifteen years you took from my life? (168)

Mohumagadi is an Amazonian character that has courage to stand up for herself against abuse. In Mda's texts female characters are objectified and, as such, do not respond to events.

6.2.2. Aspects in Mda's texts

6.2.2.1. Salvific role for women

Feminist criticism is moral because it sees that one of the central problems of western literature is that in much of it women are objects that are used to facilitate, explain away, or redeem the projects of men. Western projects of redemption almost always depend upon a salvific woman (Donovan, 1983).

(i) Mda's texts

Main female characters in Mda's texts are constructed as "saviour" to male main characters. Female characters in salvific roles are constructed in perpetuation of patriarchy. Noria in *WD* plays a salvific role to rescue male character Toloki after he became homeless. Noria had a shack and, in her role as salvific woman, she "opens the door and they [she and Toloki] both enter". (144)

The second female character to play a salvific role is Grandma 'Maselina in *SPD*. She is constructed to rescue a former soccer star Sorry-my-Darlie who was injured in a soccer match and is now on a wheelchair. The old woman invited the stinking young paraplegic male character into her rondavel and "showed him her treasures" (206).

The third female character to play a salvific role in Mda's texts is Mthwakazi. In *LS*, she is constructed to "save" Malangana who came from exile in Lesotho back to the Cape. After more than twenty years in exile, he was old, fragile, and he was using crutches. He hobbled as he walked. "The world has battered him and beaten him to a

pulp and then ground him to powder” (141). After more than twenty years of absence, Mthwakazi was ready for him. On seeing Malangana, she walks toward him, smiling, “What took you so long?” she asks, her eyes squinting and her grin toothless (260).

(ii) Matlwa’s texts

None of Matlwa’s female characters in all texts under critical focus play the objectifying role of salvific woman. Amazonian characters are in texts for themselves as subjects; and not to “save” some men, and not to serve men’s interests. Subjecthood, womanhood, and women’s prowess are celebrated in Amazonian texts.

6.2.2.2. Labelling females as whores

Often literary representations of women repeat familiar cultural stereotypes; such stereotypes include the woman as an immoral and dangerous seductress (Bertens, 2014).

(i) Mda’s texts

It is not an exaggeration to say that almost all of Mda’s female characters in texts under critical focus are labelled as whores. Constructing female characters as whores promote the concept of woman-as-object in perpetuation of androcentric ideology. In Mda’s *SPD* Grandma ‘Maselina was “once a whore in the land of gold” (102). She would “proudly announce”: “I used to eat men, my child”. (102)

The following is said of Noria in *WD*, “we all knew that by the time she reached her mid-teens, she had acquired a reputation for making men happy” (71). Noria in *WD* is also referred to as “that beautiful stuck-up bitch” (11). And the following is said of Noria:

At the hotel, Noria learnt the art of entertaining white men who came from across the seas. In return, they bought her drinks and paid her a lot of money. (89)

Diksha in *SPD* is said to have invited men into her rondavel and closed the door. The sexual escapades she had with them are referred to as “confessions”. The excerpt below is about the so-called confessions:

Strangers came to confess too, such as truck-divers. Of late they seemed to monopolise her services. She preferred them, because they came with strange and exotic confessions from far-away places. Often they spent the whole night confessing, whereas the locals confessed only for a few hours and then went back to their families. (199)

In Mda’s *GSD*, the following excerpts show that most of the female characters in the text are portrayed as whores:

Lady says of herself, “I am a whore”. (8)

Lady: “The young girls have taken over. Teenage whores line the streets by the dozen, and no one wants to screw us old whores anymore”. (18)

Lady to Woman: “You are Miss Perfect and I am a fallen whore”. (23)

Lady: “I am a high class hooker; I service rich capitalists when they come to town on business”. (18)

Lady: “A good-for-nothing teenage daughter. She gets laid all over town and doesn’t bring a cent home”. (15)

A male protagonist, Radisene in *SPD*, says the following of women as he walked the streets one evening:

Drunken women, who took pride in calling themselves *matekatse* or whores, the devourer of men, whistled at him and in their musical voices invited him to rub his lanky figure against their hungry bodies. They crowned their invitation with graphic descriptions of the things they would do to parts of his anatomy if he were to walk into their secret chambers, and boasted that he would not survive the ordeal. (24)

(ii) Matlwa’s texts

In Matlwa’s texts, not a single female character is a prostitute or labelled as a whore. Not a single female character is objectified. Female characters are constructed in the Amazon image for women empowerment.

