

DEPICTION OF WOMEN IN SELECTED TSHIVENḌA POETRY

By

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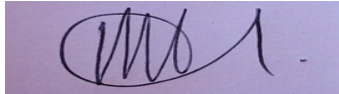
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2023

DECLARATION

I, Mareḡa Vhutshilo, declare that **Depiction of Women in Selected Tshivendḡ Poetry** is my own work, both in design and execution. All sources quoted and used in this study have been acknowledged by means of complete references. This work has never been submitted to any institution for any qualification fulfilment.



04/05/2023

Signature

Date

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the following people:

My parents, Nndaṭeni Dalton Mareḁa and Tshilidzi Melta Tshifaro Mareḁa.

My grandmother, Nkhangweni Mavis Tshifaro.

My younger sisters, Nyadzani and Wamashudu Mareḁa.

My nieces, Kharendwe, Vhutshilo and Tshedzatshashu.

ABSTRACT

Women often receive characterisations of themselves in an idealised and stereotypical manner in literature, which warrants both contestation and the provision of remedial strategies against such representations of women in literature. Underpinned by African Feminism and the qualitative research approach, the study not only analysed a selection of Tshivenda poems, but also purposively analysed those poems that challenge the portrayal of women in a negative light by presenting them, arguably, as dignified human beings. Among the negative portrayals of women were depictions of women as slaves, catastrophic beings, subservient humans, sexual objects, and idiots, consequently culminating in the perception of women as marginalised in a variety of spheres. The study might contribute to the ongoing discourse on women liberation and empowerment.

Keywords: Culture, Depiction, Feminism, Gender, Tshivenda, Poetry, Women

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Poets often write about different aspects that have aroused their deep feelings (Milubi, 1997). Among these aspects are also the varied depictions of women (Milubi, 2000a). In such depictions, it is common for women to be assigned stereotypic and idealised images as well as being relegated to a secondary position while their male counterparts are often accorded superior positions. In Tshivenda literature in general, and Tshivenda poetry in particular, one notes the myriad representations of women – an aspect that remains largely under-explored in scholarly circles. While scholarly outputs on Tshivenda poetry are numerous, there is still an opportunity to reflect on how some Vhavenda poets present the depictions of women in both Tshivenda literature and culture.

The foregoing assertion should not imply that there are no previous studies on Tshivenda poetry. On the contrary, scholars have contributed on various themes that pervade Tshivenda poetry. For instance, Milubi (1983) focused on the theme of protest in Ratshitanga's poetry. In 1988, Milubi produced his doctoral thesis (which he later published in 1997) on the development of Tshivenda poetry from oral to modern forms. In 1991, Milubi discussed the aspect of defamiliarisation in Sigwavhulimu's poetry. In 1994, he published an article that focused on the role of poets in the South African context. Milubi (2000a) focused on the South African literary history with special reference to Tshivenda. Murwamphinda (1993) conducted a preliminary study of Tshivenda praise poems. Mafela (1997) also discussed the aspect of praise in Tshivenda poetry.

Rabothata (2005) reflected on Vhavenda women's protest against abuse through songs. Sengani (2008) discussed referential praises (*zwikumelo*) in Tshivenda, while Mafela (2008) looked at how Sigwavhulimu's poetry thematises creation and death. Sebola (2019, 2020, 2021a, 2021b) sought to determine whether or not Milubi's poetry attains the tenets of New Criticism Theory, how Tshivenda poetry embodies the selfhood, identity and culture of the Vhavenda people, how Ladzani's poetry captures women's images and voices and how to decipher the meaning of *U kumela* (to praise the chief or the king) in Tshivenda culture, respectively. Although there

have been some scholarly outputs on sexualised, stereotypical and idealised images of women in Tshivenda poetry, there is, however, still a need to broaden the subject by exploring other dimensions of the subject, such as looking solely at how some Vhavenda poets portray women in their texts.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Like other African communities, the Vhavenda have long-standing beliefs concerning gender. Most of these beliefs reflect imbalances on how men and women are perceived (cf. Milubi, 2000b; Maistry & Pillay, 2015). In essence, one is likely to observe that women in Tshivenda culture usually appear in a junior light while their male counterparts occupy 'superior' positions (Mafenya, 2002; Rabothata, 2005). Further compounding the problem is the use of folklore and culture to socialise both Vhavenda girls and boys into the belief that they are not equal in dignity and worth (Okharedia, 2003). This gender inequality perpetuates mainly "under the veneer of African cultural identity" (Ramohlale, Chauke & Mogoboya, 2021). Consequently, women end up marginalised and misrepresented in literature, silenced in marriages, and repressed by sanctimonious cultural and religious indoctrinations (Rabothata, 2005; Mulaudzi, 2007; Machaba, 2011; Sebola, 2021b; Maenetja, Mogoboya & Nkealah, 2021).

In the end, women receive various modes of representation, i.e. in literature, and rarely in a positive light. In fact, studies cited thus far (i.e. Milubi, 2000b; Rabothata, 2005; Sebola, 2021b; Ramohlale et al., 2021; Maenetja et al., 2021) attest to the claim that women are rarely projected in a positive light. For this reason, this study sought, firstly, to highlight how the thematic foci of selected Tshivenda poetry vanguard women's images. Secondly, it was envisaged that the findings of this study would not only broaden the scope of gender discourse in the postcolonial context, but could also contribute to the remedial interventions set out to achieve gender equality.

1.3. DEFINITIONS OF KEYWORDS

There are keywords that undergirded this study and such keywords required that their meanings be provided in light of the scope and focus of this study.

1.3.1. Depiction

According to Hornby (2015:400), to depict is to show an image of something or somebody in a picture, to describe something in words, or give an impression of something in words or with a picture. Merriam Webster (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/depiction>) adds that depiction is a representation in words or images of someone or something.

1.3.2. Gender

Gender as opposed to sex (sex being a biological concept) is “a socio-cultural specific set of characteristics that identifies the social behaviour of women and men and the relationship between them” (Mkuchu, 2004:17). In consensus, Hornby (2015:632) states that gender is “the fact of being male or female, especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences, not differences in biology”.

1.3.3. Gender stereotyping

Mkuchu (2004:17) asserts that, “gender stereotyping is the tendency of a given culture to assign particular traits, characteristics, and roles distinctly to women and men. The assumption behind the stereotyping is that the assembled attributes of men apply to all men and those of women apply to all women”. Hornby (2015:1483) adds that, a “stereotype is a fixed idea or image that many people have of a particular type of person or thing, but which is often not true in reality”.

1.3.4. Culture

Culture is a non-generic, changeable and permanently incomplete system of lessons and acts that people get to learn over time and use to navigate their worlds (Potokri, 2015:6694). In support, Hornby (2015:365) defines culture as a way of life. That is to say, culture entails the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organisation of a particular country or group.

1.3.5. Feminism

Masha (2019:5) avers that, “feminism is the advocacy for women based on gender equality and equal opportunities for all genders”. In the same vein, Mkuchu (2004:17)

defines feminism as a “social movement that seeks to change the traditional role and image of women, to end sexism and attain for women equal rights with men”.

1.3.6. African Feminism

African feminism is “a feminist epistemology and a form of rhetoric that has provided arguments that validate the experience of women of Africa and of African origin against the mainstream feminist discourse” (Goredema, 2010:34).

1.3.7. Objectification

Hornby (2015:1730) defines objectification as the act of treating people as if they are objects, without rights or feelings of their own.

1.3.8. Oppression

According to Merriam Webster, oppression is an unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/oppression>). Hornby (2015:1050) defines “oppression” as an action meant, “to treat somebody in a cruel and unfair way, especially by not giving them the same freedom, rights etc. as other people”.

1.3.9. Poet

A poet is a person who, upon being inspired by what is happening in their surroundings, expresses their feelings through poems (Hornby, 2015:1182; Milubi, 2004:183). Implicit in this definition is that, a poet is able to perceive what most people are likely to ignore or take for granted, and then expresses feelings about what has been perceived (Mafela, Mandende, Ladzani & Raselekoane, 2003:124; Milubi, 1987:3).

1.3.10. Poetry

Poetry is the use of language in an unfamiliar way, which distinguishes it from other genres of literature (Mafela et al., 2003). This difference manifests mainly through the arrangements of words in a poem, which is unlike that of a novel or short story. Hornby (2015:1182) defines poem as “a piece of writing in which the words are chosen for their sound and the images they suggest, not just for their obvious meaning. The words are arranged in separate lines, usually with a repeated rhythm, and often the lines rhythm at the end”. Poetry is also “the language of emotions ...

the medium of expression used by poets when they speak from the heart” (Kirsznner & Mandell, 2004:550; cf. Sebola, 2019:12). Kennedy and Gloia (2007:353) see poetry as “a way of taking life by the throat”. Therefore, poetry emanates from a poet being overwhelmed by an unexpected feeling or feelings, with the only way of venting those feelings being through words artistically chosen and arranged to convey the poet’s feelings. Hence, Sebola (2019:13) regards poetry as a feeling confessing itself in moments of solitude, and embodying itself in symbols which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet’s mind. Thus, the poet’s feeling is essential in the development and production of a poem.

1.4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to analyse depictions of women in selected Tshivenda poetry.

1.4.1. Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were:

- To reveal constructions of women in selected Tshivenda poetry.
- To challenge idealised and stereotypic representations of women in selected Tshivenda poetry.
- To propose remedial strategies to combat the repressive representations of women in literature and other modes of representation.

1.4.2. Research questions

The following research questions informed the study:

- How are women depicted in Tshivenda poetry?
- What are some of the reasons that contribute to both the positive and negative depictions of women in Tshivenda poetry?
- How does the depiction of women in Tshivenda poetry contribute to the ongoing discourse on women liberation and empowerment?

- What are some of the remedial interventions that Tshivenda literature in general and Tshivenda poetry in particular can use to combat negative depictions of women?

1.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study might assist in identifying some of the challenges associated with gender, especially those that mostly affect women. Comparatively speaking, women are perceived differently from men, and are socially assigned more roles based on their gender, and not necessarily on their potential. The study may also help to raise awareness about the oppression of women by culture, women themselves and by men. This study might also challenge contemporary authors to avoid constructing stereotypic, monolithic and idealised images of women in their textual outputs.

1.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter comprises the background and motivation of the study, the research problem; definition of key words, aim and objectives of the study, research questions, and the significance of this research. The next chapter provides the literature review of previous studies that relate to the perception and portrayal of women.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter provided a brief background and introduction to the depictions of women in poetry, including the research problem, definition of key words and the significance of the study. This chapter presents the literature reviewed for this study, which includes journal articles, dissertations, theses and books that focused on the portrayal of women in literature. The chapter also provides the theoretical framework of the study. However, prior to that, a brief description of the nature and thematic foci of Tshivenda poetry is provided to coordinate the reader's understanding of this study henceforth.

2.2. The nature and scope of Tshivenda Poetry

Tshivenda poetry comprises fundamentally two 'branches', namely; Traditional and Modern poetry (Milubi, 1997, 2004; Sebola, 2022). By 'traditional', it is meant the type of poetry that in times past was transmitted from one generation to the next through the word of mouth (Milubi, 1988; Mafela, Mandende, Ladzani & Raselekoane, 2003). This type of poetry was not written; instead, it was transferred from one generation to the other through the word of mouth and thus functioned more like a communal voice. Kgobe (1999) in Sebola (2019:15) explains traditional poetry thus:

Traditional poetry is a subdivision of traditional literature which is generally known as verbal art. It is a study that is understood to be the product of a forgotten past and is also handed down from generations immemorial and is still still remarkably persistent. It is delivered by one person to the others by word of mouth and for proper performance to take place, it demands the presence of an audience and an occasion. The participants must also be actively involved in the presentation of the material. The dynamic of traditional poetry emanates from the fact that no presenter of

praise poems is capable of reciting in the same manner all the time. His style differs from occasion to occasion.

This verbal art, according to Milubi (1988:22), entailed children's rhymes, songs, lullabies and praise poetry, among others. The latter, that is, praise poetry in particular tends to dominate the nature and scope of Tshivenda traditional poetry. Tshivenda praise poetry is rendered to celebrate and extol human efforts (cf. Hornby, 2015:1204). Children's rhymes and songs are meant for entertainment and enjoyment. In praise poetry, various aspects are praised, including domestic and wild animals, chiefs, divining bones, warriors, initiates, graduates, totems (Makuya, 1993:69-70; Mafela et al., 2003:131). Therefore, praise poetry ostensibly attaches value to specific personalities, events, places, ceremonial and symbolic objects (Milubi, 1988:62 - 64).

Modern poetry, on the other hand, as implied by the term 'modern', refers to the kind of poetry that has been produced or developed recently deriving from something that existed prior. Hornby (2015:968) defines the term 'modern' as "of the present time or recent times. New and intended to be different from traditional style". Milubi (1997:72) defines modern poetry as "the kind of poetry written according to the norms and principles that govern the writing of Western poetry". In this sense, traditional literature differs from modern literature not only in that it is oral, but also in that, it is essentially the product of communal activity, whereas modern literature is the result of individual effort and bears the stamp of its author (Milubi, 1997:73). Traditional poetry is transferred from generation to generation verbally. Modern poetry assumes the written form and anyone can easily access it in books and modern digital platforms. In both traditional and modern Tshivenda poetry and literary outputs in general, as the ensuing sections and chapters show, portrayals of gender, particularly perceptions and representations of women, can be traced.

2.3. GENDER REPRESENTATION AS A BASIS OF INEQUALITY

Gender representation refers to how a male or female is (re)presented, be it in literature, media, music, etc. (Lorber, 2005). This representation often results in stereotypic perceptions of women and men. From these stereotypic perceptions, also emanate notions of traditionalised gender roles, which further become the basis of gender inequality. Gender inequality takes many different forms, depending on the

economic structure and social organisation of a particular society and on the culture of a particular group (Lorber, 2005:5). In speaking about gender inequality, one notes that women are usually disadvantaged compared to men (Lorber, 2005:5). For instance, in domestic settings, women are often assigned domestic chores based on their gender, and men are excluded from such responsibilities because of the same reason. In most societies, men have more formal political power than women, and generally earn more money than women (Magnusson & Mareck, 2012:11).

2.4. GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

Despite decades of awareness about gender issues, evidence of gender inequality remains prevalent throughout the world (Rives & Yousefi, 1997:1). There is gender inequality in social, economic, and political contexts. “Even in advanced industrial nations, women’s share of labour force is lower, and their unemployment is higher than that of men” (Rives & Yousefi, 1997:1). Chisadza (2019:7) asserts that women are relegated to the margins of society and this has led to the rise of feminist movements such as the radical feminist movement, which holds men responsible for the dilemma that women are in today. Chisadza (2019) further explains that women around the world hold not more than ten percent of seats in the legislature, which shows the need for things to change for women. Strachan, Andikaram, and Kailasapathy (2015:2) add that in Asia, comparatively speaking, “women are more likely to experience insecure employment and a gender pay gap” than their male counterparts. A widely held view is that gender inequality is much worse in developing countries since job opportunities are very low and patriarchal norms and stereotypes contribute to job rationing in favour of men (Rives & Yousefi, 1997:11).

Gender inequality also manifests in contexts where girls receive less education than boys (Lorber, 2005:6). In some households, higher education poses as a risk and danger to traditional male dominance. Consequently, boys are put first over girls in terms of education access (Tebaldi & Bilo, 2019). In the United Kingdom, although women have the same experience and education as men, they are less likely to lead big companies (Darnell & Gadiesh, 2013). In Afghanistan, 87% of all women are illiterate, and approximately 70% to 80% of women and girls face forced marriages. Furthermore, those who choose their life partners are considered disrespectful to their parents and may be subjected to honour killing. An Afghanistan woman is expected to marry the person chosen by her parents.

In Asia, women are solely dependent on either their fathers, husbands or sons for survival. Males signify future breadwinners while females' expectation is to perform domestic works and do procreative work, which is believed to need fewer skills (Tebaldi & Bilo, 2019:19-20). The scarcity of food in Asia subjects the female child to deliberate neglect whereas a male child who is likely to be the future breadwinner of the family is cared for (Chisadza, 2019:8). Due to China's high birth rate, a female foetus is highly aborted as compared to the male one (Chisadza, 2019). Chisadza (2019:8-9) outlined the predicaments of women in the global context:

Indian women have no rights to vote neither do they have freedom of choice when it comes to employment. In Muslim countries, women are not allowed to drive and come in contact with men... Muslim women have to cover themselves from head to toe in public, eat separately from men and eat only after serving male relatives first. Thus the relegation of the female species in many eastern and western societies is very common and is generally regarded as normal... Women in Orthodox Judaism are not counted in a quorum required for public prayer called Minyan. For the same reason, in Jesus' time, when Jesus fed the five thousand, this number excluded women and children (Matthew 14:21). In traditional Buddhism, a woman could not go to heaven through her own merit; neither could the woman worship by herself and could not go to heaven except through unquestioning obedience to her husband even if the husband was wicked.

These predicaments show how much women are objectified in most countries. The foregoing assertions denote sexism and gender inequality in various countries of the world (Wakeup the World, 2016). Furthermore, men often receive praise and admiration for being promiscuous, whereas women who do the same are castigated by society. One feels safe even to assert that women still find themselves trapped in numerous cages, which are built under the veneer of culture and tradition. In Asia, "women and girls are still subjected to specific forms of violence, including sex-selective abortion, physical and sexual abuse, domestic violence, acid attacks, honour killings, sex trafficking and enslavement, child marriage and custodial violence" (Tebaldi & Bilo, 2019:23). These realities in which women and girls live on almost a daily basis also manifest in literature.

2.5. GENDER DEPICTIONS IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

Women are often portrayed in accordance to their relation with men in African literature; being a girlfriend, wife, mother, courtesan, and prostitute. Hence, Mudau (2014:12) states that women are mostly perceived as people who lack certain abilities. It is believed that they are unable to function on their own or stand for themselves; thus, they need the presence of a man. Mibenge (2007:14) concurs that the position of an African female character is always secondary to her male counterparts in African literature. However, not all African literature and male writers are partial when portraying a female persona (Machaba, 2011:12).

Makokha (2014) examined the challenges faced by African women in a patriarchal society, where African men disregard women. Makokha (2014) analysed how Adichie in *Half of a Yellow Sun* projected the place of women characters in an African context, viz., Nigeria. According to Lawal (2020:276), *Half of a Yellow Sun* “depicts the myriad of challenges being faced by the African women. As portrayed in the novel, African women suffer double colonialisation, the first time by the British and the second time by the Nigerian men in post-colonial Nigeria”. Makokha (2014:112) further states that, “educated women like Olanna in the *Half of a Yellow Sun* are oppressed by men and call for urgent need for African men to solve the problem of patriarchy and domination of women by treating women as their counterpart, and not as second class citizens”. In Lawal’s (2020:276) opinion, Makokha (2014) failed to recognise the “intra-gendered colonialism that engenders the suppression of women in the novel”. Lawal (2020:276) writes:

The character of ‘other woman’ like Amala shows that the ‘African woman’ is used as a plural. The manipulation and suppression of Amala by Mama in order to advance her interest in having a grandson signifies that women are also involved in colonising their fellow women.

The dimensions of political and gender power are central in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (Lawal, 2020). Papa Eugene displays masculine dominance over Mama, Jaja and Kambili in the family. Their silence about the suffering they endured in the hands of their oppressor gave Papa Eugene a sense of authority and being in total control. Kambili and Jaja communicated with each other using sign language due to their fear of Papa Eugene’s despotism. Lawal (2020:277) indicated that in both *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, both the female and male are victims of abuses of power, oppression and human rights violation:

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Jaja (a male) is a victim of Papa Eugene's brutality. Ade Coker, an ace (male) journalist and Editor of the Standard newspaper, is assassinated through a parcel bomb by the military junta. Similarly, Papa Nnukwu, an old man, is humiliated and ostracised by his son Papa Eugene. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Mama oppresses Amala, she also insults and humiliates Olanna. Mrs Ozobia conspires with her husband, chief Ozobia, in order to use their daughter, Olanna, as a sex bait to secure a contract from the Minister of Finance, Chief Okonji. Ugwu, a male teenager, is also forced into fighting in the war he knows little or nothing about. All these instances and others show that both the male folk and the female folk are perpetrators and victims of political and domestic violence. Thus, power and its abuses in the novels are not limited to the male...

On Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, Lawal (2020:274) explains Achebe's implicit feminist narrative in the novel as being to foreground women's subversion of men's ideas and institutionalised practices and educate society to stop the violence meted to women. Lawal (2020:274) further explains that:

Achebe creates a character Beatrice who has a first-class Honours degree from Queen Mary College, University of London. Achebe moves the periphery role of women in his earlier novels to playing a central role in shaping and mediating power.

Lawal (2020:275) (cf. Mhindu, 2014) explicates the portrayal of Beatrice and expresses how Achebe failed to show some elements of feminism in the text:

Beatrice is well educated with Honours degree and she is the only person with such kind of qualification in her community. To show that men cannot surely be feminists. Achebe makes her secretary, only to take a leading position after Sam, Ikem, and Chris' deaths. This may suggest that Achebe is saying that as long as men are there, women cannot occupy those top positions.

Achebe's portrayal of Beatrice provided insights into how African society and literature construct images of women. Although she had a high qualification from one of the best institutions in the world, Beatrice was still placed under men's supervision, which emphasises male supremacy over women. The depiction of characters in African writers' work discloses a preference for male characters as protagonists while female characters are often depicted as supporting characters (Mibenge, 2007). Male heroism is more dominant in the writing of African male authors. Mibenge (2007:1) considered Achebe's (1958) *Things Fall Apart* as an example of an African novel that reflects male heroism, where Okonkwo the protagonist, is male. African female characters thus suffer at the hands of their male

authors (Kumah, 2000:7; Mibenge, 2007), and in the instances where they are portrayed as protagonists, they are mostly associated with men, depicted as prostitutes who depend on males for monetary support in exchange for sexual favours (Mibenge, 2007). Reference can be made to Wanja, a female protagonist in wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*, who is also depicted as a prostitute (Kumah, 2000:7; Mibenge, 2007).

Stratton (1994) states that female characters in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* are mentioned alongside property, as if their male counterparts own them. Okonkwo and Nwakibie are said to "have a large barn full of yams and... wives" (Stratton, 1994:25). Stratton (1994:25) further indicates that "the status of women in Umuofia is very low...they are mere objects circulated among their menfolk, willed, for example, by a father to a son as part of an estate or traded for a bag full of cowries". This reveals that their male counterparts objectify women in Achebe's novel, counted alongside property, were also excluded from political, economic, judicial, and even the discursal life of the community (Stratton, 1994).

wa Thiong'o's novels such as *Weep not Child* (1964), *Petals of Blood* (1977), *River Between* (1965), *Wizard of the Cross* (2006) and *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), show how important women and men are to the well-being of each other, and even to national/public issues (Azumurana & Audu, 2018:43). Ngugi's characterisation in his novels was a deliberate tact to emphasise the power of gender complementarity in the African society. His major female characters do not just transcend their sexual allegory for the fun of it, or as a means of revolting against men, but as a means of cooperating with their men for domestic and public socio-political and socioeconomic development (Azumurana & Audu, 2018:49). Unlike numerous African male writers (Sebola, 2021b), Ngugi shows that a community cannot be built by men without the help of women. Both men and women are expected to work hand-in-hand for the interest and progression of their society. Ngugi acknowledges the presence and importance of women in society, unlike most writers who view women as passive and weak.