6.2.2.3. Dualistic approach

In one patriarchal texts, female stereotypes are constructed to oppose each other; one character symbolises “good”, and the other symbolises “bad”, reflecting dualism in the western tradition. The “good” woman serves men’s interest properly; the character that is regarded as “bad” is a professional, unmarried woman or a career woman. Patriarchy regards a career woman as not serving men properly (Donovan, 1983). Serving man’s interests includes taking care of him. Male character Radisene in Mda’s *SPD* fell ill and female character Misti took care of him. When Radisene opened his eyes, she was sitting next to his bed; she says the following to him:

At last you are awake, and your temperature is going down...I have been coming here for the last three days and feeding you soup...There are your medicines. I am glad you are better now. I must go...I have been taking time off to look after you. Now that you are better I must go to work. I’ll come and see you again this evening. (68)

(i) Mda’s texts

The dualism approach is applied in Mda’s texts. In Mda’s *GSD*, Lady is a symbol of “bad woman” while Woman is a symbol of “good woman”. In *WD*, Noria represents “bad” women, while Church Woman” represents good women because she is a church goer, she has a husband, and she has children. In *SPD*, Mother-of-the-Daughters is married, and has ten children. She is a good woman. On the other hand, Mother-of-Twins is not married; she is thus a bad one because of her status as a single person, in terms of the dualistic approach. In terms of patriarchy, she is not serving men properly.

Matlwa’s texts

In Matlwa’s texts under critical focus dualism is not applied. All female characters in Matlwa’s texts are in the texts for themselves as subjects; they are not judged against other females as it is the case when using the dualism approach of western tradition.

6.2.2.4. Feminisation of poverty

Rich (1977) argues that in a worsening economy, the single mother trying to support her children confronts the feminisation of poverty. In Mda's texts under critical focus most single female characters are constructed poor. Male characters are not said to be poor. Mthwakazi in *LS* is labelled as a "beggar woman". Mother-of-Twins' poverty is described as follows:

Mother-of-Twins was quite wiry and visibly ravaged by the world. She had struggled alone to bring up two children born of pleasure, whose fathers she could not even point out.

Nefolovhodwe in Mda's *WD* left his wife and nine children back at the village to fend for herself and her children. That Mountain Woman in *WD* was said to be in rags before she got married. The communicated message is that married women live a better life than unmarried women. Unmarried female characters are made to suffer terrible injustices in order to discourage women independence. In Matlwa's texts, none of the female characters are associated with poverty.

6.2.2.5. Transcendence versus immanence

De Beauvoir (1949) argues that patriarchy constructs woman as immanence; as stagnation and immersion in nature; thereby impeding women's struggle to achieve existential freedom and autonomous subjectivity. Man is constructed as transcendence; as continually striving for freedom and authenticity.

(i) Matlwa's texts

Matlwa's female characters are constructed as transcendence. Matlwa's female characters are continually striving for freedom. Female characters such as Mohumagadi, the school principal in *SM*, and Masechaba, the medical doctor in *PP*, have real existence of their own as subjects. They are Amazons capacitated for power, independence and freedom. Matlwa's characters are in line with feminists' call for authentic portrayal of women in fictional literary texts in order to contribute to achieving the goal of gender parity.

(ii) Mda's texts

Mda's constructs are stuck in stagnation; they do not grow; some even regress. After passing standard six, Dikosha in *SPD* is denied bursary for secondary school because she is a girl, and the bursary was given to her brother. She then habitually visits the Cave of Barwa and sometimes spends nights in the cave. Mda's female characters are immanence in De Beauvoir's (1949) sense of the word. Women's progress is impeded. Mda's female characters are constructed immanence in perpetuation of patriarchy.