2.6. PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN IN INDIGENOUS SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

Few studies regarding the portrayal of women have been examined in languages other than Tshivenda. Among such studies are: *The oppression of women in Zulu folklore* (Masuku, 2005), *A feminist critique of the image of woman in the prose works of selected Xhosa writers (1909 - 1980)* by Mtuze (1990), *The portrayal of women in Xitsonga poetry* (Nxumalo & Nxumalo, 1999), and *The portrayal of women in Xitsonga literature* (Machaba, 2011). Notable in these studies is that the issue of gender inequality and gender (mis)representation does not only affect the Vhavenda women, but spans across cultures. For example, in Masuku's (2005) study, the oppression of women in Zulu folklore was examined, and stereotypes associated with women in folklore were highlighted. Masuku argued that women are portrayed as domestic labourers, witches, the femme-fatale, bold and daring women who persevere in marriage and are rewarded for their perseverance. Machaba's (2011) study focused on the portrayal of women in Xitsonga literature, and 'foregrounded characters who do not defy cultural customs of the Vatsonga'. In instances where these characters protested such customs, either they received severe punishment or the author found a way to disapprove of their behaviour for the purposes of sustaining stereotypic and idealised representations of women. Machaba's (2011) analysis further revealed that female characters are bound by the patriarchal ideologies and practices of society. Machaba adds that, women endure verbal, emotional and physical abuse from men, and continue to endure abuse "for fear of losing their marital status" (Machaba, 2011:84).

Mawela's (1994) study focused on the depictions of women characters in selected Tshivenda novels by Vhavenda male authors. Mawela's (1994) observation was that "a traditional Muvenda woman who is submissive and conforms to the rules of the Tshivenda culture" is perceived as a good mother or a good woman. On the other hand, a modern woman who is assertive and challenges oppressive social norms and discriminatory practices is perceived as a bad woman or bad mother. Implicit in this is that women attain respect and the qualification of being 'women enough' only if they abide by societal, patriarchal rules. In Tshivenda culture, Vhavenda women are rarely socialised to be assertive, and are traditionally considered as men's property (Sebola, 2021b). This notion is evinced across Tshivenda literary genres. Although this study was restricted to a representative sample of Tshivenda poetry, it

was deemed vital to also allude to a few other Tshivenda literary genres that thematise gender representation(s).

In Maumela's (1954) novel, *Elelwani*, the lead character, Elelwani, is portrayed as passive and agreeable, particularly where it concerned having no say on who she wanted to marry. When her father compelled her to marry an old man, Chief Ratshihule, she tried to object, but did not exert enough force to show her father that she was not interested, and gave in without much struggle (Mawela, 1994:51). Intra-gender and self-oppression among women in Tshivenda literature is also seen in Makuya's (1974) play, *Hu Do Sala Nnyi?* 'Who will remain?' In the play, Vho Makhadzi and other women of the family are in support of Esiṭere's oppression by the patriarchal dominance of Vho Makhado. Esiṭere had four daughters. Her father-in-law was not pleased that she could not bear any male child. His worry was that when his son, Tshiwela, dies, no one will remain in charge of the family's property. His worry showed how he belittled female children (i.e. four female grandchildren), and how a male child is of more importance than a female child. Vho Makhadzi and Vho Masindi were in support, and wanted Tshiwela to marry a second wife so she can bear a male child, disregarding Esiṭere as his wife.

In Milubi's (2004) poem, *Musidzana o binyiwaho* 'The girl who was raped', gender-based violence is brought into critical focus, with men depicted as perpetrators of abuse against women. Sebola (2021b) argues that Ladzani's poetry, objects to the silencing of women, and all forms of female repression. This study sought to expand such discourses on the depictions of women in selected Tshivenda poetry. It was hoped that this study would provide remedial interventions against gender inequality and oppression.

2.7. AFRICAN CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN

Culture can be viewed as a response to a way of life as evidenced in societies that continually adopt traditional practices that better their own and eventually take them to be part of their culture (Mibenge, 2007:19). In the same vein, Hornby (2015:365) defines culture as "a way of life, the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group". Potokri (2015:6694) further explained that culture is "a non-generic, changeable and permanently incomplete system of lessons and acts we get to learn over time and use to navigate our worlds". Although

culture is of paramount importance for survival and for life in general, it can also be used to destroy life and shutter determination (Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999:92).

African culture is one of the patriarchal cultures in the world. This male dominance is mostly unfriendly to women and children and categorises them as inferiors that need to be constantly under male supervision (Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999:92); hence, there are many oppressions in women's world. Chisadza (2019:09) states that though scholars preach women oppression in Africa, "the traditional Shona-Karanga culture does not look down upon women. Instead, women are of great value and are involved in important decision making in most traditional Shona families and communities". Chisadza (2019) further emphasises this by giving reference to "the aunt" (one's father's sister). The aunt is said to be a very important person in the life of her brother's family and considered the owner of his brother's wife and children because her bride price brings wealth to her maternal home and is used to pay for her brother's wife bride price (Chisadza, 2019:10). The researcher finds Chisadza's point quite worrying because the very same "aunt" with all the power of controlling and owning her brother's wife and children, is probably also being owned by her husband's sister (if married) and that cannot be considered power. The researcher finds this as an intra-gendered suppression among women. As much as she has power in her patrilineal family, she is also considered powerless in her husband's patrilineal family as her husband's sister has a louder voice in her marriage than her (as the wife).

The *Makhadzi* is said to be the cornerstone of family stability (Matshidze & Nemutandani, 2017:4) and the "priestesses" of the patrilineage (Stayt, 1931:250). Although men think they are in control of women, Matshidze and Nemutandani's (2017) interviewee avers that, *Makhadzis* in Tshivenda culture have been appointed by the ancestors to be the torchbearers and a link with tradition. It is true that there are certain powers vested in the *Makhadzi*, especially the ancestors' calling, and performing of rituals for the family. *Makhadzi* reconciles with ancestors when things are not working out in the marriage (Matshidze & Nemutandani, 2017:5). They are also considered the 'female fathers' (Chisadza, 2019), granted the status they occupy and the seemingly masculine role they play in patrilineal society (Matshidze & Nemutandani, 2017). The researcher finds all these powers and masculine roles given to *Makhadzi* unhelpful in the alleviation of women's oppression as these

makhadzis can also their powers to suppress fellow women. Besides, regardless of the power she possesses, she is still subjected to suppression in her husband's home, as her power and roles does not count in her in-laws home, meaning her power is limited, she cannot exercise it everywhere.

African women have conveyed that culture plays a significant role in their lives and thus shapes their lives (Potokri, 2015:6694). Most African cultures emphasise marriage. Many young women understand marriage as an unquestionable expectation that is embedded in culture and tradition (Potokri, 2015:6694), and it is for this reason that culture is analysed from the marriage perspective. Mibenge (2007:19) avers that:

It is expected that a young woman will grow up, get married and bear children, especially sons who will continue the family name. It is deemed culturally imperative that young women be socialised from an early age to aspire to married life and motherhood; they are thus taught how to handle marriage and motherhood from a fairly young age.

The traditional education that was a priority and given to girls in initiation schools was that of marriage, how to take care of a husband and be a good mother to one's children. Raphalalani and Musehane (2013:19) say:

Parents have an obligation to ensure that their children are trained on how to become suitable marriage partners from a cultural perspective. This is done to ensure that their children meet all the cultural expectation. For this reason, parents send their children to cultural initiation schools, where they progress from phase to phase, starting at an early age

Mbiti (1969:132) corroborates this by saying:

One of the educational purposes of initiation rites, is to introduce young people to matter of sex, marriage and procreation and family life initiation is a ritual sanctification and preparation for marriage, and only when it is over may young people get married.

Lebaka-Ketshabile (1999) proffers that a girl child in Africa is associated with wealth for her father. This is accounts for the enormous pressure on women to get married at an early age, so they can bring cattle and wealth for their family; hence, names like *Dibuseng* 'bring them back', *Madikgomo* 'mother of cows', *Bogadi* 'bride price or lobola' are assigned to girls. Motherhood and marriage are upheld as positions of high status for women in African culture and as a result, women are socialised to value such attributes (Mibenge, 2007:19).

Most women are married to a family so they can perform “wifely duties”, which is to bear children, more importantly, boys, and serve the husband’s family. Lebaka-Ketshabile (1999:47) gave reference to the Basotho proverb “*Mosadi-tshwene o jewa matshoho*”, which literally means, “she can be as ugly as a baboon, as long as she serves she is fine”. This further proves that women were married so they can serve their husbands and their families, as according to African tradition, a wife is for the whole family and not only her husband.

Lebaka-Ketshabile (1999) further explains that a woman is socialised to be a good mother, a good wife, giver of life and a homemaker. She is expected to be gentle, meek and mild, and if she is the opposite of these expectations, she is labelled uncultured and is likely to be ostracised by the community. A woman who does not have a child is considered an insult to the family (Chisadza, 2019), and is coerced to perform rituals believed to cure barrenness (Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999:48). Barrenness has rarely been publicly ascribed to a man in African tradition; it is always a woman’s fault to not have a child. In cases where she has many children and those around her have none, she is perceived as a witch (Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999); it is believed that she has taken other women’s ovaries for her benefit (Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999). African women are never allowed to speak in traditional courts; on the contrary, they are represented by a male figure. Chisadza (2019) claims that this is done to protect women. However, the researcher disagrees with this; this is to entrench the idea that women are subordinates, stupid and lesser humans (Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999). Although Chisadza (2019) indicates that women exercise the right to choose the one to represent them in traditional courts, choosing the one to represent them is not freedom; these women have no freedom to represent themselves. Men see themselves as standing on a higher moral ground, as fit to speak on behalf of women because women are regarded as mentally inferior and cannot speak for themselves (Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999:49). This is the position that women find themselves in, because “they cannot be understood” then somebody who is mentally capable has to speak for them.

When the husband dies, a woman is expected to mourn her husband for a certain period, and while in mourning, she is cut off from the active life of the society and if she is still young, she is often accused of killing her husband. After her husband’s passing, the in-laws determine her future and this “illustrates the fact that a married

woman is married forever and that African marriage is an ownership of a woman by her husband family” (Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999:64). The widow is also expected to continue bearing children for the same family; she is given her husband’s brother as her new husband to continue the responsibility and duties of her house. Chisadza (2019:31) corroborates this: “widow inheritance allows for the continuity of the family since the widow would continue to bear children and bring up children for the same family and under the same environment and tradition”. Chisadza (2019) further explains that it is in the best interest of the woman to remain in the family rather than making new acquaintances. She argues that, “the woman exercises the right to choose...the one to inherit her as a widow”. This further highlights the treatment and perception of women in African society. In such a society, a woman can be ‘inherited’ after her husband’s death, and the researcher perceives this as women commodities.

2.8 OBJECTIFICATIONS AND SEXUALISATIONS OF WOMEN IN TSHIVENḐA CULTURE AND LITERATURE

Objectification is seeing or treating a person as a commodity (Rao, Ola & Sharma, 2020:38). Sexual objectification occurs when a woman’s body or parts of her body are singled out and separated from her as a person for the purposes of presenting her (or her body parts) primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire (Szymanski, Moffitt & Carr, 2011:8). In corroboration, Mamabolo (2019) and Rao et al. (2020) state that objectification usually assumes a sexual nature, where a person is primarily viewed as an object of sexual desire. Both men and women are victims of sexual objectification, but women are more objectified than men (Nkealah, 2008).

The sexual objectification of women is a common occurrence. Women’s breasts and buttocks are highly sexualised than other parts of their bodies (Rao et al., 2020:39). In TshivenḐa culture, women are sexually objectified even by being referred to them using their developing body parts (Milubi, 2000b), which evinces the notion that in culture, the sexualisation of women and objectification is cultivated and culturally condoned (Szymanski et al., 2011:10). For example, a girl is called *Thungamamu* in reference to her developing breasts (*u tunga ha maḑamu*). Mugovhani (2014:4) defines *Thungamamu* as “a young girl (teenage) who has just begun to develop

breasts for *u mamisa* (for breastfeeding)". Tshivenda culture also refers to women according to a situation/process that their body could be going through. A girl who is experiencing her menstruation is called *Khomba*. "The term *khomba* means 'dangerous', implying that sexual intercourse may now result in pregnancy" (Stayt, 1968:106). This is also seen in Netshivhuyu's (1987) poem, *Mutshelukwa*, which refers to a woman who, according to culture, has passed the marrying stage. Every Muvenda girl is expected to get married and procreate (Stayt, 1968, & Mibenge 2007); hence, the name calling such as *Mutshelukwa* as a way of mocking her, if ever she does not meet the cultural expectation of having a husband.

Sebola (2021b:10) proffers that in Tshivenda culture, women and girls are rarely depicted in a positive light. He further explains that in most cases, these sexual images are intended to evince male chauvinistic tendencies. Sebola (2021b:10) further asserts: "In Tshivenda culture, real manhood is attainable through the shedding of blood during circumcision which confirms the essence of manhood. Surprisingly, *murundu* does not tolerate the blood of a menstruating girl". This also shows gender discrimination as menstruation also confirms womanhood. The image of blood in this instance is associated with contamination and infirmity (Sebola, 2021b). Other names such as *muimana* 'pregnant woman', *mudzadze* 'breastfeeding woman' and *muumba* 'barren woman' are used to denote women's social standing. Thus, even at the level of anthroponomy, women are still susceptible to discriminatory labels.

2.9 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study relied on African Feminism as its theoretical framework. African feminism is "a feminist epistemology and a form of rhetoric that has provided arguments that validate the experience of women of Africa and of African origin against the mainstream feminist discourse" (Goredema, 2010:34). African feminism is relevant to this study because it seeks to restore women's position in society based on gender equality and equal access to opportunities for all genders by re-interpreting repressive images of women in Tshivenda poetry (Gorodema, 2010; Maenetja et al., 2021:385). An analysis of the depictions of women in Tshivenda poetry might aid the liberation of African women from cultural oppression, and encourage dignified

portrayals of women in literature. African feminism as a theory derives from the mainstream theory of Feminism.

2.9.1 The Concept Feminism

Charles Fourier first used the concept of feminism in the 18th century. Fourier argued that social development can be made possible by giving more rights and freedom to women (Muhammed, 2017:7). Masha (2019:05) avers that, “feminism is the advocacy for women based on gender equality and equal opportunities for all genders”. Similarly, Mkuchu (2004:17) defines feminism as a “social movement that seeks to change the traditional role and image of women, to end sexism and attain for women equal rights with men”. Mathye (2003:27) and Muhammed (2017:4) state that feminism is a theory that examines gender inequality, women’s social roles, experiences and the meaning of sexual differences. Based on the definitions given by various scholars above, it is clear that feminism fights for the recognition of women and the equality of both genders in various spheres of life, be it political, economic or social.

From antiquity, women have always been perceived as oppressed by men (Chisadza, 2019:37). Mudau (2014:12) corroborates this by stating that since creation, women have always been seen as inferior to men in all spheres of life, and it was for this reason that the feminist movement was initiated to emancipate women (Ratshisevhe, 2014; c.f Maenetja, 2019:15). According to Muhammed (2017:04), the fundamental object of feminism is:

The fundamental object of feminism is the feminine, the status of women in society, the roles of women in and out of their homes, the oppression and exploitation of women, gender differences, patriarchal society structure and male dominant power approaches and pressures.

Mathye (2003:27) further explains that:

The fundamental goal of feminist theory is to explore the origin of the oppression of women and to expose sexist stereotypes. Feminist theory critically evaluates the claim that gender is biologically determined and reveals women’s individual and shared experiences by encouraging friendship between women. This friendship enables women to recognize their interest and status as human beings. Feminist theory also acts against traditional theories which restrict women from participating in economic, political and quite a number of other domains of social life and point to these as major causes of women’s oppression.

Feminism is a movement whose aim is to liberate women from oppression by both fellow women and their male counterparts (Chisadza, 2019). Chisadza (2019:37) states that during the rise of feminism, two schools of thought emerged. One school avers that though feminism has originated in the western countries, it is pertinent in Africa and can bring about liberation to African women who are seen as oppressed by their male counterparts. The second school of thought mentioned by Chisadza (2019) argues that, “feminism is a foreign ideology with no relevance to gender relations in Africa”. Chisadza (2019:38) maintains that the feminism as an ideology has no relevance in the African setting since it is, according to her, “an ideology of the upper class strata society”. Chisadza’s statement implies that the Africans are of a low class strata; hence, they should not associate themselves with the ideology of the upper class countries, as it does not concern them. The researcher argues to the contrary: this ideology is pertinent to Africa and African women as they are indeed oppressed in various ways in their lives through tradition and culture. This is not to say that African culture should be compared or be treated essentially the same as Western culture, no; this is to acknowledge the relevance and the presence of women’s oppression in African societies.

Although feminists have varying facts regarding the theory of feminism and have had their disagreements, it is clear that they do find common grounds in some of the aspects of the theory. Many scholars of feminist theory agree on some basic principles of feminism, which Muhammed (2017:4) explains as:

Working to increase equality: Feminists wants to be in more action to struggle against political, economic and social inequalities in society to grow and increase the awareness of gender equality. Expanding human choice: According to feminist both men and women should be free to develop their human interest, wishes and talents. Thus they advocate the equal opportunity principle for both genders. Eliminating gender stratification: Feminists oppose cultural and traditional norms and laws which create gender inequality in social and economic areas. Ending sexual violence and promoting sexual freedom: Women have been suffering physical pain since the beginning of the history. So feminists defend that women should control over their sexuality without any permissions and threats of any men.

It is clear that feminists want equality between all men and all women in all spheres of life and that they should be afforded equal opportunities. Therefore, society should abandon cultural norms that create gender inequality, eradicate sexual abuses and

accord freedom to women. Since some scholars argue that Western feminism does not suit the experiences of women in Africa (Chisadza, 2019), other scholars, i.e. Ama Ata Aidoo and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, saw the need to come up with a movement that could best relate to the experiences of the African woman (Masha, 2019:14), the result of which was called African Feminism.

2.9.2 AFRICAN FEMINISM

African feminism is an ideology that considers African culture and Afrocentricity as pivotal to African women's liberation since it seeks to describe the African women through an African lens (Chisadza, 2019). In support, Chisale (2017:4) (cf. Masha, 2019:14) explains that African feminism highlights the fact that the experiences of African women and their culture differ from those of Western feminism. Chisadza (2019:38) asserts that Western feminism accuses the African culture for the predicament African women find themselves in. Chisadza (2019:38) further explains that, "according to the arguments from Afrocentricity, African worldview and Africana womanism, the real culprit is not the African cultures, but the introduction of western culture amongst the African people". She argues further that African feminism was the reaction towards the failure of the mainstream feminism to deal with the relationship of men and women in African context. Chisadza (2019:38) also asserts that:

A true and correct understanding of the relationship between men and women requires a deep understanding of African culture and history of the African people. Without a deeper understanding of the African people and culture..., one would be tempted to conclude that the African woman is oppressed.

Chisadza's study foregrounds African relationships between men and women as balanced and that many westerners wrongly perceive African culture as oppressive to women. The researcher notes that as much as Chisadza defends African culture and gives valid reasons for certain African customs, she is to some extent incorrect because women have always been oppressed and looked down upon by their male counterparts. Women have always been under the supervision of men, as they are perceived as incapable by and of themselves (Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999). Lebaka-Ketshabile (1999:47) asserts that, "in the patriarchal world, a woman is regarded as a minor and expected to be under male supervision for the rest of her life. From the moment she is born she becomes men's property. As a girl, an unmarried woman, a

married woman and a widow, she is constantly under' the authority of males.” Lebaka-Ketshabile differs with Chisadza in that she acknowledges the presence of women oppression amongst Africans. Lebaka-Ketshabile (1999) further explicates that in a men’s world, there are no important decisions that a woman can make in the absence of her husband or any other male figure. This is why she should remain under male authority for the rest of her life. Women are capable of standing and making their own decisions without a male figure in their life (Mibenge, 2007). Therefore, they should not be treated as weak, passive, subordinate and as if less human.

Nkealah (2016) avers that African Feminism aspires to see unprejudiced, liberated, and self-sufficient African women. In the same vein, Maenetja, Mogoboya and Nkealah (2021:385) add that African Feminism endorses women’s rights in respect of sexuality, reproduction and their role in society, amongst others. Goredema (2010:34) regards African Feminism as a quest for “justice that aims to create a discernible difference between women who were colonised and those who were deemed colonisers, and a social movement that aims to raise global consciousness that sympathises with African women’s histories, present realities and future expectations”.

Masha (2019:15) proffers that feminism critics allege that feminism is an output of Western propaganda, used by westerners to bring separation and conflict between African communities, as African women and men are not opponents but complement each other for the survival of the society (Nnaemeka, 2004; Masha, 2019:14). It is argued that African women do not look at men as their rivals, but as compatriots and companions (Chisadza, 2019:38), hence, they resorted to forming a movement that advocates gender equality without creating enemies with their men (Masha, 2019:14). Some might argue that such allegations just prove how much some African people are enslaved by their own regressive mentalities and have no desire to improve their livelihood, while women who agree with such comments are rooted participants of patriarchy. By coming up with the concept of African Feminism, African scholars did not want to live by other people’s philosophies, but wanted to create one that best speaks to them and their historical and present experiences (Masha, 2019:16).

2.10. CHAPTER SUMMARY

Often, African culture has been used and is still used by males to sustain their dominant positions in family and community at the expense of females. Women are objectified and treated as servants. There are cultural obligations that force a woman to be controlled by man, starting from her father, brother and husband, for instance. They have no say in marriage and are often forced into arranged marriages where parents choose a partner for their daughter. Women who speak out are stigmatised and assigned labels such as a 'sexually frustrated woman' or an 'angry feminist'. In literature, women are often represented in a stereotypical way, a manner that projects them as weak, passive, repressed and even marginalised. They mostly have no voice in African literature and are treated as minor and ignorant people. The next chapter discusses the research methodology adopted in this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a review of literature related to the topic of this study. It further elucidated the theoretical framework that underpinned the study. This chapter discusses the research methodology of the study, which encapsulates the research design, sampling method, data collection, data analysis, quality criteria and ethical considerations.

3.2. METHODOLOGY

Methodology is a strategy that a researcher uses to gather the required information for research. According to Hornby (2015:932), “methodology is a set of methods and principles used to perform a particular activity”. Clough and Nutbrown (2012:31) aver that, “...methodology is to explain and justify the particular methods used in a given study”. They further state that methodology reveals how research questions are articulated with questions asked in the field. Bhattacharyya (2006:17) states that the methodology is a scientific and systematic way to solve research problems. Research methods are specific procedures for collecting and analysing data (Bhattacharyya, 2006; Brynard, Hanekom & Brynard, 2014). Creswell, Ebersohn, Elloff, Ferreira, Ivankova, Jansen, Nieuwenhuis, Pietersen and Plano-Clark (2016:51) agree that, “methods are tools that researchers use to collect data”, and to enable researchers to gather information about social reality from individuals, groups, artefacts and texts in any medium.