6.2.2.6. Summary of female representation in Matlwa's and Mda's texts

The information in Table 1 is gathered from literature reviewed, and from the analysis of texts under critical focus for the study. The Table is a product of the present study. Table 1 is as follows:

Table 1 of 1 – Amazonian Characters versus Patriarchal Constructs

| Amazonian Characters | Patriarchal Constructs |
|---|--|
| Amazonians are Subjects that take self-determined actions | Patriarchal constructions are objects that are only acted upon |
| Are transcendence; ambitions not blocked; there is growth | Are immanence; are stagnation; an immersion in nature; growth is blocked |
| Have freedom of choice; marriage is by choice | Are Deprived of choices; are socialised for marriage |
| Are authentic; have real "flesh-and-blood" Amazonian existence | Are like "cartoon" characters with no real existence of their own |
| Are independent; financially independent; act independently of men's assistance | Are dependent on men, socially and financially; are denied autonomy |
| Have voices, and confront injustices | Are silent victims; suffer oppression |
| Are educated; have professional jobs | Do menial jobs; mostly uneducated |
| Share emotions and experiences | No emotions; "empty-shell" existence |

| Amazonian Characters | Patriarchal Constructs |
|--|---|
| Are concerned with vital issues of “Self”, such as menstruation and childbirth | Have no concerns of their own; serve men’s interests |
| Are empowered for leadership roles | Idealised in their traditional domestic roles of motherhood and wifehood |
| Not paired with men; and therefore, none to “save”. | Are in stereotypical roles such as salvific woman |
| Are moral agents; not a single Amazonian character is a whore; freed from victimhood | Single female characters are constructed whores; independence is rejected |
| Amazonians not compared to one another as in good vs bad woman | Dualism: good versus bad woman |
| Are capable of forming projects; have critical consciousness | Facilitate men’s projects; no self-determined actions |
| Some Amazonians are protagonists | None in the texts is a female protagonist |
| Are financially empowered thus promoting women independence | Poverty is feminised ensuring financial dependence on men; are exploited |
| Respond to events | Do not respond to events |
| Christian teachings are questioned | Christian principles received as dogma |
| Expose oppressive practices and demand accountability | Submissive and passive; acclimated to patriarchal oppression |
| Are in texts for themselves | Serve men’s interests |
| Are in texts to empower women, and to promote the feminists’ goal of gender equality | Are constructed in perpetuation of patriarchy |
| Are inspired and enthusiastic | Are disillusioned and passive |

Table 1 of 1 is a comparison of Amazonian characters in Matlwa’s analysed texts with Mda’s female constructs. The Table summarises the differences between Amazonian Characters and Patriarchal Constructs.

Chapter Six has compared female characters from the two writers’ selected texts. Employing the feminist theory, the study aimed to determine from which feminist perspective, either Amazonian or patriarchal, are female characters constructed in selected texts. The result is that Matlwa has constructed female characters

constructed from an Amazonian perspective while Mda has constructed female characters from a patriarchal view. The comparison has shown the differences between Amazonian characters and patriarchal female characters.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7. CONCLUSION

7.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter Seven concludes the study. Through the feminist theory that underpins the study, analysis of Matlwa's and Mda's selected texts is done determining how women are depicted in the texts. Answers to the research questions posed at the beginning of the study are given. Research questions for the present study were: how are female characters in Matlwa's texts presented from a feminist perspective? How are female characters in Mda's texts presented from a feminist perspective? And thirdly, on comparing and contrasting the female representations in the two writers' texts, what unique insights emerge from a feminist perspective? Contributions of the study are included, and finally, a proposal for further research is given.

7.2. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The study focusses on portrayals or representations of women in selected fictional works of Matlwa and Mda generally, and specifically to determine if female characters in selected texts are constructed from an Amazonian perspective or from a patriarchal view. Female characters constructed from an Amazonian perspective are empowered as a means of promoting the feminist goal of gender equality. Female characters constructed from a patriarchal view are stereotypes created for the purpose of perpetuating patriarchy.