This study employed the qualitative research approach, as data were in the form of words. Fox and Bayat (2007:7) say:

Qualitative research methods are designed to scientifically explain events, people and matters associated with them and does not depend on numerical data, although it may make use of quantitative methods and techniques. Some of its usual topics are case studies ... and ethnography.

The distinctive features of qualitative research are that it relies on words rather than numerical data and employs meaning-based rather than a statistical form of data presentation and analysis (Creswell et al., 2016:53). The qualitative approach is oriented to discovery and exploration, it emphasises meanings and interpretations of others’ perspectives, analyses information in depth and detail (Morgan, 2014:48). The qualitative approach is the best method for this study because “it properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and individuals who inhabit these settings” (Creswell et al., 2016:53). It is also flexible; a researcher can easily adjust methods as he or she strives to develop new knowledge. It can also be used on small samples (Brynard et al., 2014). Leedy and Ormrod (2010:136) as well as Creswell et al. (2016) concur that the qualitative approach is the best method for a study such as this one in that it allows the “researcher to gain new insights about a particular phenomenon, and to discover problems that exist within that phenomenon”. Leedy and Ormrod (2010:137) further explain that:

Qualitative approach allows a researcher to test the validity of certain assumptions, claims, theories or generalizations within real-world context. It also provide a means through which a researcher can judge the effectiveness of particular policies, practices or innovations.

Although this approach is considered flexible and easily adjusted to develop new insight, the quality of the data gathered may be highly subjective. “What one researcher might feel is important and necessary to gather can be data that another researcher feels is pointless and won’t spend time pursuing it” (Gaille, 2017). The individual’s perspectives is often the basis of the data collected; therefore, they can have a negative effect on the collected data. Gaille (2017: *n.a*) asserts that, “the quality of the data that is collected through qualitative research is highly dependent on the skills and observation of the researcher. If a researcher has a biased point of view, then their perspective will be included with the data collected and influence the outcome”. Data collected through this approach are not always accepted due to their subjective nature. However, despite the disadvantages, the approach is still suitable to the study.

3.2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design refers to strategies chosen to integrate different components of a study in a coherent and logical way, thereby ensuring the effective address of the research problem. Bhattacharyya (2006:40) avers that, “research design is the plan, structure and strategy of investigation conceived so as to obtain answers to research questions and to control the variance. It is the blue print for the collection, measurement and analysis of data”. This study is descriptive in nature, describing the depictions of women in Tshivenda poetry. According to Edmonds and Kennedy (2013:130), “descriptive design is used to explore the status of some phenomenon and to describe what exists with respect to the individual group or condition”. In corroboration, Brynard et al. (2014) state that description data is the “participants’ own written or spoken words pertaining to their experience or perception”. Question Pro (<https://www.questionpro.com/blog/research-design/>) states further that:

In a descriptive research design, a researcher is solely interested in describing the situation or case under his/her research study. It is a theory-based research design, which is created by gather, analyze and presents collected data. By implementing an in-depth research design

such as this, a researcher can provide insights into the why and how of research.

In the same vein, (<https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/researchdesigns>) mentions that descriptive research assists with answers to questions such as “who, what, when, where, and how” associated with a particular research problem. Hence, this study has focused on how women are portrayed in Tshivenda poetry.

3.2.2 SAMPLING

Sampling focuses on population and samples. A population is any group that is the subject of research interest. It is often not practical or possible to study an entire population (Goddard & Melville, 2001:34); hence, the use of samples. Samples are representatives of a population that is being studied (Goddard & Melville, 2001:35). Sampling “is a technique employed to select a small group with a view to determining the characteristics of a large group” (Brynard et al., 2014:56). There are different sampling types. However, this study has used the purposive sampling type. “Purposive sampling is precisely what the name suggests” (Creswell et al., 2016:85). “It selects information-rich cases that best provide insight into the research questions” (Brynard et al., 2014:56). Purposive sampling depends more on the researcher’s deliberate choice (Bhattacharyya, 2006:81), and helps to convince the audience about the research (Emmel, 2013:33). The researcher relies on their own judgment when choosing members of population to participate in the study (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013:17).

In this study, five Tshivenda ‘traditionalist’ poetry texts, *Vhakale vha hone* (Ngwana, 1958), *Zwiala zwa Venda* (Matshili, 1967), *Fhululedzani* (Matshili, 1976), *Ndi nne nnyi?* (Ratshitanga, 1973) and *Vhungoho na vivho* (Ratshitanga, 1979) and ten ‘modernist’ poetry texts; *Nyangalambuya* (Netshivhuyu, 1987), *Muḍifho 2* (Makuya, 1987), *Muḍifho 3* (Makuya, 1987), *Muimawoga* (Milubi, 1990), *Dzuvha* (Ramaliba, Mamafha & Munyai, 1994), *Tshiḱodzimare* (Mafela, 1995), *Khavhu dza muhumbulo* (Sigwavhulimu et al., 2001), *Tshiala tsha vhugala* (Ladzani, Ndlovu, & Milubi, 2004), *Vhuḱungu ha mutambuli* (Ladzani, Nemaḱangari, & Rasili, 2006) and *Miludzi ya shango* (Makhado & Ṭhagwane, 2012), have provided a representative sample of the poems that have been subjected to analysis. Although the anthologies that fall under the former category were published in the colonial era, they encapsulate Vhavana’s ‘traditional’ perception of women in both the pre-colonial and postcolonial eras. Both,

the traditionalist and the modernist anthologies have each provided twelve poems, making it twenty-four poems in total, which thematised women's representation.

3.2.3 DATA COLLECTION

Depending on the sources utilised, whether the data were obtained through observations or from the stored records kept for certain reasons, the data can be classified into two categories; primary and secondary data (Bhattacharyya, 2006:52). This study was a desktop research and both primary and secondary sources were consulted. Bhattacharyya (2006:52) defines primary data as "one which is collected by the investigator himself for the purpose of a specific inquiry or study". Bhattacharyya (2006) further explains that such data is original in nature and is a result of participant observation, surveys, interviews, etc., by a researcher or an organisation.

The *Management Study Guide* (<https://www.managementstudyguide.com/secondary-data.htm>) defines secondary data as:

Data that have been already collected by and readily available from other sources. Such data are cheaper and more quickly obtainable than the primary data and also may be available when primary data cannot be obtained at all.

When an investigator uses the data that others have already collected, such data is called secondary data. "This data is primary data for the agency that collects it and becomes secondary data for someone else who uses this data for his own purposes" (Bhattacharyya, 2006:52). Struwig and Stead (2013:82) describe secondary data as "available data from sources other than the current research project." Secondary data is available in books, publications, journals, records, newspaper, articles, etc.

There are widely used methods for collecting primary data, which are observation, experimentation, interviewing, case study, etc. Secondary data collection may either be internal sources, external/published sources and unpublished sources. Internal sources are financial reports, sales report, organisational information, customer details, and feedback from the dealer or distributors (<https://www.stechies.com/difference-between-primary-secondary-data/>). External or published sources include, but are not limited to, publications of government, journals, books, magazines, newspapers, reports and other sources of published

information (Bhattacharyya, 2006:66). There are many sources of unpublished data, such as diaries, letters, biographies and many others. Before using secondary data, the researcher must ensure the reliability, suitability and adequacy of the data (Bhattacharyya, 2006:66).

3.2.3.1 Advantages and disadvantages of primary and secondary data

Each method of data collection produces its own information in its manner and therefore each one has its own advantages and disadvantages. In the table below, the advantages and disadvantages of primary and secondary data collection methods are provided (Bhattacharyya, 2006).

Primary Data	Secondary Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It produces original sources with authenticity. The user originally collects data first hand/first time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary sources, relying on other's collection of data.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data are used is specific reasons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data are taken from other sources and used for decision-making.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary data are more time consuming and the cost of research are expensive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary data are less time consuming and the cost are cheaper. Almost all of the secondary data sources are free.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It requires more efforts and it is more accurate since it is essentially objective and explicitly obtained from the original source. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It requires less efforts and it is less likely accurate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It requires an experts or trained individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It requires less trained/ untrained personnel.

In this study, primary data were collected from five purposively selected 'traditionalist' and ten 'modernist' poetry anthologies. The data were collected based

on these themes: Vhavenda's idealised notion of women, women as destructive and catastrophic, women as male validation seekers, women as unintelligent and idiots, women as liberated and powerful and womens' poetry as a retaliation to their negative portrayal. Secondary data also abetted the analysis of the selected texts. In this study, secondary data were acquired from sources such as journal articles, textbooks, the internet, theses and dissertations, to name but a few.

3.2.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The study has employed the textual and thematic analysis method. "A textual analysis is a method of communication that the researcher utilises for describing and interpreting the characteristics of the recorded or visual message" (<https://www.singaporeassignmenthelp.com/blogs/textual-analysis-research-method/>). The purpose of textual analysis is to analyse a short story and to give emphasis on the imagery, narrative perspective and structure of a text. All work in literary studies includes an in-depth analysis of texts such as poems, stories etc. "Thematic analysis is a method of analysing qualitative data. It is usually applied to a set of texts, such as interview transcripts. The researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes – topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly" (<https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/thematic-analysis/>). In constructing "the analytical and interpretive prose, the researcher has ensured that the analysis of the voluminous body of raw data gathered follows a particular sequence". The sequence entailed five phases (adapted from Kubayi, 2013:114-115), namely;

- Organising, sorting, classifying or categorising the raw data obtained from the selected texts;
- Going through the entire data in order to get a general sense of the ideas expressed by the poets;
- Making a detailed analysis through the process of 'coding' emergent patterns and themes;
- Integrating and summarising data mainly through inductive reasoning; and,
- Interpretation or understanding of the data.

3.2.5 QUALITY CRITERIA

To ensure that this study meets the rigours of quality criteria, the following aspects were borne in mind when conducting the study:

3.2.5.1 Credibility

Cameron (2011:6) argues that credibility “is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness and is about determining how congruent the findings are with reality”. In other words, credibility emphasises the accuracy of data. This study has ensured credibility by comparing its approach and findings with approaches and findings that were employed successfully in previous comparable studies. The comparison was for the purposes of confirming congruences or incongruences, and correcting any claims that might be inaccurate or hazy in the final study.

3.2.5.2 Transferability

Transferability “requires the researcher to provide sufficient data and context to enable the audience to judge whether the findings can be applied to other situations and contexts” (Cameron, 2011:6). The researcher presented a thorough description of each theme and/or subthemes under study and appropriate them into the Tshivenda culture. A thorough literature review has also been helpful in fortifying the researcher’s claims about the subject under scrutiny. However, the researcher is also aware that the technique of transferability may not always be applicable because the selected poets might possess subjective and misguided perceptions of women, and therefore may not always exhibit ideological outlooks that can be generalised. Apart from the probable ideological disharmonies among Vhavenda poets, the selected texts may encapsulate perceptions of women that are foreign to Xitsonga culture, for example, which may suggest that what may be ‘true’ and ‘real’ in Tshivenda culture may not necessarily be true in other cultures.

3.2.5.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to “having sufficient details and documentation of the methods employed so that the study can be scrutinised and replicated” (Cameron, 2011:6). A detailed description of methods that have been employed to gather and analyse data

was provided to ensure that findings are factual and representative of some of Vhavenda's perceptions of women.

3.2.5.4 Conformability

Conformability refers to ensuring that the study's findings are a result of experiences of informants rather than preferences of the researcher(s). Conformability "can be achieved through an audit trail of the raw data, memos, notes, data reduction and analysis" (Cameron, 2011:6). The research findings are clearly linked to the raw data gathered. The literature reviewed, specifically in Chapter 2, has undergirded the conformability of the study. The researcher has also provided a full disclosure of all the decisions taken and steps followed from the study's conception to its completion, including the collection and analysis of data in the final report.

3.3. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study has not involved research participants because it was solely a desktop research. Data were acquired from primary texts, and corroborated by secondary sources, i.e. theses, dissertations, journal articles, textbooks, etc. However, in an effort to comply with and uphold ethics in research, the researcher applied for permission to conduct the study from Turfloop Ethics Research Committee (TREC) at the University of Limpopo prior to the write-up of the dissertation. Aspects such as harm, privacy, confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent, that often characterise ethical considerations, cannot be addressed or appropriated in this study because there were no (human) research participants. Nevertheless, the researcher ensured that all sources consulted in the study are duly acknowledged, and ran the final draft of the study through the Turn-it-in Software Program to capture any manifestations of plagiarism and similarity indices to other studies prior to the final submission of the dissertation.

3.4. CHAPTER SUMMARY

Research methodology is of paramount importance in research as it elucidates the process that has been followed when conducting research. Research methodology includes the qualitative approach, which this study employed. The research design of

this study was descriptive. Both primary and secondary data collection techniques were employed. The chapter also stated how the collected data were analysed as well the ethical considerations adhered to.

CHAPTER 4: PORTRAYALS OF WOMEN IN SELECTED TSHIVENḐA TRADITIONAL AND MODERN POETRY

4.1. Introduction

Traditional and modern Tshivendḥa literature has, to a large extent, stereotypically depicted women as merely devoted wives and mothers, and nothing else (Variyar &

Prajapati, 2017; Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999:58). Machaba (2011:12) concurs that “women have always been portrayed in terms of their relationship with men”; as wives, mothers, widows, as those people who have passed the marrying stage (*Mutshelukwa*), (*mubvana*) a young married girl who has a child or children, and prostitutes. They are mostly portrayed as prostitutes due to their dependence on males for monetary support, sometimes in exchange for sexual favours (Mibenge, 2007:14). They are also “portrayed as labourers, witches, the femme-fatale and the daring women who persevere in marriage” (Machaba, 2011:14). In this chapter, the researcher provides the analysis of the selected oral (traditional) and modern poems for their depictions of women.

4.2. PORTRAYALS OF WOMEN IN TSHIVENḂA TRADITION: A CASE OF MAFHUWE

Women in marriage are expected to submit to their husbands and to extend the submission to their in-laws (Mibenge, 2007:22). In the same vein, Rabothata (2005:33) avers that, VhaventḂa women are anticipated to be reserved and to submit themselves to the dominating authority of men. The VhaventḂa men exercise absolute power over their women and these women retaliate by singing songs, i.e. *mafhuwe*, as a way of trying to escape their frustration and hard time in marriage. Sengani (2011:178) defines *mafhuwe* as “working songs that VhaventḂa women sing as they pound maize during the night to deal with fear, they can also be seen as protest poetry, chanted by VhaventḂa women against the harsh treatment they get from their in-laws”. According to Milubi (1997:106), “protest poetry is an art that speaks to people in terms of their feelings and ideas about the world”. A poet that protests is one that finds him/herself immersed in an oppressive situation. Women uses *mafhuwe* songs to protest against the bad treatment they receive from the in-laws and the husbands (Mphaphuli, 2021).

Mafhuwe are poetry-cum-songs that are chanted to illustrate power imbalances that exist between the in-laws, who are regarded as superior and the daughter-in-laws, seen as inferior; hence, oppressed by the husband and the mother-in-law (Mphaphuli, 2021; Sengani, 2011). VhaventḂa women have used these songs as a tool to deal with their frustrations and the hardship that they face in their marriage. The VhaventḂa female singers use these songs as an expression of their feelings

and emotions when they suffer from the abuse imposed on them (Rabothata, 2005:31; Mphaphuli, 2014:27). The singer uses her voice to respond to the voice of the unseen and unheard interlocutor who is known to her (Sengani, 2011).

One of the interviewee in Sengani's (2011) article, explained *mafhuwe* as "*nyimbo dzine vhafumakadzi vha imba ngau hanganea kana u fhulufhuwa*", that is, 'Songs that women sing when they are disillusioned or in despair'. Sengani (2011:178) further explains the structure and the characteristics of *mafhuwe* songs thus:

An important characteristic of these songs is that; they are half sung and half spoken, and in the process 'the soft tones of the women's pounding may rise almost to a shout if a singer has news that she wants her neighbours to hear'... Because of their frustration, anger and tension, the women often do not pronounce the words of the song but go on to groan like 'Nhii ... nhii ...nhii ... haa ... haaa ...' and in the process insert words that are found to be appropriate for that situation.

In support of Sengani, Nemapate (2010:20, 24) states that when the song starts,

A woman performs harmony while pounding maize using pestle and mortar... She then uses both short and long sentences to scold the in-laws for ill-treating her...and when the pounding has reached its highest point, she does not utter words any longer, she just pounds the mealies hard...and the sound produced by her voice will be; Hee!... Hee... Hee... Hee!

Mafhuwe songs are performed when one is complaining about the family and the in-laws, complaining about women abuse, performed to drive away fear at night while pounding mealies and to make the difficult task of pounding mealies easier to perform.

4.2.1. THEMATISATIONS OF WOMEN AND WOMANHOOD IN MAFHUWE

It is understood that women usually accept the harsh treatment they receive in their marriages for as long as they live until they get older and become the mother-in-law themselves (Mphaphuli, 2021). Throughout their harsh, abusive and oppressive marriage journey, they resort to singing to express their feelings. A soloist who is pounding maize sings these songs. In these songs, the singer-protester responds and answers to her oppressors, usually her mother-in-law, husband and even her co-wife (Sengani, 2011). Ngwana's (1958:19) poem, "Mafhuwe a Vho-Makhadzi" (Aunt's Work songs) renders *mafhuwe* thus:

Nyandani ni vhone ndi ya khoḁa,

Makhadzi wanga ndi a khoḡa;
Nda shaya makhadzi ndi a lila.
Vhuḡambi ndo tou bebelwa nga mme anga;
Mutswukutswuku a no nga ḡuvha ḡi tshi bva Vhutonga.

(Come and see me as I praise,
My great aunt I praise;
If I cannot have a great aunt I cry
My exceptional ability in singing I got from my mother
One who is as red as the sun dawning from the east.)

Ndi a ḡa-vho vhoḡa madembe;
Nyamunaka mulayo musadzi o nakaho na haḡwani,
Vivho ndi naḡo a thi vshivhi muhadzinga;

(I too can come and witness wonders;
I am one woman who is beautiful even in deed from the depth of my heart
I do have jealousy, but would not mind a co-wife;)

U si goḡe mubva ḡwana wa hashu,
Mubva u goḡwa nga muavheli wawe;
Musadzi ha rendi munna fano;
Musadzi u renda vho-mazwale.
Vho-mazwale ndi tshiselo tsha sinyuwa
Tshi ḡela tshi sa ḡamba,
ḡi tsha ra vhoḡani vhananga?

(Do not speak ill of a lazy person fellow child of my mother;
A lazy person is spoken ill of by her parent;
A wife does not praise a husband here;
A wife praises the mother-in-law.
The mother-in-law is like a bowl which if it gets angry
It is used even if it is dirty,
What does daylight hold for us my children?)
(Ngwana, 1958:19).

In this protest poetry, the protester is appealing to all humanity to come and hear her venting her anger and frustrations, which she sarcastically calls praises (Sengani, 2011:181). She is sarcastically praising her paternal aunt '*Makhadzi*' as she is regarded as a very important person in the family due to the duties that the latter carries out. *Makhadzi* is regarded as the ritual leader who holds spiritual power to act as an intermediary between the physical and spiritual worlds (Stayt, 1931). *Makhadzi* takes important decisions in the family such as intervening in her brother's marital conflicts to bring about peace in the family. She is also considered the owner of her brother's wife and his children because her bride price is used to pay for her brother's wife (Chisadza, 2019), therefore, she is considered a mediator between parents and their children and also mediates in marriage and lobola negotiations.

The protester states that she would cry, if she has no paternal aunt. This is because in Tshivenda culture, having a '*Makhadzi*' may guarantee one a marriage, hence the saying '*Muzwala ndi musadzi kana munna*', meaning cousins can marry each other. The singer is trying to express that having a paternal aunt is important as she is also a potential mother-in-law, therefore, she would have a marriage. This speaks volumes regarding how a girl child among Vhavenda is raised. Many young women are raised to understand marriage as an unquestionable expectation that is embedded in culture (Potokri, 2015); hence, the protester feels there is an assurance of marriage because she has a paternal aunt.

She further confesses that she was taught to sing by her mother who is very beautiful. In Sengani's (2011:181) words, "the protester marvels at her mother because she is her role model and the one who taught her how to complain through scorn which she sarcastically calls praises. She praises her mother for being exceptionally brilliant and wise because she has taught her an art through which she is able to hide her frustrations. From her mother she got hope, life and a way of protecting herself". This communicates that in Tshivenda culture, parents have an obligation to ensure that their children are trained on how to become suitable marriage partners (Raphalalani & Musehane, 2013:19). This is done to ensure that they meet all the cultural expectations; thus, they are sent to cultural initiation schools.

In the second stanza, the protest singer is entreating people to come and witness 'miracles'. The noun 'miracles' is used ironically to refer to the hardships that she encounters in her marriage such as abuse, oppression and discrimination which her mother-in-law who is also her paternal aunt subjects her to. This is the woman who ironically is supposed to protect her, but has turned into her tormentor (Sengani, 2011). She also reveals that she has '*Muhadzinga*' a co-wife, which is common and acceptable among Vhavenda people (Stayt, 1931); hence, she also understands and accepts polygamy. Her words, "*Vivho ndi naḷo a thi vhivhi muhadzinga*", 'I do have jealousy, but would not mind a co-wife', conveys that although she is jealous of her husband and want him to herself, she has to accept her co-wife and is prepared to share her husband with this other wife. This is a cultural expectation for women to do so. She then describes herself positively when she calls herself '*Nyamunaka*' 'the beautiful one', not only physically but also in her heart of hearts (Sengani, 2011); she takes after her mother. This might also tell the reader that her co-wife is not as beautiful as she is; hence, she had the courage of accepting her.

She then ridicules her co-wife, for perceiving her as lazy, something which she feels the co-wife is not entitled to criticise, only her mother who taught her how to work is eligible to give those criticisms as she knows her better (Sengani, 2011). She goes on and warns her co-wife about always praising her husband. She then advises her that in marriage a wife is only supposed to praise her mother-in-law because she has more power and a lot to say in their marriage; hence, Mareḷa (2019:62) states that:

Vhabebi, zwi hulusa zwi tshi kwama vhomazwale, vho vha vhe na vhu pfhiwa vuhulu kha mbingano dza vhana vhavho. Zwoṭhe zwine vha amba zwo vha zwi tshi fanela u tevhedzwa nahone vho vha vha tshi fanela u pfhiwa nga vhana vhavho. U pfhiwa ha vhabebi nga vhana zwo vha zwi tshi sumbedza ṭhonifho, nahone wo vha u tshi tou vha mulayo muḷini wa Vhavenda uri vhahulwane vha fanela u pfhiwa.

(Parents, mostly the mother-in-laws had power and say in their children's marriages. Everything they utter was given an ear and was to be followed. Being heard and listened to by your children showed respect, and it was an obligation in Vhavenda's home for children to listen to their elders.)

Mother-in-laws have a lot of influence in their children's marriages, and this is mainly because in the Vhavenda's cultural practice, a woman is married for her mother-in-law and the family (Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999). Nanda and Warms (2004:205) corroborate this by saying; "a good wife was one who was a good daughter-in-law.

She had to work hard under the eyes of her mother-in-law and her husband's elder brothers' wives". It is always expected that the elders of the family should be heard and respected. Thus, the protester in this song emphasises that the co-wife should respect the mother-in-law. She further informs her co-wife, who seems to lack the knowledge as to who their mother-in-law is, "that the old lady is like a bowl that is used for eating; one that is used when dirty. This means that when she is angry, she becomes foulmouthed. She then warns her co-wife of more criticism by their mother-in-law if she continues to behave as she does" (Sengani, 2011:181).

The above quoted *mafhuwe* depicts women as men seekers, for they have a firm desire to get married. Culturally, marriages involve men and women, therefore, a woman who firmly seeks marriage, seeks male validation, companionship and presence to feel whole and complete. A woman has been depicted as one who needs male presence; hence, the protester averred that she would cry if she had no paternal aunt, because having one guarantees marriage. The noun 'tears' symbolises the urge and deep feeling of wanting to get married and have male presence and superiority in life. Although marriages bring about hardships that mostly affect women because of the in-laws and the co-wives, women are still portrayed as people who would rather suffer the pain of having co-wives (sharing their husband) for the mere fact of having a man.

Another *mafhuwe* song worth considering is "Vho Nyadenga Vha ri" (Mrs Nyadenga says) by (Ngwana, 1958:24):

*A thi lali nda rongomelwa,
Vhuhadzi ho tuwa na khofhe;
Vhuhadzi ndi nama ya thole,
Ya fhufhuma ri a fhunzhela.*

(I do not sleep and oversleep,
Marriage departed with sleep;
Marriage is lean meat,
If it boils over we beat the foam)

*Midzimu yanga midzimu-de?
I no ruma nowa luvhilo;*

Tshipuka tshi si na milenzhe.

(What kind of gods are my gods?
That send a snake speed;
An animal without legs.)

*Nyamphemphe no mmbona ndo farani?
Ndo fara gaku khe'ni sa nkumbeli?
Tshihweduhwedu musi wa davha ǀa hashu,
Davha ǀa fhela hu sala mavhengano.
Nyakhothomba ha bvi muḏini;
U salela hone u fheḽa vhaḽwe.
Asiḽo dzhatsha ǀanga vha hashu;
Nga vhomme a ǀanzhwani wa Dau.*

(Mrs. Give-me-give-me what did you see me holding?
Why don't you ask for a lump of porridge when you see me holding it?
The cooperative gathering at a time of our work party,
The work party ends and hatred remains.
Mrs. Cruelty does not leave her home;
She stays there to betray others
There is my misfortune, brethren;
I swear by ǀanzhwani's mother a *Dau*.)
(Ngwana, 1958:24).

In the first stanza of the foregoing song, the protester states that she does not sleep until late because she always has to wake up at a certain time so she can execute her duties. Marriage has taken away all her sleep and time to relax, meaning that she has no time to rest in this marriage because she is expected to be constantly working. This is supported by Lebaka-Ketshabile (1999:47) who avers that African men do not only marry women because of their beauty, but also those who will perform their wifely duties for the husband and his family. What matters is how well she works for the entire family, thus, the protester is complaining about not having time to rest.

She then utters the proverb, “*Vhuhadzi ndi ṅama ya thole, Ya fhufhuma ri a fhunzhela*”, literally meaning ‘marriage is lean meat, if it boils over, we beat the foam’. The hidden meaning is that marriage is difficult, and a woman is not supposed to leave the marriage, even when it gets hard, she has to endure all the pain (Rabothata, 2005). She is expected to hoe the field, pound grain, prepare food and do the entire general work in the home alone. ‘*Tholo*’ is a Kudu, a wild animal that takes time to cook. The longer time of cooking the lean meat is compared to the years that women dwell in the marriage. The ‘foam’ symbolises the troubles and hardships that brew in marriage and the ‘beating of the foam’ is the expectation that a woman should accept all the trouble, abuse and hardship that brews in her marriage and act as if all is well. This belief has turned into a truism and is used when one has to suffer injustice at the hands of the husband, co-wives and in-laws (Rabothata, 2005:37). Thus, Vhavenda women have resorted to protesting through songs.

In the second stanza, the singer protester then blames her ancestors and her elders for allowing her to get married before she was ready. “*Midzimu yanga midzimu-ḡe? I no ruma ṅowa luvhilo; Tshipuka tshi sina milenzhe*” literally meaning; ‘what kind of ancestors and elders are they? That they send a snake to speed up, knowing it lacks legs’. The ‘snake that is been sent to speed up without legs’ is used connotatively to describe the protester, for she has been sent or forced to get married before she was ready for marriage. In Tshivenda culture, many women were married young, encouraged or even arranged for a marriage by their parents without their own consent (Raphalalani & Musehane, 2013). In corroboration, Stayt (1968:144) states that indeed “marriages are often arranged in an entirely arbitrary way between the parents. Nanda and Warms (2004:197) add that:

The father betroths his infant daughter to the man he thinks will bring him the most economic and social advantage...this might be a friend or an ally or someone he wants as a friend or ally, or he might bestow his daughter on a man who has already bestowed a daughter on him.

The protester was married off before she was ready to have a husband; hence, she is blaming her elders and ancestors for all her marriage problems. In the third stanza, the protester uses a proverb, ‘*Tshihweduhwedu musi wa davha ḷa hashu, davha ḷa fhela hu sala mavhengano*’. ‘*Davha*’ means a work party held by one who wants to have the land ploughed or cultivated. The singer protester uses the hidden

dialogical language, 'davha' referring to her marriage as Vhavenda cultural marriage is composed of many people other than just her and her husband (Mbiti, 1969:141). It involves the family of the bride and that of the groom, hence, they say 'Nga Tshivenda hu malana miṭa' (Likhanya, 2017). Therefore, where many people are involved, conflicts and quarrels never lack, because everyone wants to be heard. The in-laws and the other family might have their differences regarding the marriage and this leads to separations and hatred towards each other.

She then went on to say that, "Nyakhothomba ha bvi muḍini, u salela hone u fheṭa vhaṅwe", 'Nyakhothomba' is someone who gossips and always speaks ill of others. In this protester's situation, Nyakhothomba is one of the in-laws, possibly the sister-in-law 'Muhaliwo' who has not had the luck of getting married or leaving her parents' house. This makes it difficult for the wife to have peace in her marriage due to the quarrels that most sisters-in-law have, hence, she is referring to her as a traitor, who causes all the trouble in her marriage.

In the above *mafhuwe* song, women are portrayed as slaves who are expected to be constantly working without getting any rest. Although they are regarded as being hardworkers, they are commonly put under pressure to perform the duties that they are expected to execute, duties such as pounding maize, hoeing the field and many others, so they can be referred to as a 'real' and hard working wives. This can be seen as a form of slavery as they have been coerced to do so. If they do not execute these duties, they might be labelled lazy and chased out of their marital home. Womanhood is socially associated with perseverance and endurance, despite the hardships and despairs that women find themselves in, in their marriages.

The following *mafhuwe* song; *Mutuli* (mortar) by (Ngwana, 1958:60) is also worth contemplating, because it relates to *Vho Nyadenga Vha ri*: with its depiction of women.

Mutuli ndi muluṭanyi, wo luṭanya mme na ṅwana;
Musingi a songo rambwa u a rumbula ḍulu a lifha;
Mme anga ndo wana vho ḍa u vhona
Nyanganyanga musadzi a tshi lwa na ṅwana;
Mme anga mutshena, mukunandi me a muṅwe.

(The mortar is a troublemaker, it caused a fight between mother and child;
If the one who pestles is not invited he/she destroys the storehouse and reimburses;
I found that my mother had come to see
Chaos, a woman fighting a child;
My mother who is white, one who is clean is someone else's mother,)

*Makhadzi wanga muvhuya ndi a siho;
Vho masalannḡa a vha mmbengeli hone;
Nde ndi yo ka tshikoli ndi a tovholwa
Mbevha dzi tshi ḡa khe vha sa dzi tovholi?*

(My aunt, a benevolent person is one who is absent;
Those left outside loathe me beyond description;
If I say let me go harvest maize I am persecuted
Why don't they persecute rats when they eat?)

*Mutuli ndi ngoma ya vhasadzi;
Madekwe nḡe a tho ngo lala;
Masase ko ḡi bva ndo tumba;
Ndi tshi nga mureḡi wa khuni.*

(The mortar is women's drum;
Last night I did not sleep;
The morning star appeared while I was still squatting;
Looking like a collector of firewood.)

*Inwi mmawe u sinḡa a thi tsha kona;
Ndi ndo sinḡesa ndi tshee ḡwana;
Ndi vho vhuya vha nthina dzina;
Vho vhuya vha nthina ḡibango ḡisekenyisi;
ḡibangoḡisekenyisa mase.
Inwi mmawe ḡangana yanga mulomo;
Nda pandelwa ndi a shavha nayo.*

(You mother, I can no longer pestle;
I am saying I did that a lot when I was still a child;

I am saying they once gave me a name;
They once named me One-Who-De-husks-to-smoothness;
One-Who-Grinds and de-husks maize
You mother, my small horn, defender;
If I am chased away I flee with it.)

Musadzi n̄ne ndi ðivha Vho-Phophi;
Vhane u dzhena gohani ha lila matya;
Vha tshi sin̄ða maḍulu maḇa;
Ḷavhuḷanu vhe ndi mbeu.
Musadzi muḇwe ri ðivha Vho-Nyavele;
Vha no dzula vho ima;
Vha tshi kan̄ða danda kha ḷin̄we.

(The only woman I know is Mrs. Phophi;
Who enters a dwelling place and palms snap;
Pounding four storehouses;
She says Friday is seed.
Another woman we know is Mrs. Nyavele;
Who sits standing,
Smashing the log on the other.)
(Ngwana, 1958:60).

In the first stanza of this protest poetry, the singer starts her protest song by personifying ‘*Mutuli*’ a mortar, “*Mutuli ndi muluḷanyi*” ‘the mortar is a troublemaker’, referring to a mortar as a conflict instigator in the household, that has been instigating conflicts between mother and daughter. The protester’s mother has gone to her daughter’s marital home to witness the conflicts and troubles that have been caused by *mutuli* between her daughter and her mother-in-law. The protester praises her mother for being beautiful and a good woman, sarcastically criticising her mother-in-law for not been a good person.

In the second stanza, the protester vents out that her paternal aunt, who is also her mother-in-law, does not see any goodness in her. She regards the outsiders as the righteous ones compared to her own brother’s daughter. The protester tells her mother that she is also hated by the outsiders due to the gossip and the

badmouthing that her mother-in-law utters to the neighbours about her. She has no good relationship with her mother-in-law. She persecutes and agonises her in almost everything she does in the household. This is revealed by her own words; “*Nde ndi yo ka tshikoli ndi a tovholwa; Mbevha dzi tshi ja khe vha sa dzi tovholi?*” Although she works hard in the family, doing chores such as ploughing maize, while they are ripe, she is not allowed to reap them from the garden; she is not allowed to taste the fruits of her own labour. She further emphasises the level of her persecution by asking her mother-in-law a rhetoric question; why do you not also persecute the rats that are feeding on the same mealies that I am prohibited to feed on? This further communicates that her mother-in-law’s hatred towards her was unbearable.

“*Mutuli ndi ngoma ya vhasadzi*” literally meaning; ‘a mortar is a women’s drum’. A mortar has been assigned and related to women’s chores because that is what they use when pounding maize. The word ‘*ngoma*’ has been used to symbolise the action of pounding maize with a pestle, moving it up and down as it is done when playing drums. The singer protester goes on to say that; “*Madekwe nne a tho ngo lala; Masase ko di bva ndo tumba; Ndi tshi nga mureḡi wa khuni*”, literally meaning ‘last night I did not sleep, the morning star appeared while I was still squatting’.

She did not have any sleep last night because she was busy pounding the maize until the morning star appeared. She then compares herself with a firewood collector who has to wake up in the early hours to go in the forest or the mountain to collect firewood so she can come back and do other house chores before the sun rises. This communicates that women are expected to fulfil all the chores and to make life more manageable for others and care less about themselves (Rabothata, 2005:106). They are expected to be constantly working without the help of their husband or their in-laws and sometimes the work becomes too much for the woman, but she is still expected to execute them alone (Rabothata, 2005), just like the protest singer in this song.

Due to too much work that she has to perform in the household, she is tired and worn out, hence, calling to her mother who has witnessed the conflicts between her and her mother-in-law brought by ‘*mutuli*’. She tells her mother that she is unable and can no longer continue pounding maize. She is worn out, because she has been pounding maize since she was very young, so much so that they have even given

her a nickname, '*Libango lisekenyisi; Libangolisekenyisa mase*' meaning a big pole that crushes mealies into coarse maize meal. The name was given to her because she has always been pounding maize in the mortar and is good at it, but now she is tired and cannot carry on pounding anymore. She then tells her mother that her mouth is now like a reed flute because she is always singing/complaining about the in-laws' treatment and can be chased out because of ceaseless complaints, which are not tolerated in marriage.

In the Tshivenda culture, females should subsume household chores and agricultural work (Mafenya, 2002:03). These women's upbringing trained them to focus solely on the domestic sphere as a place and centre for women. They have been trained to perceive themselves as mere domestic labourers and people who persevere in marriage (Machaba, 2011:14), where they are not supposed to voice out her feelings. Hence, the protest singer knows that she might be chased out because she is doing what is forbidden. She ends her protest song by praising Vho Phophi, who is always pounding as expected because she is a woman, pounding four granaries while the fifth one is reserved for seed. She further praises Vho Nyavele, who is always on her feet, pounding using her mortar and pestle. Her praising other women for being hard workers implies that she envied them. She is disappointed in herself for not being like Vho Phophi and Vho Nyavele.

In the above analysed protest poetry-songs, it is notable that women perform these songs to complain about marriage, the husbands and their in-laws. This is their form of retaliating to the abuse, discrimination and the injustices they are subjected to in their marital home. Vhavana women sing *mafhuwe* songs when they are in anguish and despair. They are used as a medium of venting their frustrations and dissatisfactions in their marriage (Mphaphuli, 2021:47).

It is widely known that marriage is not a bed of roses (Sengani, 2011), hence, the Tshivenda proverb "*Vhuhadzi ndi nama ya thole, ya fhufhuma ri a fhunzhela*" (Marriage is lean meat, if it boils over we beat the foam) and it is for this reason that *mafhuwe* become handy when the going gets hard (Sengani, 2011). These traditional protest songs also reflect on gender imbalances in the Vhavana's households, where a woman is expected to do almost everything alone. Mphaphuli (2021:47) avers that, when the protester sing the *mafhuwe* songs, "she sings in a

poetry that gives her the freedom to shout without fear because in Vhavenḡa culture, the protester has a cultural license to chant by using poetry of resistance”. The protester uses this manner because under normal circumstances, she has very limited power (Sengani, 2011:188).

The analysed *mafhuwe* songs revealed the negative depiction of women in Tshivendḡa poetry. Women are depicted as persecuted and agonised by their fellow women, and this is drawn from the protesters who complain about the ill-treatment brought to them by their mother-in-law. This is viewed as an intra-gender abuse, for it is one woman mistreating another. The protesters confront the horrible and unpleasant circumstances and treatment that they receive from their mother-in-laws, who are their paternal aunts in this instance, revealing that women also oppress each other.

Women have also been depicted as enslaved people, who are essentially married to work in their marital home. They are treated as labourers, servants and bondwomen. The only reward they get is to be labelled a ‘good’, ‘real’ and hardworking woman/wife. In this protest song, it is clear that the protester has worked hard in ploughing maize and yet she was deprived the right of reaping what she sowed.

4.2.2. PORTRAYALS OF WOMEN AND WOMANHOOD IN TSHIVENDḡA CHILDREN’S RHYMES, SONGS AND LULLABIES

Children’s rhymes, songs and lullabies falls under the oral traditional poetry, which is the survival of an indefinite past which was handed down from one generation to another by word of mouth (Milubi, 1997:6). Milubi (1997) says that these type of poetry was never put into writing, hence their oral nature. They were repeatedly recited orally by individuals and this promoted the variation of words in these songs. The children’s rhyme and songs are meant for entertainment and enjoyment (Mphaphuli, 2021). Usually there is a playful rhyme, which makes them enjoyable. The musical nature of rhymes and lullabies have an inviting effect of children.

Lullabies are “nursery songs, sung by nurses as they carry the babies on their backs, inducing them to sleep” (Milubi, 1997:6). According to Mafela et al. (2003:136) children’s rhymes and songs are “for entertainment to children, they reprimand from being greedy and being selfish and to induce the children”. Although these songs are meant for entertaining children, they also portray women in a certain manner and

that can be seen in the following chosen children's songs and lullabies. Ngwana's (1958:1), "Mafula" (*Sclerocarya birrea* fruits) is illustrative here:

Vho mme vho ya ngafhi?

To-to!

Vho ya u fhoṅḁa mafula;

To-to!

Mafula ndi a mini?

To-to!

Mafula ndi a u !a;

To-to!

Dzingi-dzingi mafula;

To-to!

Dzingi-dzingi mafula;

To-to!

(Where did the mothers go?

To-to!

They have gone to process Mafula drink

To-to!

What are Mafula for?

To-to!

Mafula are for eating

To-to!

Shaking the mafula from the tree

To-to!

Shaking the mafula from the tree

To-to!)

(Ngwana, 1958:1).

There are some Tshivenda lullabies in which a child, longing for its parents, is informed about the absence of its father – a tactic meant to foreground the need for its attention to be directed to the mother. This is evinced in the lullaby, "Nwana u a lila" (A child cries) by Ngwana (1958:5):

Nwana u a lila;

U lilela nnyi?
U lilela mme awe;
Mme awe vho ya fhi?
Vho ya mulamboni;
Mulamboni ngafhi?
Mulamboni Dzondo;
Zwikumbu zwingana?
Zwikumbi zwiraru;
Tshiñwe ndi tsha mini?
Tshiñwe ndi tsha maḡi;
Tshiñwe ndi tsha ṭhumbe;
Tshiñwe ndi tsha nḡuhu.

(The child cries;
Who is it crying for?
It cries for the mother;
Where has the mother gone to?
She has gone to the river;
Which river?
The River Dzondo;
How many gourds?
Three gourds;
What is each for?
One is for water;
Another for “ṭhumba”;
The third one for nuts.)
(Ngwana, 1958:05).

In the song, ‘*Nwana u a lila*’, it is said that the child cries for her mother that has gone into the river *Dzondo* to collect water, *ṭhumbu* and nuts. This is a lullaby song, sung for a child, and yet, it reveals the hard work that the mothers have to go through to sustain their families’ lives. They are expected to hoe the fields, fetch water, prepare food and everything else in the households without being helped (Rabothata, 2005). Some children’s rhymes, although meant to be playful, still implicate the absence of the mother, and rarely comment on that of the father. A case in point is the rhyme, “Funguvhu” (Crow) by Ngwana (1958:23):

Funguvhu țanzwa mulomo,

Țanzwa mulomo,

Ri kone ri tshi Ța roȚhe;

Ri tshi Ța roȚhe.

Vhomme vha ka enda pi?

Vha ka enda pi?

Vho lima davha Ța khombe;

Davha Ța khombe.

Vho lima ndima nngana?

Ndima nngana?

Vho lima ndima ntharu;

Ndima ntharu.

Ya vhuȚa ndi ya u fhedza;

Ndi ya u fhedza.

...

(Crow, wash your mouth

That we may eat with you

Where are the mothers?

Where have they gone to?

They have gone to plough.

How many acres have they tilled?

They have tilled three acres

The fourth is the last one)

(Ngwana, 1958:23).

Culturally, Vhavenda women are married into a family to work and bear children for that family (Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999). Hence they are found doing a lot of chores for their husbands and their in-laws. In other version of the song *Mafula*, it is mentioned that the mothers have gone to process mafula drink that is consumed by hundreds of people 'a Țiwa nga vha ngana? a Țiwa nga vha Țana'. This serves as an emphasis into the women's work. They produced food and worked for the whole family, which was very large at times because the Vhavenda family structure includes the extended families (Stayt, 1931). The children's song *Funguvhu* is sang in the day

time when children see a crow. Blacking (1967:103) said the following about the song;

Crows often come to look for eggs or beads when there is no one in a household or village. The crow has come to steal but has found children eating; they invite him to join them, but tell him he must first wash his mouth. He asks them where their mother is, because he is sure that she would not approve of their inviting a stranger to eat with them.

There is a pattern in all three children's songs mentioned above. The mothers are absent in their home, and the children have been left alone. In all these songs, the singer asks, *Vho mme vho ya ngafhi?* (Where did the mothers go?); *Mme awe vho ya fhi?* (Where did her mother go?), and *Vhomme vha ka enda pi?* (Where did the mothers go?) The absence of these mothers in the home symbolises and emphasises the amount of time that mothers spend in their home and outside. In most cases, they are away, hoeing of plants, fetching water, or collecting of firewood so they can prepare food for their family. In these children's songs, women, particularly mothers, have been portrayed as hardworkers and the ones looking after their families. The male figure is hardly mentioned in the songs and this is because women do almost everything in the upbringing of the children, therefore, women are anticipated to do all the hardwork in their households and above that, take care of their husbands, their in-laws, and then themselves after everyone else is sorted (Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999).

4.2.3 ACCOUNTING FOR THE ABSENCE OF THE FATHER IN TSHIVENḌA LULLABIES

Attempts are made in some Tshivendḍa lullabies to inform the child about its father's absence. This is done whilst centralising the mother as the one responsible for child-rearing. Ngwana's (1958:21-22) lullaby, "Lili Nwana Nwananga" (My Grandchild) is helpful in showing how this is expressed in Tshivendḍa culture:

Lili nwana nwananga;

Lili nwana nwananga vhasa mulilo;

Lili vhasa mulilo;

Lili vhasa mulilo khotsi vha vhuya;

Lili khotsi vha vhuya.

Lili khotsi vha vhuya vha vhuya na nnyi?

Lili vha vhuya na nnyi?

Lili vha vhuya na nnyi vha vhuya na Donga.

Lili vha vhuya na Donga.

Lili vha vhuya na Donga, Donga u ɔɔani?

Lili Donga u ɔɔani?

Lili Donga u ɔɔani, Donga u ɔɔa vhasikana

Lili u ɔɔa vhasikana

Lili u ɔɔa vhasikana ku sa ɔi mavhele;

Lili vhasidzana vho bva;

Lili vhasidzana vho bva vho ya khunini;

Lili vho ya khunini;

Lili vho ya khunini thavhani ya Thengwe.

(My grandchild

My grandchild do kindle a fire

Kindle a fire for your father will be coming

The father is coming, but with whom is he coming with?

He is coming back with Donga.

What does Donga wants?

Donga wants the girls

The girls have gone out

Girls have gone out to fetch wood

To fetch wood from Thengwe mountain.)

(Ngwana, 1958:21-22).