The first research question, "how are female characters in Matlwa's texts presented, from a feminist perspective?" Analysis of Matlwa's texts employing the feminist theory, with its branches, reveal that the female characters are constructed from an Amazonian perspective. The second research question, "how are female characters in Mda's texts presented, from a feminist perspective?" After employing the feminist theory on analysing Mda's texts, the result shows that the female characters are

constructed from a patriarchal view. And the answer to the third research question, “on comparing and contrasting the female representations in the two writers’ texts, what unique insights emerge from a feminist perspective?” what emerges on contrasting the female representations in the two writers’ texts is that Amazonian female representations foreground women’s lived experiences of the pain and joys of childbirth while patriarchal constructs suppress these experiences but project women as super mothers who can birth ten children without problems. As the study concludes, Ngcobo’s (1991) argument is included for its relevance as wayforward to writers, in particular fictional writers. Writers have to be aware not be caught in a patriarchal ideology which is pulling backwards to irrelevancy. Ngcobo (1991:48) argues for change in women portrayals as follows:

African writers have a responsibility they can’t escape. It is their responsibility to change society’s views by drawing more acceptable images of women in writing. This is an aspect of responsibility that many South African writers have not done much to improve. As most of our books end up being read by our youth in schools and out of schools, we succeed in confirming many stereotypes if we do not take due care. In this way, women continue to be burdened by these, we have a duty to the nation in fostering healthy attitudes towards our women who have contributed so largely in the years of our struggle.

The chosen female writer, Kopano Matlwa, has heeded calls by feminist critics such as the above to draw more acceptable images of women in her writings. Amazonian characters are more acceptable images of women. Mda’s female characters are stereotypes constructed for perpetuating patriarchy. The study has done Justice to determining and contrasting female characters constructed from an Amazonian image versus patriarchal constructs. Contrasting of Matlwa and Mda’s female characters in the previous chapter brings to the fore the dichotomy between stereotypes and Amazonian characters. Amazonians in Matlwa’s texts defy the traditional submissiveness and dependence of women on men. Amazonian characters have broken the bounds of immanence as they are constructed as transcendence; they are constructed for growth; they are constructed for progress.

The depiction of female characters from a patriarchal view needs to change for the better. Times have changed, and so should negative delineation of women in fictional texts. Patriarchists should realise that society is evolving and that women are moving

from traditional spaces to modernity. Women are becoming influential and independent. Fictional texts should move forward as women move. It is almost absurd that fictional texts cling to a past that is no longer even visible.

7.3. CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY TO KNOWLEDGE

Juxtaposing Matlwa's Amazonian characters with Mda's patriarchal constructs in the present study shows that it is possible, particularly for writers, to create a narrative totally devoid of patriarchal tendencies by drawing more acceptable images of women in their writing. The study makes a contribution to the field of "images of women" school of feminist critics. The study contributes to the fictional literary world by introducing an Amazonian character. The study presents the Amazonian character side by side with the traditional and outdated patriarchal female constructs. Bringing the two different female characters, Amazonians and patriarchal constructs, together in the study makes it easier to see what characteristics qualify for positive portrayal of women and what negative depictions of women in fictional texts are. The negative portrayal of women in analysed texts has led the researcher to believe that there is a very thin line between patriarchy and misogyny. The juxtaposition of Amazonian characters and patriarchal constructs in one study highlights the stark contrast between the Amazonians and patriarchal constructs. The harsh oppressive nature of patriarchy towards women is exposed when the two types of female characters appear and analysed together in one study. This thesis contributes to the reality that there is a whole different way of women depiction other than the western tradition of stereotyping and portraying women negatively.

Amazon image defies the orthodox portrayal of women which persists in Mda's novels in perpetuation of patriarchy. The Amazonian character is the ultimate new image to representation of women in fictional texts. In acknowledging the value of literature in changing the perception of women in societies, Matlwa's narratives could be playing a role of contributing to changing negative perceptions and attitudes by societies towards women. Negative attitudes towards women could block women's transcendence. The amazon image epitomises women's struggle for gender equality.