This song is sung as a lullaby when looking after the child and the singer is usually the grandmother (Blacking, 1967:122). That the singer is a grandmother is seen by the repetition of “*nwana nwananga*” meaning ‘child of my child’. In this lullaby, it is evident that women are the ones that look after the child, the grandmother is looking after her grandchild while the father is away and it is not known where the mother is. The child is been told by the grandmother to kindle the fire because the father is coming back home with someone. Blacking (1967:122) suggested that lines 5 to 13 of the lullaby;

Lili khotsi vha vhuya vha vhuya na nnyi? Lili vha vhuya na nnyi? Lili vha vhuya na nnyi vha vhuya na Donga. Lili vha vhuya na Donga, donga u ɔɔani? Lili donga u ɔɔani u ɔɔa vhasikana...

(The father is coming, but with whom is he coming with? He is coming back with Donga.
What does Donga want? Donga wants the girls)

... could mean that:

The father has come back with a second wife, who will be a 'mother' to the child, and that the woman he has taken is from another tribe or it could mean that a Tsonga woman has come along to look for a wife for her son. Many Tsongas live in the plains that lie south of the Thengwe mountains.

In the Tshivenda culture, it is common for men to marry more than one wife (Stayt, 1931); hence, Blacking (1967) interpreted line 5 to 13 as alluding to the father of the child who is coming back with a new wife since the mother was not mentioned anywhere in the lullaby. In most cases, children are taken care of by their grandmothers, if the mother has somehow decided to leave the marriage or has been chased away by the husband. In this case, it can only be assumed that the mother has left her marriage home.

Blacking (1967) further avers that the person that the father has brought home could be a woman who has come to look for a wife for his son which is a norm culturally. There are various ways of pursuing marriage and choosing a marriage partner and in most cases, among the Vhavenda, parents are responsible for choosing a marriage partner for their children (Mbiti, 1969) and this is because "marriage is not just an affair between two individuals, but also an alliance between two families. It is regarded as a sacred institution precisely because it involves the welcoming of a new member into the clan. For that reason, it cannot be left in the hands of an individual to decide, that is an individual may not choose his or her own partner for marriage" (Raphalalani and Musehane, 2013:19). Hence we find Donga coming to a foreign place looking for a wife for her son. It is also said in Raphalalani and Musehane's (2013) article that the person responsible for the arrangements is the head of the family, who is usually a man, however, it is assumed that this woman in this lullaby is the head of her family, thus taking the responsibility, and can be sad that she has been given some power to lead which is very rare among various cultures.

In researcher's perspective, Donga can also be a man who is looking for a wife "*vhasikana*" himself, hence he decided to come to a different community so he can find a girl to marry. Although parents were responsible for their children's marriage

partners, some seek partners themselves, but will their parents' approval. Raphalalani and Musehane (2013:19) explains in details that:

If he comes with a suggested name, the parents would not just accept it. They will first send people to investigate the suggested name's parents that they would be looking at whether she is from a good family; a family of parents who do not bewitch people. Another aspect is whether she behaves appropriately. If she is found lacking in these aspects, the parents will not allow the young man to marry the lady. However, if they are satisfied with the family, they would send an intermediary to the girl's family to propose the girl for the boy. If he does not suggest a name, the parents will take some time to search among the local girls. If none of the local girls are suitable, the family will find out from relatives who are far away if they can make any recommendations.

In this lullaby, *Donga* is looking for *vhasikana* who has certain characteristics, "*vhasikana ku sa li mavhele ku la ndovhonzhane muṭanga*" literally meaning; a girl who does not eat maize but eat *ndovhonzhane muṭanga*. Families look for different characteristics and aspects in a woman before they decide to marry her. This is also seen in Raphalalani and Musehane's (2013) article when they described the aspects that a Venda woman must have for her to be married in a certain family.

In the lullaby, *Donga* did not find the girl/s because they have gone to collect firewood at Thengwe Mountain. Women were rarely at home due to their chores, "they would go out on the fields to plough, in rivers to fetch water, in the mountains to fetch firewood, and the children would remain at home, doing what they do best which is to play while their mothers are out" (Blacking, 1967:122).

4.2.4. WHEN VHAVENDA GIRLS SING

In the song, "Khethani" (Choose) in Milubi (1997:33), it is notable that the singer(s) implicitly lament their inability to make choices simply because of their gender. The song goes thus:

Khethani.

Riṇe a vha ri khethi;

Vha khetha vho nakaho.

Khethani;

Vha maḡamu matzwororo

Khethani.

(Choose.
They don't choose us
They choose the beautiful ones
Choose
With sharp-pointed breasts;
Choose.)
(Milubi, 1997:33).

This song is sung in the evening when boys and girls are playing together (Milubi, 1997:33). Milubi (1997) further asserts that; “in the midst of the singing, a girl goes out of her way to choose a boy of her taste”. However, the researcher finds this contradicting to what is said in the song. In this song, girls are singing, telling boys to choose the girls they like, meaning the ‘choosing’ is being done by boys and not by girls, as explained by Milubi. Furthermore, girls singing in this song are also raising their concern regarding how they are chosen.

The lines “*riṅe a vha ri khethi; vha khetha vho nakaho*” (‘they don’t choose us, they choose the beautiful ones’) reveals how other girls are partitioned due to their appearances. Only those who are beautiful, with sharp-pointed breasts get to be chosen by boys. This brings us to the concept of sexualisation and objectification of women discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.7). In this song, women’s body part, breasts, has been singled out and separated from a woman’s real being and used as a sexual object that serves merely to attracts male attention.

There are those girls who naturally have big and saggy breasts. In the context of this song, such girls could end partitioned because of the size and appearance of their breasts. One could argue that Tshivenda culture allows for the sexualisation and objectification of women, indicated even in the content of children’s songs. Culture allows for a boy child to grow up looking at a girl child through her body parts. It suffices to say that, in this sense, a woman is considered beautiful largely based on how big her buttocks are, how sharp-pointed her breasts are, how thin her waist is, her complexion and even her facial appearance.

Tshivenda culture socialises males to disrespect women, as can be seen through the male initiation rites undergone to adulthood. Males attend *murundu*, which is “a traditional rite which initiates a young man to full manhood (Milubi, 2000b:57).

Although the main objective of *murundu* is “to teach boys to respect women, to take care of their families, to be responsible husbands and fathers, and to lead by example” (Luonde, *n.a*), it also encourages the disrespect and belittling of women due to its use of vulgar words and reference to women’s body parts. Milubi (2000b:58) supports that; “the initiation process socialises men to believe that women are their sexual objects. This is clear in the songs used by men attending traditional initiation schools. This is also illustrated by the reference to women’s private parts as sexual objects in most of the songs used by initiates during initiation process”. The *murundu* rules are not largely known by women and *mashuvhuru* (the uninitiated; uncircumcised).

On the other hand, girls undergo their own initiations such as *musevetho* for young girls, *vhukomba* for girls who have just reached puberty, and *domba* for girls ready for marriage. In these initiations, girls are taught differently from boys; they are taught proper behaviour, to be responsible wives and mothers, to be the powers behind the thrones (Luonde, *n.a*). The researcher finds this song disrespectful to women because it refers to them as sexual objects. In the above analysed children’s rhymes, songs and lullabies, women have been depicted as hardworkers and child-rearers. There is a recurrent pattern in these songs – mothers as being often absent from their homes due to chores they carry out. The absence of mothers from their homes typifies the devotion that women exert towards taking care of their children despite male absence. The songs also depict women as objects and sexualised. Other than the *mafhuwe* songs and children’s rhymes, songs and lullabies that form part of traditionalist poetry, there are some Tshivenda poems that exhibit idealised notions of women and womanhood.

4.3. IDEALISED NOTIONS OF A WOMAN IN TSHIVENDA POETRY

Like any other cultures, the Vhava culture also have their own idealised notions of what a true and real Muvenda woman should be. The poem, “Mbuya-Vhuhadzi” (Female divorcee; One who returned from her marital home) (Matshili, 1967:68).

Hee mbuya-vhuhadzi u bva'fhj?

Tsho u vhaisahoo ndi tshithu-ge?

Wo diwa ngani u vhuhadzi hau?

Tsho u totaho ndi tshi'ni munnani wau?

(Hey, female divorcee, where do you come from?
What is it exactly that brought you back?
What hit you when you were at your marital home?
What pinched you when you were with your husband?)

Hee mbuya-vhuhadzi a u shoni na u fhanu?

Munna wau u sala a tshi bikelwa nga nnyi?

Wo bva ngani ngei vhuhadzi hau?

Wo pandelwa nga nnyi a sa funi u bikelwa?

(Hey, female divorcee, are you not ashamed of being here?

Who do you think will remain cooking for your husband?

What made you leave your marriage?

Who expelled you that does not like being cooked for?)

Hee mbuya-vhuhadzi mubvafha-u-sinda

Vhabebi vhau vho la thundu ya vharwa-vhanna,

Vha do lifha ngani vho shenga yothe?

Kholomo vho dzekisa khaladzi yau.

(Hey, female divorcee, you who is lazy to pound

Your parents consumed their in-laws' bridal property,

How will they repay it when they have consumed all of it?

They have used even your cow to marry elsewhere.)

Hee mbuya-vhuhadzi mulamba-u-vhudzwa?

Vho mazwale vho u sundelani?

Wo fara milayo ya hayani wa litsha ya vhuhadzi.

Thetshelesa vhalai vha vhuhadzi u dzule nga dakalo.

(Hey, female divorcee, are you one of those who do not heed counsel?

Why did your in-laws push you out?

You obeyed the laws of your home and disregarded those of your in-laws.

Listen to the marital counsellors so that you may remain happily married.)

Hee mbuya-vhuhadzi iya vhuhadzi hau;

U songo shavha vhahadzinga vhau,

Naho vha u hadzinga nga gango li fhisaho,

Kondelela ndi zwa vhuhadzi hau.

(Hey, female divorcee, go back to your marital home;

Do not run away from your co-wives,
Even when they make you go through severe challenges,
Endure, that's what happens in your marriage.)

*Hee mbuya-vhuhadzi zwa vhuhadzi a zwi shavhiwi,
Shumai u shishe mabiko a rothe,
Vha vhuhadzi vha u khoḁe mishumoni,
Ndi hone vha tshi ḁo renda vhe' thundu yashu yo vhuelwa.*

(Hey, divorcee, you never flee from marital challenges,
Work so hard until sweat becomes droplets,
Until your in-laws praise you when it comes to hardwork,
That is when they will praise and say our bridal property has paid off.)

(Matshili, 1967:68).

Mbuya-vhuhadzi refers to a woman who has divorced her husband and returned home (Tshivenda wordlist, 2019). This is the woman addressed by the poet in the preceding poem. *Musadzi* is expected to stay and persevere in her marriage. Therefore, if she ever returns home, she is perceived as an embarrassment to her family. Culturally, a woman is expected to stick to her husband and her marriage no matter how unbearable her ordeal is. A woman who ever decide to return to her parents' home is given a special title "mbuya-vhuhadzi" or a return soldier (Mulaudzi, 2003).

Hence, the poet is having questions regarding why she has come back, what is it that has 'pinched' her, implying what has troubled her in her marriage. Women who are not married and those who returns home are stigmatized (Gumani & Sodi, 2009:199), and it is for this reason, that the poet is asking the woman if she is not embarrassed "*He mbuya-vhuhadzi, a u shoni na u fhanu?*" Women are also culturally and socially perceived as suitable to perform the household chores, they are married so they can work for their husbands (Mibenge, 2007), and this is the reason for Matshili to ask in the poem; "*Munna wau u sala a tshi bikelwa nga nnyi?*" The poet's question is two-faced, asking 'who is now going to cook for her husband since she has returned home'. We all have been given the skills and abilities to perform duties that add to our survival. The poet, from a male standpoint, is exercising his patriarchal thinking position and authority to advocate for his fellow men and to emphasize the notion of treating women as servants and should

continue to serve their husbands, because that is what they were created to do and it is what men desires, hence the verse; “*wo pandelwa nga nnyi a sa funi u bikelwa?*” literally meaning ‘who expelled you that does not like being cooked for?’.

As mentioned by Lebaka-Ketshabile (1999), a woman is expected to be a hard worker. In Tshivenda they say; “*mufumakadzi ho ngo fanela u vha na nala dzo swaho*”, literally meaning; ‘she should not have burned fingers, implying that she should use her hands to work for her family. Someone with burned fingers will be unable to work using her hands, therefore a lazy woman is compared to someone whose fingers are burnt. A woman who returns home from her marriage is assumed to be lazy and someone who does not listen to her in-laws as expected of her to be submissive. In this poem, the poet points out that she is *mbuya-vhuhadzi* due to her laziness to perform her wifely duties such as the pounding of maize.

According to the Vhavenda culture, if a married woman divorces her husband and returns home, her parents are expected to pay back the bride price that has been paid by the groom’s family. This is why the poet is asking *mbuya-vhuhadzi*; now that you have returned home and your parents have used your bride price, how are they going to repay it? This also tells us how bride price or lobola is treated in the Vhavenda culture. Bride price as the word suggests, connotes a purchase (Phaswana, 2000), signifying the concept of purchase required to acquire a wife from her parents. Although this is traditionally considered a good practice that gave spouses prestige within themselves and the eyes of the society and family (Phaswana, 2000) it also derogated women. Potokri (2015: 6695) defined lobola as “a process where the bride is converted into a sort of feudal slave purchased from her father by the husband’s family, thus, a woman is treated as such ‘a slave’ in her marriage.

It is also said that, Lobola forges a relational bond among families, it honors the bride’s family and celebrates the addition of the woman into the husband’s family (Potokri, 2015:6695), but if it is really for honoring the bride’s family and a gift to forge a relationship, why is it treated as a transaction? In this poem, the bride’s family is expected to return the bride price. This is contrary to the notion that has been put into the bride price as an ‘honor’. After a ‘woman’s service’ has been rendered in marriage, the ‘slave master’ then wants his money back since ‘the slave’

is no longer serving, regardless of the already executed service she provided while still married. In corroboration, Lebaka-Ketshabile (1999:60) avers that;

What could increase the girl's honor and value actually lessens it where a dowry appears to some like pay. What can be 'bought' even if it was expensive, can ultimately be thrown away once it has served its purpose.

It is also common that the money or property used to marry a woman is used by her brother to acquire his own wife. Thus a birth of a girl child is associated with wealth (Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999). A woman is anticipated to listen to her mother in law's order, and whether their instruction and disciplines contradict those she has learnt at home, she should just take them as they are and never questions them. Apparently that is how she will find happiness in her marriage. In marriage, women are expected to endure anything, including physical abuse, as long as their men are satisfied (Mafenya, 2002:35), and consequently, the singing of *mafhuwe* songs that is believed to help women face the hardship in their marriage. The poet in this poem is calling for *mbuya-vhuhadzi* to return to her marital home without even wanting to explore what it is that has uprooted her.

He further utters that; "*u songo ofha vhahadzinga vhau, naho vha u hadzinga nga gango li fhisaho, kondelela ndi zwa vhuhadzi hau*" literally meaning 'do not run away from your core wives, even when they mistreat you, bear with them'. The Vhavenda people are polygamous (Stayt, 1931), meaning they have more than one wife, called *vhahadzinga*, literally meaning the one who fries, implying the one who ill-treats (Rabothata, 2005:36). Rabothata (2005:37) further explains that; "the co-wife is compared to a process of frying something in hot oil or fat. This shows that traditionally, men exposed their wives to suffer in the hands of their other wives".

Polygamous marriages antecedent rivalry among co-wives (Gumani & Sodi, 2009). These women call one another by derogatory names, from jealousy to dislike for the other woman. And consequently, they end up accusing each other of witchcraft and the kids get affected too. But the poet in this poem, who is also a male, calls for women to stay in such toxic marriages and endure it all.

In the Vhavenda culture, men propose love to women and not vice versa, but women tend to blame one another for the predicament they find themselves in. Rabothata, (2005:107) asserts that this is an intra-abuse because they are shifting the blame from the real abuser. He further stated that "by doing so men are pardoned and

largely condoned from responsibility for explaining or consulting with them against social expectations”.

In the last stanza, the poet encourages a divorced woman to return back to her marital home and be a good and hardworking wife, so she can be praised by her in-laws. In doing so, they will praise her for they have gained a ‘servant’ through ‘trading’ their property. This evidently shows that women are treated as commodities. She has been bought, so she should execute what she has been bought to do, which is to work for her in-laws family. Thus, Matshili is insinuating that being praised by the in-laws for being a submissive and hard-working wife is of paramount importance, over a woman’s well-being, freedom and happiness. In Ratshitanga’s (1973:2) poem, “Musadzi” (Woman), one also notes idealised notions of what a woman is:

*Musadzi a si nge a vha o shayaho ndebvu,
Kana nge a mamisa.
Wa sa divha zwenezwo devha zwau thebvu,
U sa fhedze mbavhalelo yawe nga u tambisa.*

(A woman is not a woman because she does not have a beard,
Or because she breastfeeds,
If you do not know that, then just use your time to crush the hard-walled marula
seed,
And not waste their mercy by taking it for granted)

*A si nge a vha wa lukanda lutete,
Kana nge a vudesa,
Wa vha na mashithe a uri a ye u u bikela vhutete.
U dzumba ndi vhutshivha, nga ndi ralo-ha u buledza.*

(It’s not because she has a soft skin,
Or because she is too humble,
That you even hesitate to let her cook soft porridge for you,
To hide is to be greedy, let me say it explicitly.)

*A songo vha ene nge a tswukesa,
Kana nge vhabebi vhawe vha lugesa,
Wa fhurwa nge wawe hwenda a di u fukedza,
Ngeno wa hangwa uri mbingano i diswa nga lufuno u dugesa.*

(She is not a woman because she has a light complexion,
Or because her parents are kind,
And become deceived because of the *nwenda* cloth she wears,
While you forget that marriage is by love set ablaze.)

*Luvhomba lwa musadzi-sadzi ndi u q̄iita musadzi,
A ralo a q̄ivha zwe a dzulela afho muq̄ini,
Ngeno a sa hangwi uri kha iwe fhedzi u musadzi.
A tenda zwenezwo vhuiwa hoq̄he a hu na tshidini.*

(The crème de la crème of woman is one who knows herself to be a woman
By so doing, she knows her purpose in the home
While not forgetting that she is a wife to you only
Agrees with whatever and goes wherever without grumbles)
(Ratshifanga, 1972:2).

Ratshifanga also has his own idealised notion of what a 'real' Muvenda woman should be. A woman is not considered a 'real woman' for the reason that she lacks beards nor that she has breastfed and if one does not know that, according to Ratshifanga, is still young and still needs to mature. Thus, implying that anyone who does not see this in Ratshifanga's eyes is perceived as immature. The poet here has portrayed himself as intolerant, for the reason that there are those who regard a woman as a 'real woman' for the mere fact that she has breastfed, as womanhood is associated with bearing children (Mulaudzi, 2003).

He further asserts that; she should not be considered a 'real woman' for she has smooth and soft skin nor that she is too humble, and this is because many people who are quiet and humble are considered to be menacing. And consequently, a woman who is calm, quiet and humble is also seen as vicious and always up to something of no good. Therefore, a man should never 'be thrown dust into their eyes', being made a fool by a woman's calmness. Ratshifanga (1972) goes on and says that she should not be the one due to her light skin. And this is because a lighter skin tone is stereotyped as beautiful (Sebola, 2022:03) and it is also a feature of attractiveness in women. There is a Venda proverb that says; *fuyu li tswuku a li kundwi tshivhungu*, meaning that a light-reaped fig lacks no warms, implying a light-skinned woman or a beautiful woman does not lack evil. Thus, Ratshifanga is

warning his fellow men to not be deceived by what women portray themselves to be and rush into marrying them because they might change in marriage and reveal their true identity and character, one which is opposite to what they portrayed themselves to be prior to marriage.

The goodness of a 'real woman' is through being a 'woman', *luvhomba lwa musadzi-sadzi ndi u di ita musadzi*. *Musadzi-sadzi* in Vhavenda culture is one that shows deference towards her husband in everything (Phaswana, 2000), meaning being passive, submissive, and quiet is what constitutes a 'real' woman. Although quiet women are stigmatized as menacing, men still desire this characteristic in women so they can be able to control them. A 'real' woman is expected to listen to her in-laws, bear children for her husband and the family, and do all the wifely duties required of her. And if she agrees to all that 'her marriage will last'. A woman who is anything different from the one described here is not a 'real woman'.

The poem *Vhasadzi ndi vha mulovha* (Women were there yesterday) by Ratshitanga (1973:29) also gives us an insight of what a Muvenda woman should be.

*Vhasadzi kha n̄e ndi vha dzhia sa mutambo,
Sa zwipotso, golofu na u imbelela,
Ngeno ndi sa hangwi u zwimbedza havho sa murambo,
Hune naho zwo ralo vhanzhi khavho vha di swendelela.*

(To me, women are like games,
Like sports, golf and singing,
While not forgetting their ability to constipate like a sweet potato,
Who, in spite of their being like this, most people still draw near to them.)

*Thi vhenzi musadzi sa tshivhumbwa
Vhunga rothe ri na zwe ra dela,
Ngeno mbilu yanga yo lindela nowa na mmbwa
Zwine ya nga zwi fha vhukonani yo takala.*

(I do not hate a woman as a creature
Since all of us have what we came here for,
My heart is waiting for a snake and a dog
Which it can joyfully give friendship to.)

*Avha ndi vhaṅwe vhathu kha muhumbulo
Nge na muṭali vha tama u undudza,
Zwa ralo i ngoho a fhedza nga yone thambulo,
Vha ralo tshiṭuhuni itshi vha simesa u ḍihudza.*

(These are different people in mind
Who desire to obliterate even the wise,
They eventually succeed and the wise ends up in poverty,
They do this while steadfast in their cruelty and blatant pride.)

*Ndi musadzi wa lunako na vhulenda
O pikulelwaho nga pfunzo we nda lindela,
Wa oṭhe a kule na ḷa Venda,
Ane mbiluni yanga nṭhaṅwe a ḍo swikela.*

(It is a woman of beauty and gentleness
Who is well-educated that I am waiting for,
Hailing from countries far from Venda,
Who perhaps might reach out to my heart)

*Vhasadzi vha vhukuma ndi vha mulovha,
Vhe phedziselo ya ḍa na vhashu vho-mme,
Kha maḍuvha aḷa a mirula na madavha,
He musadzi vhukuma a hwala tshiala.*

...

(True women were there yesterday,
The last ones came with our mothers
In those days of marula and work parties,
When a true woman carried a crown.)

*Nṅe ndo wana musadzi a tshi mangadza
Nge a vha muthu a shayaho nḍivho,
Ane zwoṭhe a tama u anḍadza,
Hune ha vha na lufuno a ḍisa vivho.*

(I found a woman awe-inspiring,

By being a human being who lacks knowledge,
Who desires to publish everything,
Where there is love she brings jealousy.)

*Ndo wana e mutshini wo ḍiselwaho yone
Mbebo nge e ri u thivhelwa
A zwi ralo na kha vhana vhe a beba,
Shango nga u sa ḍivha ʃe ri ʃi a ʃulelwa.*

(I found her to be a machine that was brought for
Childbirth, who after her [womb] being blocked
Decided that even her own children will not conceive,
The world for lack of knowledge thought it a bad omen.)

*Ndo wana vhanna vha n̄amusi vhe matsilu
Nge ra mu vhea na hu songo fanela,
A dzula zwiduloni zwa khoro na vhanna,
Ngeno u thetshelisa munna wawe zwi tshi mu balela.*

(I found today's men being fools
For putting her where she is not supposed to be,
And sit on the court's seats which were reserved for men,
While she fails to obey her man.)

*O wanaho musadzi-sadzi vhukuma
Uyo ndi we nga Mudzimu a fhaʃutshedzwa,
Wa lunako kana uʃa mudziatshikuma,
Nge musadzi vhukuma i mbilu u naka.*

(He who found a genuinely true woman
That is one who has been blessed by God,
The one of beauty or that one with a big forehead,
Because a true woman is one with a beautiful heart.)

*Yawee! Ndi felani ndi tshi tambula
Nga u zwima muthu ane a sa do wanala,
Muthu ane a vha khonani nga u humbula,
Ane naho ra eḡana ngeno a ḡi mmbikela?*

...

(Oh! Why do I perish in suffering
By hunting a person who will not be found,
A person who is an imaginary friend,
Who although we are equal still cooks for me?)

(Ratshitanga, 1973:29).

Ratshitanga's opening verse "*vhasadzi kha nḡe ndi vha dzhia sa mutambo*" literally meaning 'to me, women are like games' used a simile, comparing women to games, implying that they are not to be taken seriously or taken in mind. However, they can still cause one harm, "*u zwimbedza sa murambo*" meaning 'their ability to constipate like a sweet potato'. He went on to say that he does not hate a woman since we are all in the world for a reason, but he would rather make friends with a snake and a dog and not a woman. This stanza shows how Ratshitanga despises a woman. He would rather be friends with a snake that carries venom that is highly toxic and a dog that can be classified as dangerous due to its aggressive behavior. The imagery used here implies that the poet sees women as menacing, and this is the reason why women are also called snakes, *ndi ḡowa*, meaning she is untrustworthy.

Ratshitanga perceives women as stupid, thus the referral to women as "*avha ndi vhaḡwe vhatu kha muhumbulo*", meaning they have their own way of thinking and consider themselves wise. He went on to say that the woman he desires is one who is beautiful, kind, and educated. He further vents out that 'real women' are those of the past, and exemplified them by his mother, meaning his mother was a 'real woman'. However, this makes one wonder what Ratshitanga really means. According to the African culture, a woman was considered 'real' only if she toes the line and plays by the rules (Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999). A *muvenḡa* woman is expected to be reserved and submit to the dominating authority of men and any woman who is the opposite of that is perceived as uncouth.

Modern women are assertive and no longer confined by male authority and it is for this reason that Ratshitanga considers these women as 'not real'. Only those who

toe by the cultural norms and patriarchal authority are considered noble and righteous. Most women who are educated are assertive, self-fulfilled, and independent (Mibenge, 2007). Thus, finding Ratshitanga in refute, as he desires to have an educated woman who is culturally perceived as unwomanly due to her assertiveness, whereas he considered the olden women as the 'real women'.

In stanza eight, the poet is astonished for a woman lacks knowledge and intelligence to a greater extent. She is considered one who lacks knowledge because she makes everything happening in her life known publicly and where there is love and peace she disrupts and plants jealousy and bitterness. Ratshitanga's perception of a woman is that; "*ndi mutshini wo diselwaho yone mbebo*", a woman's duty is to bear children. In corroboration Mulaudzi (2003:20) avers that "Among the vhavenda people, a woman's role is to bear children to prove her femininity...women are nothing more than just a baby making machine". This has the implication that a woman who has no child or is barren is not considered 'real', hence they are mostly stigmatised and belittled.

He further blames men for allowing the integration of women in the political sphere where men had dominated, and for this, he refers to men as fools for they have allowed women to be heard, seen and given positions in the society. In Ratshitanga's view, a woman is not supposed to be found where a man is found, more specifically a woman who is assertive and does not toes to her husband's rule. The poet, as expected because he is a male, is in favour of patriarchal dominance and authority and he feels threatened by the empowerment of women.

4.4. WOMEN PORTRAYED AS SEEKERS OF MALE VALIDATION

There are some Tshivenda poems that portray women as seekers of male validation, without which they can never classify themselves as wholesome beings. Matshili's (1972:27) poem, "Khomba" (Teenage girl) sheds light on how this notion manifests in Tshivenda poetry:

*Nda țamba nda țola,
U tshimbila ndi tou khophea,
Vha mbonaho vhe ndi khomba yo dziaho,
Ndi hone vhathuni vhukuma.*

(If I bath and apply fragrances
I walk like I am breaking
Those who see say I am a mature girl,
I am truly among the people.)

*Ndi tshi tshimbila thi funi thunzi i tshi kavha,
Thafu dzi a penya dzi vhai-vhai,
Vhathannga vha fhisea vha tshi mmbona ndi tshi kanda,
Ndi humbelwa fola na nga vha sa dahi.*

(When I walk, I do not even want a fly to land,
My calves are shiny like a blinking light,
Young men burn with passion when they see me walking,
I am proposed even by the disqualified.)

*Ndi nnyi a sa nkongoniho ndi ndilani?
Ndi nnyi ane a si fune ndi musadzi wawe?
Ndo naka na ningo ya u fumula maduda,
Maḡamu ndi zwitendende khanani yanga.*

(Who does not bother me when I am on the road?
Who does not want me to be his wife?
I am all beautiful, including even my nose that blows out mucus,
My breasts are stand upright on my chest.)

*Ndi nnyi ane a sa ri khomba iyi ndi tshinyeke?
Ndi gondoni ndi vhidzelela zwiḡoḡi zwi kule,
Zwa ḡa zwa vhungedza phanḡa hanga,
Zwi tshivhanda vho ni beba vha tshi funa ngoho nga Mutangwa.*

(Who does not admit that this girl is a beauty?
When I am on the road, I summon birds from afar,
And they all come and gather before me,
Telling me that 'creature, the Mutangwas conceived you in love'.)

Ndi vhangana vha ḡaho u ambisa?

*Vhapfumi na vhashai vho wedzana vha tshi ambisa,
Vho kanuka ndi tshi "pfu" sa goya la daka,
Wanga u hone wa mbiluni we ra anelana ra khwaṭhisa.*

(How many came to propose me?
The rich and the poor all came to ask for my hand,
They were shocked when I declined like a stray cat,
My beloved with whom I have a strong covenant is there.)

*Hee inwi vhabebi vhangana vha hashu!
Ni songo la thundu dza vharwa vhanna,
Ne ni na nwana ni tshi amba nṅe:
Nṅe wanga u hone ane nda mu funa nga mbilu yanga yoṭhe.*

(Hey, my parents and relatives!
Do not consume the bridal property from other people's sons,
Thinking you have a daughter, referring to me:
I already have someone I love with all of my heart.)

*Mufunwa wanga ndi mu humbula masiari na vhusiku,
Ndo mu funa nga Swondaha tsini ha muhuyu,
A sa mmala ndi nga diposa tivhani zwa ya na vhusula,
Nṅe khomba ya tshinaḡa tsha vhasadzi.*

(I think about my lover day and night,
I loved him on Sunday near a fig tree,
If he does not marry me, I drown myself in the lake and all will be end there,
I, the only strong one among women.)

*Nda eḡela ndi lora ndi khou mu vhona,
Nda fhaṭuwa ndi mu humbula tshifhinga tshoṭhe;
Nda mu vhona ndi nga ndo vhona musuku u penyaho;
Ndi hali maṭo mbilu yanga i rothisa mutoli wa ṅotshi.*

(While asleep, I dream of seeing him,
When I wake up, I think about him all the time;

When I see him, it's like I have the shining gold;
I am so in love that my heart drops honey.)

*Ndi do mu lindela u swika a tshi mmbinga,
Thi nga iti vhuḁabaḁaba vhu ḁisa mutshinyalo;
U do nngwana ndi si na tshilavhi muvhilini wanga,
U do mpha marengwa mbilu yawe yo rula.*

(I will wait for him until he marries me,
I will not succumb to wayward behaviour; it brings destruction;
He will find me without any bit of defilement in my body,
He will pay a hefty bride price with his heart at ease.)

(Matshili, 1972:27).

When a teenage girl experiences her first menstruation, she has to pass through a *vhusha* ceremony which is an initiation school for girls, after the initiation she is then referred to as *khomba* (Lumadi, 1998:43). Stayt (1931) refers to a *khomba* as dangerous, for she is at a stage where she can fall pregnant easily if she be intimate with a man. In the first stanza, the teenage girl is praising herself for being beautiful. She is content and composed and this is drawn from the verse “*ndi hone vhathuni vhukuma, ndi khomba yo dziaho*” meaning; ‘I am a mature girl, I am truly among the people’ however, she validates her contentness and beauty through how males react when she sees her “*Vhaḁhannga vha fhisea vha tshi mbona, ndi humbelwa fola na nga vha sa dahi*” meaning; ‘young men burn with passion when they see me walking, I am proposed even by the disqualified’, as much as she has been portrayed as all confident, beautiful and composed, she still confirms her beauty through men’s proposal, thus, portraying her as one who seeks male validation so she can really believe that she is indeed beautiful.

She further asks a rhetoric question, asking who doesn’t wish and long to have her, boys always long for her and men desires her to become their wife, hence this makes her feel more assured about her beauty. Society perceives a woman’s value through a marital relationship (Moloko-Phiri, 2015) thus this notion is also embedded in this teenage girl’s mind. Being desired to become someone’s wife gratifies her. She then praises her breasts, for they are big and round. She emphasises her

beauty by giving reference to her breasts, for they are highly objectified and sexualised and that men refers to them as a feature of attractiveness, therefore the referral of breasts in this poem is linked to men, conveying the notion that women define their beauty based on how many males' proposals they get. This is notable by the verses "*ndi vhangana vha daho u ambisa? Vhaphumi na vhashai vho wedzana vha tshi ambisa*", 'how many came to propose me? The rich and the poor all came to ask for my hand'. She then utters that regardless of the number of proposals she get, she has declined them all for she already has her lover. This shows that this girl is liberated for she has the freedom to choose her own spouse. In the past, parents had the obligation and responsibility of choosing partners for their children (Raphalalani & Musehane, 2013) and a girl child had no say in who to marry. However, in this poem, she has been accorded the freedom to tell her parents to never arrange nor accept any man's property for her hand in marriage because she had already chosen the one she loves.

Women in this poem have been portrayed as liberated, for they can choose their own spouses and have the power to tell their parents to never arrange any marriage for them. This, in the olden days, was seen as disrespect to parents. Although women have been given power to decide for themselves, they are characterised as ones that still need male approval, notable through the verse "*A sa mmala ndi nga diposa tivhani zwa ya na vhusula*" 'if he does not marry me, I could drown my self'. This proves how much she values marriage, she would rather compromise her own life for a man. This reflects to the notion that she is not completely liberated from the patriarchal and traditional expectation of a woman, for she doesn't feel whole without her man. In the last stanza, the teenage girl is willing to wait for the man to marry her, regardless of how long it is going to take her to get married and, she will not be touched by any other male, so she can receive appropriate gifts from her husband.

In the above traditionalist poems analysed, women have been depicted as the ones who must persevere and endure all the marriage hardship and if ever they decide to return home or to get divorced, they are stereotyped and called derogatory names. Rather than being viewed as choosing themselves and their peace of mind by getting away from an unpleasant and possible toxic environment, which is marriage in this instance, they are rather viewed as lazy to serve their husbands and

rebellious to their in-laws rules. Women have also been portrayed as objects and commodities, for they can simply be paid for, replaced and returned to their home. Culturally and traditionally, if a woman decides to divorce her husband, his family will then demand the bride price to be paid back by the bride's family for she no longer serves what she has been paid for, treating her as a commodity, object and a slave.

It has also been seen that a woman who is calm and humble in the Vhavenda culture, is regarded as somehow evil, plotting and deceit. She is mostly associated with a snake, which symbolises danger, fear and destruction. Although humble and calm women are stigmatized as menacing, men still desire this character in them so they can easily be submissive. Women, in the traditional poetry, have also been portrayed as idiots and one's who lack knowledge. They are merely seen as the baby making machines, hence, one who has no child is considered unwomanly, belittled and often stigmatised.

Women are also depicted as male validation seekers. This is exemplified by the poem *Khomba*, where in a teenage girl confirms her beauty through how men react and treat her. She is painted as being astonished and flabbergasted by how men behave towards her and how they bothers her while walking on the road. Thus, giving her an impression that she is indeed beautiful. Women here, have been painted as one's who conforms to men's behaviour, standard of reaction towards them to rate their beauty. Although they have been depicted as conforming to men's judgment of their beauty, they were also depicted as partially liberated, for in the poem *Khomba*, the teenage girl was able to choose her own spouse, and also be able to tell her parents to never arrange any marriage for her. That is viewed as liberty, being able to make your own choices.

4.5, PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN TSHIVENḌA MODERN POETRY

A woman is socialised to be a good mother and a wife, a home maker, a performer of 'wifely' duties and is expected to be gentle, meek and mild. If she is the opposite of these expectation she is accused of being uncultured or behaving unlike a woman and is ostracized by the society (Lebaka-Kethabile, 1999:58). The Vhavenda women are rarely socialised to be assertive, and are traditionally considered a man's property (Sebola, 2021b:216). The images and symbols poets use in poetry awakens emotional responses and also give rise to attitudes and perceptions in the

reader's mind. The figurative language employed allows the audience to bring out the suggested meaning of the poem (Machaba, 2011).

In the following selected Tshivenda modern poetry, the researcher has analysed the perception and portrayal of women based on the following themes; Vhavenda's idealised notions of a woman, women as destructive and catastrophi, women as male-validation seekers, women as unintelligent and idiots. Like traditionalist poets, some Vhavenda modern poets also have their own notions of what a 'true' Muvenda woman should be. For instance, Ndhlovu's (2001:55) poem, "Musadzi ndi nnyi?" (Who is a woman?), says this about a woman:

*Musadzi nnyi kha jino ja muno
Wa mshedzo na zwiluvhelo zwi sa ambarwi tshikhotho
Wa thavhela i sa dzimuli dora ja gogo
Ane zwanza zwawe zwa shaya thidza
U ngafhi uyo vhothe vha tshi nga zwipurantanga?*

(Who is a woman in this world
Whose undergarments are not worn to sag
Whose spring does not quench the thirst of the multitude
Whose hands lack laziness
Where is such a woman when all of them are ill-disciplined?)

*U ngafhii uyo musadzi kha jino?
Ane thungu ya damu jawe ya shaya mutengo?
Ane malalo awe a kuna na misi vhutshilikadzi ho mu ziamedza
A si tende u nengulwa nga vili ja ndala
Ane thoho yawe ya dvha u dzungudza.*

(Where is such a woman in this world?
Whose breast's nipple is priceless?
Whose bed is clean even when overwhelmed by widowhood
Who refuses to be knocked out by poverty's punch
Whose head knows how to shake.)

*U ngafhi a sa hovheli dwadze tshifu muṭani?
 Mukonanyi wa vhuthihi sa ha guma la ṅotshi
 Ane muṭani a vha bodzandala
 Damu laawe la phungaidza mivhango
 Tshisima tshawe tsha selutshela muṅe muthihi.*

(Where is she who does not draw a deadly disease to her homestead?
 One who makes oneness possible like that of a swarm of bees
 One who at home is the remover of famine
 Her breast obliterate conflicts
 And her spring bubble for only one master.)
 (Ndhlovu, 2001:55).

In this poem, Ndlovu describes his idealised notion of a 'true' Muvenda woman. In the first stanza, it is said that a true woman is one whose undergarments (*masheḁo*) are not worn to sag. "*Sheḁo* is a square fabric sewn to the broad strip (*mutshila*), which is balanced by the *ludede* on the waist" (Phophi, 2004:140) and it is worn by girls. "*Zwiluvhelo zwi sa ambarwi tshikhoṭho*", 'undergarments that are not worn to sag', the poet is referring to a woman who is always ready to take off her undergarments. The word *ṭhavhela* 'seepage/spring' is used as a symbol of a female private part, implying that a real woman is one who does not sleep with everyone, hence used a 'spring' that does not quench everyone's thirst.

Her hands lacks slack hand, the one who works hard at home, the one who perform her wifely duties and chores. This has been uttered by Lebaka-Ketshabile (1990) that an African man marries not only a beautiful wife, but that one who will be able to execute her chores, taking care of all the family members. Hence this poet is referring to such character as an emphasis of a real woman. He further used a simile, a figure of speech that compares one thing to another and a rhetorical question, asking where is that kind of a woman, since all are like *Zwipurantanga*? *Zwipurantanga* is a type of a locust that is very fast and is not easy to catch. The poet is comparing *Zwipurantanga* with women, having culturally conditioned that women who are assertive, energetic and strong are considered uncultured. The poet is insinuating that women with the characteristics he mentioned are rare to find since

most of them are promiscuous and very assertive, something which is unfavoured by men.

In the second stanza, the poet asked 'where is that woman in this world?' referring to the kind of woman who never put a price on the nipple of her breast; one whose marriage bed is without defilement, though she is faced with widowhood. In this stanza, the poet avers that a real woman is one that never put a price to a nipple of her breast. However, the researcher finds this contradicting because this is being said by a man who is mostly responsible for commodifying a woman's body. A woman's body can simply be commodified by the highest bidder (Sebola, 2022: 5). This is also prevalent in the Vhavanḁa culture where marriage is arranged for financial benefit, parents sometimes arrange a marriage for their daughter to a man as a payment for a debt that the family is unable to pay back (Raphalalani & Musehane, 2013: 22). Women are so used to the notion of being commodified, that even the ones in poor conditions seek financial civilisation through selling their bodies to men. However, the poet in this poem evince that a real woman is one that is never shaken by their poverty to sell their own body and knows how to say no.

In the third stanza, the poet continues to give us the characteristics of what he envisaged what a real woman should be. She should never contract sexual transmitted diseases and bring them to her home. She should be the one who unite like the bees. The one that fight hunger in the home due to her cooking, ploughing and hoeing the field, and she should be the dismissal of rivalry and calamity.

In the verse "*tshisima tshawe tsha selutshela muḁe muthihi*", 'her spring bubbles for only one master', the poet has once again used the word *tshisima*, which means a fountain as a symbol of a vagina, implying that a real woman should only have intercourse with her husband alone and no one else. This is also refuting or a double standard because men do not want their wives to have extramarital affairs, but they rely in polygamous marriage wherein they have more than one wife. Similarly, Nḁnngwekhulu's (1995:44) speaks of a woman thus:

Musadzi kwae u vhonala nga u dza,

Ha bvuli vhusadzi hawe,

Vhusadzi vhu mu itaho musadzi.

(A good woman is seen by her meek demeanour,

She does take off her womanhood,
The womanhood that makes her a woman.)

*Musadzi u lavhelesa muḡi wawe,
Ha na mangai,
Ha na tshiḡale.*

(A woman looks at her home,
She does not have squinty eyes,
She does not have an unstable gaze.)

*Musadzi ha ḡisi munna maḡanza,
Ha shanduli munna buphuthe,
U ima kule na vhuḡudzi.*

(A woman does not feed a man vomit,
She does not turn a man into an idiot,
She stands far from abomination.)

*Ha isi munna tshaloni,
U mu isa dakaloni,
A vhulunga lupfumo lwawe.*

*(She does not take a man to the grave,
She takes him to joyfulness,
She preserves his and/or her wealth.)*

(N̄enngwekhulu, 1995:44).

In the first stanza, the poet avers that a real woman is seen by her meek demeanour and being passive. The meaning being implied here is that if she is not passive and down to earth, she is unlike a woman. It is like taking off her womanhood. This supports Lebaka-Ketshabile's (1999) point that if a woman is opposite to what culture and society expects her to be she is labeled as uncultured or unlike a woman.

In the second stanza, the poet says that a woman is supposed to look after and care for her home, as opposed to one to woman referred to as “*ha na mangai*” and “*ha na tshitale*” literally meaning that ‘she does not have squinty eyes’ and that ‘she does not have an unstable gaze’ or that ‘she does not lag behind’. A ‘real woman’, according to Ndhlovu, is one that does not look into other relationships even though her own is troubled. In the third stanza, the poet further avers that a ‘real woman’ does not feed her husband vomits, implying that she should always prepare a proper meal for her husband. This brings us back to the fact that women are married so they can serve their husbands and their family. A woman should never make fool of her husband and should restrain from what is considered taboos and non-acceptable in society. Although women are being made fools and get cheated on and lied to by their husbands, a male poet still has the audacity to speak on behalf of women, of which he knows nothing about. Women are expected to be passive and submissive. In the fourth stanza, it is said that a woman should not send her husband in the graveyard but should lead him into happiness and protect his wealth by giving birth to a boy child. A boy child is considered important than the girl child. In Ntshivhuyu’s (1987:18) poem, “Mutshelukwa” (A woman who has passed her marriageability age), one reads:

Sudzuluwa iwe mutshelukwa!
U siele vharathu tshifhinga,
U si vha vhindedzele
Dzone pfanelo dzavho,
U tshi sokou rothisa nthe
Nga lwone lugube lwau,
Lu si na tshifhinga,
Wa vho nga muhumbuli
Ngeno zwi songo ralo.

(Shift, you whose marriageability phase has passed!

And make room for your younger siblings,

Do not strive with them

For their rights

Dropping drools

Because of her courting musical instrument

That always plays
Ending up looking like a thinker
While it is not like that.)

Tevhela thanga dzau
Dzine dza vho mamisa,
Ngeno iwe u tshi diita
Ene n̄nemuḍi
Zwa vho nengisa-vho;
Na vho u tsitsaho mirini,
Wo shanduka magause;
Yone ḥhanzwa mbuisamare.

...

(Follow your peers
Who are already breastfeeding,
While you are acting like
The actual homestead owner
Which ends up disgusting;
Even those who birthed you;
You have become a spoiled soap nettle;
The actual soap nettle that draws back the saliva.)
(Netshivhuyu, 1987:18).

In African society, marriage means prestige and respect and a woman is considered whole or complete when she has a husband (Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999:62) and as a result, women who are not married tend to be tainted by society. *Mutshelukwa* is a woman who according to culture has passed marriageable stage (Mulaudzi, 2003). The poet in this poem is ridiculing a woman who has culturally passed the marrying age. This is because society have been conditioned to think that a woman needs a man to be whole, so he can make sure that she is in control (Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999).