The study, through Matlwa's texts, argues that there is a potential that literature can transform negative perceptions of women in societies through the portrayal of compelling images of women. Redefining women's roles in fiction could have a powerful function of promoting public recognition of women.

In addition to the assumption that most male writers construct patriarchal female characters for perpetuating patriarchy, Meeder (2008) argues that for men to portray women negatively could be that they fear strong women. Meeder (2008:53) allays men's fears by arguing as follows:

Men have nothing to fear from the reality behind the myth of the amazon, and in truth, they have everything to gain from accepting their sisters as full partners equal to the challenges of life. We [women] are not an inconvenience, and never should have been considered as such. If anything, it is time to lay aside the myth of patriarchy.

There, men should just calm down!

Undertaking this project was a worthwhile and fulfilling exercise. It tremendously contributed to my own growth and understanding, I feel wiser. Unearthing the amazon image is an empowering and encouraging exercise contributing even at personal level. The present thesis contributes to a greater awareness of women's personal achievements; their involvement and contributions to the struggle for equality. The thesis also highlights that not only are women involved in political struggles against all forms of discrimination in society, but also that women are in the struggle for greater good of all in education, health, and personal issues using their maternal instincts.

The thesis also contributes in "bringing together" pieces of information on Amazons "scattered" in various critical texts as feminists reject negative imaging of women by men's desire to maintain patriarchal power. In their rejection of stereotypes, feminists call for positive imaging of women that would contribute towards attaining their goal of gender equality. Matlwa's positive portrayal of women has enabled the thesis to "compile" some characteristics of the Amazonian character. The thesis also contributes to the understanding that misrepresentation of women is unnecessary, oppressive, unrealistic, and outdated because women are far ahead of what Mda

portrays them to be. The study contributes to the pedagogy of women's studies in literature. The study makes a contribution to the development of African feminist theory which has to be developed from African feminism which at present is arguably defined as African feminisms because of its many variants. If African feminist theory is developed, it will be a relevant and a better model, unlike western feminism, for interpreting and analysing African women in texts with African settings.

On characterising African feminism, Mama (1995) argues that it is about challenging the status quo, or about describing the ways in which the contemporary patriarchies in Africa constrain women and prevent them from realising their potential beyond their traditional roles as hard-working income-earning women. Matlwa's Amazonian characters defy these constraints on women orchestrated by contemporary patriarchies in Africa. It is a contribution to the literary world to have the Amazonian character as a role model in female representations to promote the feminist goal of achieving gender equality. Davis-Kimball (2002:240) argues that Amazons "are our heritage, our role models. They deserve to come out of the shadows of history and be celebrated".

7.4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In the early stages of this project, the researcher discovered that there is paucity of information on the Amazonian character in critical texts. It is not an exaggeration to say that even to get primary texts with Amazonian characters has been hard. Also there are hardly any theses on Amazonian characters; this could be caused by the scarcity of fictional narratives that present Amazonian characters in opposition to stereotypes.

The scarcity of usable material calls for women themselves to take pens and fight patriarchy on paper, as Matlwa does. Female writers need to redefine women's roles through new images in recognition of the empowered women in societies. Women have to take their rightful place in literary fiction and write their own story; write their

own experiences by themselves as subjects; and not as objects that are written about. In writing their own story, women writers would be confronting the struggle for women liberation against domination from a literary fictional front, and in reality.

As subjects, women have the power to be who they are and who they want to be, and not what they are told and portrayed to be. The study reminds women of an English metonymic adage that says, "A pen is mightier than a sword". Empowering texts are in alignment with the new South African dispensation which has made strides socially, economically and politically towards women empowerment and emancipation.

Further researches still need to be undertaken much further on representation of women, particularly on narratives that draw acceptable and compelling new images of women that function to promote the feminist goal of gender equality in both fact and fiction. Despite the contributions that the study has made, it is limited in that it could not go beyond comparing female characters in selected texts of only two black South African writers, a female writer and a male writer. The study recommends that further studies be done on representation of women in fictional texts by South African female contemporary writers.

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