In the Vhavenda culture, the older daughter is expected to get married first, and if this does not happen, it is believed that she is blocking her younger siblings to get married and it is for this belief that Netshivhuyu is telling a *mutshelukwa* to shift her

position, meaning to get married so her sisters can also get married. In the second stanza, the poet tells the *mutshelukwa* to follow in her peers' path, which is to get married. He is encouraging her to go get married and have children and stop being stuck at home. Culturally, it is expected that a young woman will grow up, get married and bear children, especially sons who will continue the family name Mibenge (2007:19). Therefore, when a woman who is considered marriageable is not getting married, it does concern her parents and at some stage, they tend to despise her for not bringing the bride price and the respect to the family. Thus in this poem, a *mutshelukwa* is being referred to as “*magause*”, something sour that causes puckering and mouth-watering. Lebaka-Ketshabile (1999:59) further assert that “the birth of a girl child in Africa is associated with wealth for her father and this is why there is such an enormous pressure for women to get married at an early age so that they can bring cattle or wealth into the family”. Thus, names like *Dibuseng* ‘bring them back’, *Madikgomo* ‘mother of cows’, *Bogadi* ‘bride price or lobola. All these names are given to a girl child, symbolising that she will bring riches to the family when she marries. For Rasifuḍi (1989:12), “Musadzi muthihi ndi khaladzi” (One wife is a sister):

Musadzi muthihi ndi khaladzi,
U kona lone vivho,
Mishumo i tshi paḍa tshanda,
Munwe muthihi a u ḡusi mathuthu.

(One wife is a sister,
 All she can master is jealousy,
 While her (mis)deeds are countless
 One finger cannot pick grains.)

Musi une a lwala munna u shanduka musadzi,
Mutiki dzikhalini ndi ene,
Mulamboni na zwisimani ri vhona ene,
Mushumo u shavha zwanḍa zwa hashu.

(When she falls sick a man becomes a woman,
 He is the one who cooks,

At the rivers and wells we see him,
He is fully devoted to the chores.)

*Musadzi kha fune muñwe ngae,
Mishumoni kha vha ṭhaḍulane,
Vho mazwale ri takale muḍi wo hula,
A ni takali na no ambadzwa tshiala?*

(A woman must love her fellow woman,
They must aid each in the chores,
The in-laws should be happy when a home is big,
Do you become happy when you have been crowned?)

*Kha mishumo ni tshi vho tou sumba,
Kha munna ha vha u ṭhaḍulea,
Na inwi na vha no ṭhaḍulwa kanwe,
Dzina ḵa lushaka ḵa hula ḵa phaḍalala.*

(When concerning the chores you just point,
To the man, relief has come,
And you too would have been relieved as well,
The name of the clan grows and spreads.)

*Miteo na mikanoni ḵa swika,
Ho vha u karusa mutakalo mbiluni ya munna,
Naho zwikope zwi ri vhone zwa tenda,
Hu hone-hone muḍi wo hula.*

(In far regions and borders it reaches.
When joy has been aroused in a man's heart,
And the children must see us and agree,
While the household has become big.)

*Munna wa musadzi kanwe,
Mbilu ya mulalo ya shaya,*

*A humbula nga mbilu nga mulomo a bula
Vha mu pfaho vhe ndi hone tsho thoma.*

(To a man with one wife,
A heart of peace is lacked,
He thinks through the heart and the mouth speaks,
Those who hear him says, it has started.)
(Rasifuḍi, 1989:12).

By looking at the title of the poem *musadzi muthihi ndi khaladzi*, it is clear that men degrades women, moreover, because this poem has been written by a male author. It evidently shows how women suffer in the hands of male writes, the level of women degradation that men portray in literary work is enormous. A woman in this poem is compared to one's sister, siblings who culturally and traditionally cannot marry or be intimate with one another, as it is a taboo. This is a sibling's relationship where everybody have the responsibility to take care of themselves without completely relying on one another regardless of the gender roles that are culturally assigned to them. Therefore, the male author is referring to one wife as one's sister, so to justify their desire and will of possessing more women.

In the first stanza, the poet reveals that one wife is good at being jealous of her husband and rarely completes her household duties due to spending a lot of her time wondering what her husband might be doing, *u kona ɓone vivho, mishumo i tshi paḍa tshandḍa*, 'all she can master is jealousy, while her (mis) deeds and house chores are countless', implying that women are married to work for their husbands, he further supportes his words by a Venda proverb "*muḥwe muthihi a u ɓusi mathuthu*" meaning one cannot do all things alone, she needs someone to help her. Implying the need for men to marry more wives, so they can help each other with the house chores. The poet in this verse, is insinuating that the polygamous marriage is for the benefit of the women.

In the second stanza, it is evident that men marry to be served as they do not agree with the notion of helping their wives. This implication is drawn from the poet's words; "*musi une a lwala munna u shanduka musadzi, mutiki dzikhalini ndi ene*", 'when she falls sick a man becomes a woman, he is the one who cooks'. This shows

that men have been culturally conditioned to think that a woman's place is in the kitchen (Mafenya, 2002) and it further perpetuates the inferiority status of women, that they are expected to perform all the household chores in addition to formal employment (Mulaudzi, 2003:23) if even allowed to have any. Men who do what has been conditioned to be 'female roles' feel less of a man, although doing it for their own benefit and that of their wives.

In the third stanza, the poet asserts that a woman should love another, implying that a woman should have a co-wife and she should love and accept her in a relationship. And since there is plenty of household chores, they should help each other with those, and thus making their mother-in-laws happy. Men continues to advocate for polygamous marriages, ignoring the hostility that is found within this kind of marriages and the psychological consequences that women endure.

The poet further supports his own notion of marrying more than one wife, for he believes it helps to enlarge the family, for each wife will be bearing children as 'it is their duty to do so' (Lebaka-Ketshabile, 1999). In the same vein, Gumani and Sodi (2009:199) state that "men tend to enter into polygamous marriages as this practice would increase their chances of having more children". Rasifuḍi (1989) adds that these women should also be happy and be appreciative that they have been married since marriage means prestige in the Vhavanḍa culture (Lebaka-Kethabile, 1999).

Gumani and Sodi (2009:199) point out that there is a link between the status of the man and the number of dependents that he has. The more the dependence a man has, the higher his status in the society. This is exemplified in this poem wherein the in-laws are more interested in the expansion of the family name through marrying more than one wife, which guarantees more offsprings, mainly the male ones so the family name can be known and be respected, which brings the man an honour and respect.

In the last stanza, the poet utters that a man with one wife lacks peace, and is likely to be driven crazy due to woman's jealousy and complaints, however, the researcher finds this idea confusing and contradicting because polygamous marriages are the hostile ones (Gumani & Sodi, 2009). There is often quarrels regarding the unequal distribution of resources such as food and finances (Gumani & Sodi 2009) thus, for this poet to consider a monogamous marriage as hostile is hypocritical.

4.6. WOMEN AS DESTRUCTIVE AND CATASTROPHIC

In Tshivenda poetry, women are also typified as destructive and catastrophic beings, particularly to their male counterparts. This is notable in Mudau's (1995:74) poem, "Musadzi" (Woman):

*Ndi nnyi a vhaho muvilinganyi?
Ane kha tshaka a vha mubalanganyi?
Dzotho the thoho a vha ene mufhiritanyi?
Uyo o futelelaho u vha mulutanyi?*

(Who is the cause of chaos?
Who in the clan is the scatterer?
All the heads frustrated by her?
One who is devoted to being a troublemaker?)

*Ndi ene o emulaho u talifha,
A hwenya gondoni o halifha,
Vhawe nga malofha u vha nea thungulifha,
Fhedzi wazwo musu zwothe u do lifha.*

(She is the one who lusted after being wise,
And walked hastily on the road in rage,
Her blood relatives she gives stinkbugs,
But when the time comes she will pay.)

*Ndi makone kha marevho u suka,
A ralo phanzi phanda ha muthu u sika,
Sakha ndi u muthu a shengele u swika,
Musu wa ndala a tshi do sika.*

(She is an expert at plotting mischief,
And thus sets a deadly trap before a human being,
Her longing is that a human being suffers endlessly,
While she will eventually experience a time of famine.)

*Uyu muthu ndi ngafhi hune a ya?
Nga u lothe shango o kuya,
A futelela u kuvhanganya mathupho aya,
U mu swielela a vho ngo sima lukuna u shaya?*

(Where does this person go?
Considering that she has ground the entire the world,
And commits to gathering all these sufferings,
Wasn't welcoming her actually the destruction of good?)
(Mudau, 1995:74).

Mudau is a male poet, who in this poem, has portrayed women as destructive and catastrophic. In the first stanza of the poem, the poet used rhetorical questions to make a point regarding women. In his rhetorical use of language, he portrays women as turmoil makers, dispersers, scatterers, squanderers, and antagonisers. In the poet's perception, as much as the woman is all disruptive and hostile, he considers her as someone who aspires to be wise, implying she is not wise. Mudau's perception is the same as that of Ratshitanga (1973) in the poem; '*Vhasadzi ndi vha mulovha*', they both perceive women as idiots and dumb.

Mudau further utters that women are fierce, always causing troubles and hostilities to her own blood relatives. She is said to give *Thungolifha* 'stinkbugs' to her own relatives, an edible insect that is bitter and sour '*khwilivhava*' or '*tshivhavi*'. A woman has been portrayed as one who kneads the animal skin, implying that she insinuates quarrels and conflicts, always causing uproar and being at loggerheads with others. Similarly, Milubi's (1990:24) poem, "Musadzi" (Woman) depicts women thus:

*Iwe musadzi! Ndo vha ndi sa u divhi
Ndi tshi divha vha ngaho sa iwe
Nda vhona mbilu heyi yau heyi
Yo tunga, ya ralo u tunzwula yone ndulu.*

(You woman! I did not know you
I only knew those like you
Until I saw this heart of yours

Swollen, releasing poison.)

*Ṭhungu ya ḍamu ḷau iwe musadzi
Yo lumula nga mikando yayo
Ya lumula i tshi tanya
Nga muthihi nga muthihi
Sa khovhe ya ḡula tivhani ḷa vhutshilo
I tshi latela nnḍa muṭavhani, u no ri u otsha wa zwizwiedza
Vhadzimu vha kowela, vha fhedza nga u neta ḡdalani.*

(The nipple of your breast, you woman
Weaned its breastmilk
Weaned while snatching
One by one
Like fish, snatched from the lake of life
Throwing out onto the sand, which burns until one writhes in agony
The gods pleads, until they are exhausted in hunger.)

*Ndo vhona u sea-sea hau
Nda emula ṭhungu ya ḍamu ḷa vhusadzi hau
Nge ḍamu ḷau ḷa ṭavha mukosi, ḷi tshi ṭavhela vhunna hovhu
ḷa tzhema heḷi ḍamu ḷau iwe musadzi
ḷi tshi tzhemela yone mbofhanu
Ya hovhu vhusadzi hau
Na honovhu vhunna hanga
Nda tenda, nda kapea mbilu yanga
Vhuthu hanga ha ragalala ḍamuni ḷeneli ḷau
Nga u sa ḍivha, ha luvha
Ha tshenuwa musi ho no ṭanzelwa ḍaledaleni.*

(I saw your recurrent smiles
And lusted after your breast's nipple of your womanhood
Because your breast screamed, screamed for this manhood
It screamed this breast of yours, woman
Screaming for a bond
Of your womanhood

And this manhood of mine
 I conceded, and yielded my heart
 My humanity became enlivened on this breast of yours
 For lack of knowledge, it worshipped,
 Only to be surprised when it had been vomited onto the rubbish heap.)
 (Milubi, 1990:24).

Milubi (1990), like many other male authors such as Ratshifanga and Mudau, speaks of a woman as menacing and vicious, and this is seen in verses 4 and 5, “*mbilu heyi yau heyi, yo tunga, ya ralo u tunzwula yone ndulu*”, ‘this heart of yours, swollen, releasing poison’. *Ndulu* is something bitter or sour, just like the *khwilivhava* of the *thongolifha* that Mudau (1995) used in his poem to describe a destructive woman. The use of the personification in the first stanza is to emphasize the bitterness that women are said to carry. In the second stanza, the poet explains how evil women can be. “*Thungu ya damu lau iwe musadzi, yo lumula nga mikando yayo, ya lumula i tshi tanya, nga muthihi nga muthihi, sa khovhe ya nula tivhani la vhutshilo, I tshi latela nnda mutavhani, u no ri u otsha wa zwizwiedza*”, ‘The nipple of your breast, you woman, weaned its breastmilk, weaned while snatching, one by one, like fish, snatched from the lake of life, throwing out onto the sand, which burns until one writhes in agony’. The first and second verses of the second stanza used a personification, showing the woman’s capability of ‘killing and taking one’s life by throwing it into a hot sand’, implying a woman who is pregnant and still considers aborting her baby. Therefore, any woman who does this is considered evil for bringing something to life, and then deciding to crush its life.

A woman who has had an abortion can be returned to her parents by her husband, for it is considered a taboo (Phaswana, 2000). The poet in this poem is regretting, for he has fallen for a lady who is beautiful and attractive. He praises her breasts, for they are mostly sexualized and objectified. He uses a personification to emphasize the attractiveness of the breasts “*nge damu lau la tavha mukosi*”, ‘because your breast screamed’, emphasizing how sharp pointed her breasts were, calling for his manhood, however, after her breasts and his manhood have intimately and sexually met, the poet regrets falling for this woman’s breasts, for he is left in despair, for she has infected him with sexually transmitted disease.

A man who has slept with a woman who had abortion contracts the sexual transmitted disease through the discharges which in Tshivenda it's called *u wela*, 'to have fallen in'. This is said to happen "if a woman who aborted a baby had not undergone dilatation and curettage. She is considered dirty and has infectious discharges which infect men" (Mulaudzi & Makhubela-Nkondo, 2006). Thus, a woman is seen as destructive and catastrophic for their actions are ferocious to men. In yet another poem on a woman as a theme, "Damu la vhufhura" (Breast of deception), Milubi (1990:37) says:

*Yawee, inwi vhanna wee
 Khomba yo ima ya tongisa khana
 Damu la imalala, thungu dzaḽo
 Dza goba vhumuthu ha vhanna
 Vha li tangedza heji damu heji
 La shanduka ndode dzine vha kaḽa vho takala.*

(Oh, you men
 There is the girl standing, exhibiting her chest
 Her breast lifted pointedly, its nipples
 Striking the carnality of men
 These men give in to this breast
 In the end, its pleasure yields their demise.)

*Yawee, damu heji a si damu
 Ndi vhufhura vhu no fhura vhanna
 Vha poḽowa, ha vha u gwadamela jeneji damu
 Lo shandukaho ngweḽi i sa vhoneali.
 I welaho vhoḽthe vhafuni vha damu
 Ha vha u zhakwa nga damu, zwa shanduka thaidzo
 Dakalo je vhanna vha lavhelela damuni
 La vho shanduka dakalo li siho
 Li silingisaho mbumbo ya nama.*

(Oh, this breast is not a breast
 It is a deception that deceives men
 They crumble, and bow before this breast

Which has turned into an invisible rock.
Which falls upon all the lovers of the breast
And end up being smashed by the breast, which becomes a problem
The joy that men expected from the breast
Turns into an absent joy
Which nauseates the flesh.)
(Milubi, 1990:37).

Looking at the poem's title, the poet has used *damu* as a symbol, signifying a breast itself and also signifying something beyond the breast (Mafela et al., 2003:184). *Damu* is symbolizing a woman and is being portrayed as deceptive. The female's body in this poem has been objectified and sexualised. "The identity of the girl is reduced to 'the breast', she is nameless, voiceless and faceless and the only thing notable about her is her breast" (Sebola, 2020:12). The poet is calling out to his fellow men, warning them about the deceptive breast that women have. The girl in this poem, "is only noticed by men, not for her essence and presence as a human being with equal dignity but as an object of male sexual fulfilment" (Sebola, 2020:12). It is implied that the sharp-pointed breast and the nipple of women makes men to have sexual urges. In the first verse of second stanza, "*yawee, damu heli a si damu*" 'oh, this breast is not a breast' a defamiliarization was used. This is a technique of presenting to audiences common things in an unfamiliar or strange way so they would gain new perspective and see the world differently.

Literarism (2012) in (<https://literarism.blogspot.com/2012/04/russian-formalism.html>) refers to defamiliarisation as "to denote the way that literally and poetic languages differ from ordinary language". In this verse, *damu* is used as a symbol for woman, and is said to not be '*damu*'. The poet is defamiliarizing the known meaning of breast, implying that it carries dreadful consequences. It is referred to as "deception that deceives men, an exhibitionist who lures men into having sex with her" (Sebola, 2020) and consequently end up 'worshipping' women. The woman's breasts are assumed to create issues and difficulties that makes one feel sick with an inclination to vomit. She is painted as a destroyer of men and this is a negative view of the girl and women in general. This can be related to the poem *Musadzi* by Milubi (1990), where a woman is considered evil and hostile for she can cause men to suffer

greatly through the sexual transmitted disease. Mamafha (1994:27) writes about a woman as a gossip:

Musadzisadzi matakadzambilu
Ndele zwiitoni mukhoḁisa mbumbovhuthu
Mudziki muhuliswa nga vhafhiri
Wa zwitshela mbilu yo fura.

(A true woman who gladdens the heart
Morally excellent, a cause for praise, an embodiment of kindness
Cool, calm, collected and praised by passers-by
One who gossips the heart is full.)

Wa zwitshela a hu na a sa mu ḁi
Wa zwitshela a hu na a sa tshi ḁi
Mudziazwitshela ndi mudziamazwifhi
Zwi bulwaho nga mulomo phaḁho a zwi na.

(The one who gossips is known by everyone
The one who gossips knows everything
A gossip is a habitual liar
That which is spoken by her mouth does not build.)

Maḁo a razwitshela o fhaḁuwa
Zwa mulomo wawe zwi shaya khandzo
Mutshimbili ndi u kuvhanganya oḁhe
U fhulula zwoḁhe tshidzumbe a shaya.

(The eyes of a gossip are awake
What she speaks cannot be opposed
She is wanderer who gathers all
She tells it all, she keeps no secret.)

U ḁivha zwa miḁani ya vhaḁwe
U ḁivha zwa malaloni e siho
U ḁivha zwa Mandondi e heneḁha hawe

Ha shoni musi a tshi ralo u fhulula.

(She knows what is happening in other people's homes
She knows their bedroom talks even in absentia
She knows what is happening at Mandondi even she is at her own house
She feels no shame when she is busy disclosing.)

*Luvholela he lwa luma
Muzwimbo u sala khagala
Miṭa i sala e matumba
Wo fhira mulomo wa zwitshela.*

(Where the bee sting stung
A swelling is left in the open
Homes are left in ruins
After a gossiping mouth has passed.)

*A khoḡa wawe uri zwo lungwa
Ngeno i tshi tou vha mbonzhe tshilonda
Vhawe vhoṭhe ndi vhavhuya vha u luga
Kha vhawe hu shayea ḷipambuwi.*

(If she praises her own, you will say all is well
Only to find that it is a festering wound
All her own are righteous and good people
Among her own, there is no one who is a wayward.)

*Vhana vha musadzi vha farana nga zwanda
Munna na musadzi ha tou fa muthu
Mashaka vha furalelana ha sikwa nyofho
A tshi fafadzela a sa imi nga mazwifhi.*

(Siblings hold hands together
Husband and wife, one dies
Relatives turn their backs and fear invades
While she is busy spraying lies ceaselessly.)

A u litshi ngani ngowelo mmbi?

A u shoni-na u tshi tokoshola u songo vhudziswa

Thoni dzau dzi ngafhi mme a zwitshela?

Tutshela vhathu a zwi toqi iwe.

(Why don't you stop this bad habit?

Are you not ashamed of babbling without being asked

Where is your shame mother of gossip?

Leave people, it is none of your business.)

(Mamafha, 1994:27).

Women are mostly associated with bad things (Mulaudzi, 2003). The opening verse of the poem utters that a real woman makes one's heart joyful. Woman with good conduct and moral is said to makes humanity praised, however the one who acts all calm and composed is only respected by the bypassers as they do not know her heart carries gossips. The poet refers to slanderous woman as someone who is known by everyone and knows everything. She always speaks lie, and brings no unity to humankind. No one opposes what she says and she cannot keep a secret. Women have been portrayed as people who are full of unfounded gossip, lies, and very good at destroying others. The poet believes that what is said by women brings no peace nor unite people, instead, it destroys families and friends. She is seen as a destroyer of people's marriages. A slanderous woman is also perceived as biased because she does not gossip about her own children nor herself as she perceives herself as ideal, she makes no mistakes. She is said to create havoc and hostility between husband and wife, relatives and siblings due to her lies and deception. The poet believes that women are not good people. What they do best is to gossip, destroys, causing confusion and fights between family and friends. This belief makes a woman's life difficult because they cannot express their opinions because men will not value their ideas.

4.7. WOMEN PORTRAYED AS IDIOTS

Although this has been tangentially stated above, some Vhavenda male poets insist on perceiving women as idiots. One such a poet is Makuya (1987:11) in the poem, "Vhasadzi" (Women):

Vhasadzi vha nga mavu a muṭavha,
Vha tshi thetshesha mafhungo,
Vha a tswonzwa vha songo ṭala,
Zwi nga maḍi a tshi nwiwa nga muṭavha,
U farelela havho a ho ngo lapfa,
Zwe vha fara a vha lengi u litsha,
Zwi ḍi nga wone muṭavha
U ṭavhanyaho u nwa maḍi,
Fhedzi-ha wa si vhe mufari,
Wa a ṭanza ḷi sa athu u ṭavha,
Wa ḍi sala u na ḍora.

(Women are like sandy soil,
When they listen to news,
They absorb with uncritical acceptance
It's like water being drunk by the sand,
Their concentration span is short,
What they hold onto, they quickly drop
It is still like the sand
Which is quick to drink water,
But does not become a holder,
It vomits it before the sun rises,
And is left still thirsty.)

Vhasadzi ndi mavhivhi,
Vha ṭavhanya u fara mulilo,
Vha ḍi vha vhone vhalili,
Vha ri fhunga nga zwillilo,
Wa vha ṅanga a u yi thambo,
U dzima khali i songo vhila,
Vha tou vha ṭhasana dza u u ṅangedza;
Ndi vhone vhathu vha si na ṅdila,
Zwine vha ita vha ita lwa u shushedza,
Vha ṅanzwa na zwa muhulu muḍifho
Vha fhedza vho ḍi huma.

(Women are stubbles,

They are quick to catch fire,
 They are the one who cry
 And disturb us with their noise
 If it catches a flame, it does not burn for long
 It dies out before the pot boils
 They are mere sticks to start a fire
 They are people without direction
 Whatever they do is just a pretension
 They lick even the greatest of pleasures
 And still go back.)
 (Makuya, 1987:11).

Women characters in literary work suffers in the hands of male writers (Mibenge, 2007). This is evident in the already analysed poems where in they are degraded and called names. In this poem, women have been degraded, for they are being compared with sand that holds no water. Women are portrayed as people who are unable to keep a secret or unable to stop themselves from talking about something they heard. They are perceived as lacking the quality that is required for a woman. Women are said to be quick to take things to heart without fully understanding its significance. They do not hold firmly what they have, for its easy for them to sabotage what they have. This is referred to a woman who is slanderous, they are quick to hear things and spread it out without its true essence. They are said to be unable to hold themselves together therefore they are perceived as idiots. It can be said that some male poets perceive women as stupid and unintelligent and this is also exemplified by Ratshifanga's (1973) in the poem *Vhasadzi dzi vha mulovha* and Mudau's (1995) poem *Musadzi*;

Avha ndi vhaŋwe vhathu kha muhumbulo
 (These are different people in mind)

Nŋe ndo wana musadzi a tshi mangadza, Nge a vha muthu a shayaho nḡivho,
 (I found a woman awe-inspiring, By being a human being who lacks knowledge,)

Ndi ene a emulaho u ŋalifha
 (She is the one who lusted after being wise,)

All these verses characterise women as dumb and stupid. Makuya uses a metaphor “*vhasadzi ndi mavhivhi*” ‘women are stubbles’ to emphasise how quickly they can be taken away by things and be regretful of it the next day. The poet further asserts that women are not to be trusted and relied on for they never finish what they start. Women are perceived as quitter, ineffectual and feckless, thus, referred as subordinates and should never be in position of authority for they have no direction.

4.8. CHAPTER SUMMARY

The portrayal of women in the modern poetry, is somehow the same as that of the traditional poetry. In the above analysed modern poems, women have been portrayed as people who should be meek, passive; submissive and servants, serving and working hard for their husbands, and if they do not conform to that, they are considered unwomanly. Women have also been depicted as people who need male presence, for it is believed that they ‘cannot function’ without being under the male superiority, hence they are expected to marry and have a husband. They have been painted as the one’s who should value and respect marriage, for being married gives a woman a prestigious status, therefore, they are expected to be grateful for being married, as ‘men are humouring them’. And this is why for any woman who does not marry nor one who gets divorce, is stigmatised for being without a man. They are called names and belittled in the society, hence the poems like *Mutshelukwa* ‘a woman who is believed to have passed the marriageable stage’ and *Mbuyavhuhadzi* ‘a divorced woman’.

The analysed modernist poems also revealed women as been depicted as their ‘husband’s sisters’ if married alone. For one to be referred to as a wife, is when she has a co-wife. It was also noticeable that women are seen as idiots and unintelligent, for it is said that “they aspire to be wise” implying they are not, and the only things they are experts at plotting mischiefs, gossiping, being habitual liars and setting deadly traps for other people. Women have also been portrayed as objectified and sexualised. Their identity can simply be reduced to their sexual body parts, and this is noticeable in the poem *Damu ja vuhura* ‘deceptive breast’, where in a teenage girl was referred to as a deceptive breast. Women have indeed been depicted in negative and derogatory manner.

CHAPTER 5: FEMALES' 'REBUTTAL' POETRY TO WOMEN'S PORTRAYAL

5.1. Introduction

The majority of poetry anthologies analysed in this study have been produced by Vhavenda male poets. Implied here is that Vhavenda women have had minimal opportunities to vocalise their ideas and experiences, particularly in the literary domain (Sebola, 2021b). The poems analysed in Chapter 4 were all composed by male poets, which still serves to bolster the view that women characterisations in literature are largely the prerogative of male writers (Mibenge, 2007). Thus, it becomes interesting when Vhavenda women poets also produce poetry that

comments on the perception and portrayal of women. Among such poets is Ravhanga (2012) and Ladzani (2006), who uses poetry to challenge stereotypes ascribed to women (Sebola, 2021b:215). For instance, Ladzani's poems; *Ndo neta* ('I am tired') and *Naa musadzi ndi mini?* ('Really, what is a woman?'), can be regarded as a rebuttal to the male poets' depictions of women and womanhood in their poetry. The rebuttal was explored in this study based on the following themes: Contestations of gendered stereotypes and disrepute, defining a woman and womanhood, and women's liberation and empowerment in Tshivenda poetry.

5.2. CHALLENGING GENDERED STEREOTYPES

5.2.1 *Vhavenḁa's Female Poets' Contestations of Gendered Stereotypes and Disrepute*

In the poem, "Ndo neta", Ladzani says:

*Ndo neta nga u itwa musadzi vhafumakadzini,
Ngoho ndo neta nga u itwa mbongola ya mihwalo,
Ndo netesa nga u itwa mufhembeledzi wa vho huvhadzwaho muyani,
Ngeno nḁe ndo ralo ndi si na mufhembeledzi.*

(I am tired of being treated like a female among women
Truly, I am tired of being made a donkey that carries burdens,
I am exhausted from being made the comforter of those wounded in their souls,
While I am just left as I am without a comforter.)

*Ni nnyitani ndo rali ndo sikwa nga Ḃwali,
Sa inwi ndo tutuwa-vho vhuthuni,
Ni nnyitani ni tshi ndi tshivhotshwa tshaḁu,
No nkhungelani nga ngeḁane mukuloni ngoho?*

(Why do you do this to me while I too am the creature of God,
Like you, I emanated from humanness,
What are you doing to me, calling me your prisoner,
Why are you tying my neck with a chain?)

Ndo neta ndo netesa nga u pfi a thi dzi,

*Ngeno hu n̄e mudzi wa haṅu vhutshilo,
Munamba muḍifhelelo wa haṅu e ene n̄e,
Ha ḍifha ha ḍifhesa vhuthuni ngomu-ngomu.*

(I am tired, I am depleted by being told I am rootless,
While I am the root of your lives,
The delicious taste of your *munamba* is me,
Whose taste sinks deeply into the essence of your being.)

*Nda ralo nda ḥala nda sunguvhela henengei swiswini,
Nda naḥanela sa ngalavha tshikhalani,
Ndo no ralo u vha muya ndi tshi vho vhudzulea,
Vhusendekamisi ndo no swika ni sa tsha mmbona,
Ni ḍo nkumbula ndi sa tsha vha wa u wanalea.
Vhunga ndi tshi ḍo vha ndo neta nda neta tshoṭhe.*

(So, I leave and slither into oblivion, there in the darkness,
And float like a ship in space,
Having become the wind, prone to being blown,
Having reached the heavens, where you no longer see me,
You will remember me when I am no longer within your reach.
Since I would have been tired, completely exhausted.)
(Ladzani, 2006:20).

In this poem, the poet speaks of the experiences of womanhood and the injustices suffered by women. The line “*Ndo neta nga u itwa musadzi vhafumakadzi*” (‘I am tired of being treated like a woman among ladies’), deliberately distinguishes the noun *musadzi* from the noun *vhafumakadzi*. Sebola (2021b:225) explicates that “the word *mufumakadzi* in Tshivenda is laden with genteel attributes, such as being dignified, well mannered or having an impeccable character, whereas the word *musadzi* is generally used either to refer to a woman/female person or to denote a female person’s marital status, with no allusions to the person’s character”. Being treated like a *musadzi* has worn out the poet, for she desires to be treated like a *mufumakadzi*, that is, with high class distinction (Sebola, 2021b). She then says “*ngoho ndo neta nga u itwa mbongola ya mihwalo*” (‘truly, I am tired of being made a

donkey that carries burdens'). *Mbongola* (donkey) is associated with offering services, suffering, oppression and humility, thus, implying that through her life, she has been carrying burdens. However, Sebola (2021b:225) avers that "it is not clear whether the poet carried these burdens in her own accord or if she was forced to carry them". She further reveals that she is ever present whenever needed by others for comfort, but when she needs comfort, there is no one to comfort her. In the subsequent lines, she says:

*Ni nnyitani ni tshi ndi tshivhotshwa tshaṅu,
No nkhungelani nga ngeḁane mukuloni ngoḁo?*

(What are you doing to me, calling me your prisoner,
Why are you tying my neck with a chain?)

The nouns *tshivhotshwa* (prisoner) and *ngeḁane* (chains) typify the feeling of being oppressed and imprisoned. A chain which is shackled around her neck symbolises the dehumanising condition, possibly in marriage, for marriage can arouse a feeling of entrapment that leads to powerlessness and an inability to change the unpleasant experiences (Gumani & Sodi, 2009:203). In the 3rd stanza, the poet avers that she is weary of being treated as inadequate by the people who are beneficiaries of her generosity. She further avers that she is the root of their lives and without her, they cannot live. In the Tshivenda culture, a woman is expected to care for her family in every way possible to keep her marriage and home intact because these two are the only spaces she is often confined (Moloko-Phiri, 2015). And yet, despite having given her very best, the poet is still disappointed by the recipients of her sacrificial generosity.

In concluding the poem, the poet bids farewell to her target audience, informing them of her departure to a place where they will never see her again. It is possible that she refers to her death, where in her absence, they will then realise her significance in their lives. The poem generally depicts women as those beings who sacrifice their lives for the service of those they love and yet have their efforts are met with disdain, ingratitude and indifference (Sebola, 2021b).

5.2.2 Defining a woman and womanhood in Tshivenda poetry

In yet another poem, “Musadzi ndi mini?” (Really, what is a woman?), Ladzani (2004:11) says:

*Musadzi a si daleḍale ja mathukhwi,
Line ine na funa na tshokoḗedza,
Ndi musuku u fhiraho daimane nga kule,
Ndi mpho i tewaho u tetekedzwa,
Nge Musiki a vhona i thengokhulu.*

(A woman is not a garbage site,
Where whatever you wish to discard is discarded,
She is the gold that far surpasses the diamond,
She is a gift worthy of tender care
Because the Creator ascribed to her great worth.)

*Musadzi a si bunga line malaḗwa na sia,
Ngau ndi ene murango na mukhunyeledzi,
Vhutshilo muḗisi ndi ene,
We a ralo u angaḗela ya ḗahe.*

(A woman is not a toilet, where you leave excrement,
Because she is the beginning and the end,
She brings life,
She carried it within her for nine months.)

*Musadzi ndi ene mukonḗeleli,
Wa khoḗelelo ya zwi haḗaho na u kalakata,
Nga u luvhahela a khuba zwo ralo,
Musadzi ndi ene-ene.*

Vhuḗi hawe vhu ḗo ḗḗana lini na lini.
(A woman is the epitome of perseverance,
Who endures the sour and bitter,
She carries a mouthful of the bitter
The woman is the ultimate one.
Her beauty will exhibit itself forever and ever
(Ladzani, 2004:11).

In the poem, Ladzani seeks to reveal the essence and worth of a woman (Sebola, 2021b:222). Women are thematised as people who are not assigned an honourable place. For this reason, the poet challenges the unpleasant notion attached to women by culture, society and male authors. The noun *daledale* ('rubbish heap') used in the line, "*Musadzi a si daledale la mathukhwi*", refers to a place where refuse is discarded; hence, the poet's use of the noun *mathukhwi* ('trash'). The poet employs this image to emphasise that a woman is not trash and to confront how women are perceived and treated in society (Sebola, 2021b:222).

For the poet, the abuse of and disdain for women begins with the perception that women are dumping sites, and therefore worthless. Ladzani challenges this perception and maintains that women are not dumping sites by portraying women in positive imagery. She describes a woman as *musuku* ('gold') to foreground the notion that women are precious and valuable, as opposed to trash. In this way, Ladzani proffers that woman should be viewed and depicted as beings of value and should be well taken care of.

In the second stanza, the poet declares that a woman is not a toilet, notable through the use of the noun *bunga*. "The image of toilets depicts women as not only dehumanised, but also as reduced to detestable beings whose existence entails nothing but the collection of excrement from others, presumably men" (Sebola, 2021b: 223). Far from being worthless and trash, the poet portrays women as of paramount importance because they bring human life to the world. That is, they alone can carry a human being who lives inside them for nine months. For this, women should be celebrated instead of being despised.

In the last stanza, a woman is depicted as an epitome of perseverance and endurance. She endures the sour and bitter taste of life; hence, the use of proverbs such as *Vhuhadzi ndi nama ya thole, ya fhufhuma ri a fhunzhela* ('marriage is like cooking a lean meat, and when it boils over, we beat the foam'), and *Vhida la musadzi li vhuhadzi* ('a woman's grave is in her marital home'), the hidden meaning being that marriage is difficult, and a woman is not supposed to leave the marriage even when it gets hard, she has to endure and persevere all the pain that marriage brings (Moloko-Phiri, 2015; Rabothata, 2005). By implicating perseverance as a

theme in the poem, the poet seeks to challenge the normalised epithets often ascribed to women to perpetuate their self-sacrifice for the benefit and pleasure of others.

5.2.3 Women's liberation and empowerment in Tshivenda poetry

Ravhanga (2012:71), a female poet, produced a poem titled, *Musadzi* ('Woman'), which implicitly celebrates the somewhat liberation of a modern women from the cultural veneers under which the traditional woman is suppressed:

*Musi nga bai u tshee wo fukedzwa
U tshi kha ɔi pfi u thundu ya u rengwa
U tshi kha ɔi vha mbongola ya u namelwa
Mulomo wau u wa mbevhevhe
Shango a ɔo ngo zwi ɔivha
Uri ɔo ɔihunga milenzhe.*

(Woman, while you were still covered by a blanket
Still being called a property that is bought
Still being a donkey to be ridden upon
Your mouth still being that of dumb person
The world did not know
That it had actually manacled its own feet.)

*ɔamusi a hu na a sa aɔami mulomo
Musi a tshi vhona tshedza lushakani
Musi wo ralo u tindivhala vhungalatengani
He mulovha wa vha wo iledzwa u vhea lwayo.*

(Today there is none that does not open her mouth wide
When she sees light in the nation
While you are at ease in the top seat
Where yesterday you were forbidden to set your foot.)

*Shango ɔoɔhe ɔi a ɔwethuwa
ɔi tshi vhona mitshelo ya vhurangi hau
Ngau miɔani wa shanduka ɔhokha*

*Ngau kha khuluṇoni wa shanduka phuphu
Zwoṭhe u tshi zwi shuma nga vhusedzi.*

(The whole world smiles
When it sees the fruits of your leadership
Because at home you have become a fortifier
Because to a throne you become a pillar
All done through your womanhood.)

*Hau vhusadzi nga vhu ṅaṅe u fhufhuma
Ḳau ipfi Ḳi shanduke lufhalafhala Ḳi unḡe
Na oṭhe magovha a Afurika
Afurika Ḳi holedzwe vhuloi haḲo
Zwe Ḳa u tshipeledza lwa miṅwaha
Uri hu bebwe tshinyalani.*

(May your womanhood continue to bubble
Your voice turn into a trumpet and echo
Across all the valleys of Africa
And Africa becomes mocked for its witchcraft
For suppressing you for years
So that chaos might be born.)
(Ravhanga, 2012:71)

Like Ladzani, Ravhanga seeks to portray women in a positive light. In the first stanza of the preceding poem, the poet notes how women have slowly moved from being treated as commodities or property and donkeys (implying that they are mindless beings, good for nothing but carrying burdens) to beings occupying executive positions in the modern space. The line *u fukedzwa nga bai* ('to be covered by a blanket') alludes, firstly, to being veiled as a commodity, awaiting an unveiling so that those who bought her might relish the outcomes of their purchase stupidity, and secondly, to stupidity. When one is covered by a blanket, the implication is that they cannot see anything other than the darkness brought by the covering blanket provides. This not only symbolises women's invisibility, but also their culturally induced passivity and silence. The noun *thundu* ('possessions; goods') still reinforces the treatment of a woman in society as largely a man's property (Mafenya, 2002).

The noun *mbongola* ('donkey'), as explained in the previous poem, symbolises service, suffering, oppression and humility. The noun *mbevhevhe* ('dumb person') in the poem not only refers to a person with a speech impediment, but also to one whose speech is not necessarily considered important. Thus, the poem commences with an image of woman who is still covered by a patriarchal blanket (authority) and thus exists in the shadows of insignificance, except when she has to gratify patriarchal interests. Put succinctly, the poet intends to depict a woman who knows what it is like to be treated as a slave, a commodity – essentially a suppressed being who is familiar with being perceived as ignorant, uninformed or unknowledgeable about anything worthwhile.

In lines 5 and 6 in stanza 1, she avers that the world did not know that it has tied its own legs. The use of personification in this verse emphasises the delay of progress and development attributable to women oppression and exclusion by society and culture. In the second stanza, the poet is describing the astonishment that women have brought to the world, "aṭami mulomo" ('mouth wide open'). The world is amazed for what women are capable of achieving. They are said to be the light of the nation in their prestigious positions that they are now accorded by society, for the narrative towards women is continually changing. These are positions which they were never allowed to occupy, for their place was believed to be in the kitchen, to be baby makers and be submissive to their husbands (Phaswana, 2000).

In the third stanza, the poet used the verb *nwethuwa* ('a warm and friendly smile'), as a personification to make reference to how appreciative and friendly the world has become towards women; for instance, women are in leadership. Women are depicted as the root of families, pillars of thrones, supporters of and contributors to the world's development. The poet further encourages women to blossom in their womanhood, for their voices to be blown like a trumpet, through this vocalisation, she will be heard all over Africa and the world. This poem depicts women as liberated and powerful positions, a depiction they are rarely accorded in most Tshivenda literary outputs. This is commendable. If only the Vhavenda male poets also depicted women in such positive and commendable tones, perhaps Tshivenda poetry in particular and Tshivenda literature in general would be seen largely as adding meaningfully to women's liberation and empowerment.

5.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The analysis of Tshivenda modern poetry in particular reveals that women have generally been portrayed in negative light by Vhavenda male writers in poetry. This chapter analysed the poetry written and published by female poets who in their literary outputs challenged traditional, cultural and societal constructs of women and womanhood that ascribed passivity, oppression and silence to women. These poets' poems not only reveal that women have been portrayed as suppressed beings, child bearing machines, idiots, destructive and slanderous, but that it is about time that such notions be challenged vociferously and agentively. In their combative and liberatory poise, women poets have portrayed women and womanhood as worthy of respect and ascribed strength, intelligence and immense essence to a woman and womanhood. The next chapter provides a summary, conclusion and recommendations of the study in light of the foregoing analyses in chapters 4 and 5, respectively.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the Vhavenda female poets' rebuttal to gendered stereotypes leveraged against them. This chapter presents the summary of the study, the findings, conclusion and the recommendations of the study.

6.2 Summary of the study

The first chapter presented the background and motivation of the study. It also presented the research problem, purpose (aim and the objectives) of the study, defined the operational terms of the study and concluded by stating the significance of the study. The aim of the study was to explore the depiction of women in selected Tshivenda poetry. This study fulfilled its aim by illustrating that the selected Vhavenda poets, particularly Vhavenda male poets, present women and womanhood in a negative light, whereas the Vhavenda female poets present women and womanhood in a positive light.

The second chapter provided the review of previous studies related to the topic of this study. It commenced by providing a brief description of the nature and scope of Tshivenda poetry. The review focused on the portrayal of women from a global perspective, narrowed down to the continental level (African context), and ultimately to the national and provincial levels (South African context), with special attention paid to how indigenous South African literature depicts women. Aspects such as the perception, objectification and sexualisation of women in Tshivenda culture and literature were explored in this chapter. The chapter also discussed African feminism as this study's theoretical lynchpin.

The third chapter discussed the research methodology employed in this study. The study utilised the qualitative research approach. The chapter explained how data were collected and analysed in this study. It also elucidated how the study met the rigours of quality criteria and adhered to ethical considerations pertaining to research.

Chapter four presented the analysis and interpretation of the selected texts in view of the research topic. The analysis in this chapter focused mainly on traditionalist perceptions and depictions of women and womanhood in *mafhuwe*, children's rhymes and lullabies. The poems were analysed on the basis of a predetermined set of themes, namely; Vhavenda poets' idealised notions of women and womanhood, women as destructive and catastrophic, women as seekers of male validation, women as unintelligent and idiots.

Chapter five analysed women's poetry as a form of retaliation to negative perceptions and portrayals levelled against them by society. Due to the dearth of literary material

produced by Vhavenḁa women, the chapter's analysis was restricted to only two Vhavenḁa female poets, namely; Ladzani (2004, 2006) and Ravhanga (2012).

Chapter six presents the summary, findings, conclusion and recommendations of the study.

6.3 Research Findings

- The study intended to reveal constructions of women in selected Tshivenḁa poetry. It was found that there is a biasness of Vhavenḁa male poets in their portrayal of women. Women have been portrayed in a negative light in all the selected male authored poems.
- The analysis of *mafhuwe* songs revealed the negative depiction of women. Women are depicted as persecuted and agonised even by their fellow women in marriage. These women include mother-in-laws and co-wives.
- Women, in the analysed poems, have been portrayed as enslaved, labourers, servants and bad omens to men.
- The children's rhymes, songs and lullabies depict women as hardworkers. This was drawn from their dedication to taking care of their children regardless of male absence. They carry out a lot of chores, such as fetching water and wood, pounding maize and many others in order to make a living for their children.
- The songs also depicted women as sexual objects. Women's bodies are highly sexualised and objectified in Tshivenḁa poetry. They are most likely to be referred to and identified by their 'attractive' body parts such as breasts and buttocks than they are by their names.
- Women are culturally and socially expected to be the ones who respect the marriage, persevere and endure all hardships in marriage, irrespective of whether their husbands do the same or not.
- Women are also highly associated with marriage. Women who are divorced and those who never marry, are stereotyped and called derogatory names. If divorced, she is stereotyped as being lazy and rebellious to her marital directives. If she has never married, she is regarded as 'unwomanly', unmannered or as having some of defect. They are called names such as

Mbuyavhuhadzi (one that has returned from her marital home) and *Mutshelukwa* (one that has passed the marriageable stage).

- The poems analysed revealed that it is an expectation of both men and African tradition for women to be meek and passive. However, it has also been revealed that a calm and humble woman is seen as evil, plotting and deceitful. This is contradicting, for the tradition and men themselves, aspire to have a wife who is humble, meek and passive so she can be submissive and serve the husband with no complaints.
- Women are portrayed as idiots and unintelligent. They are painted as baby making machines; hence, any woman who is barren is often belittled, stigmatised and called names such as *muumba* (a barren woman).
- Any woman who is different from what society and tradition expects of her is considered rebellious and uncultured.
- Women are also portrayed as experts at plotting mischiefs and setting deadly traps for other people, particularly men.
- Another objective of the study was to challenge idealised and stereotypic representations of women in selected Tshivenda poetry. The depiction of women from the female poets' standpoint is positive, challenging that of the idealised and stereotypic representation of women in poetry by Vhavenda male poets. Women portray themselves as strong, intelligent, liberated and powerful. They perceive themselves as of significance and value.

6.4 Limitations of the study

The study on the depiction of women in selected Tshivenda poetry had some limitations, and these include:

- Limited scope: The study only looked at a few poems, which do not represent the complete body of Tshivenda poetry. Because of the narrow scope, conclusions may be incomplete or prejudiced. However, when assessing the selected poems and the study's conclusions, the researcher emphasised objectivity.
- Source availability: Tshivenda poetry lacks a diverse variety of sources, which made it difficult to compile a comprehensive dataset for study. For instance, it

was quite difficult to locate poetry sources published recently, i.e. 2018-2023, that present depictions of women. This limited the range and depth of the study.

- Limited generalisability: The study's findings are not easily generalisable to different contexts or cultures, as Tshivenda poetry does not necessarily represent the trends and themes explored in the poetry of other cultures or languages in their depictions of women.

6.5 Recommendations

The recommendations of the study are:

- Male writers should depict the true essence of a woman without being biased. Although women are imperfect and faulty at some level or the other, they should not only be depicted erroneously and unfairly. Their value and impact should also be recognised.
- There should be more female writers portraying what being a woman really is, depicting their true essence, reality and actuality, from experience rather than from observing and biased personal feelings by male poets. Women having a place in the African literature would mean the eradication of male dominance in literature and that women will be portrayed in terms of their reality, portraying women who are dignified, grounded, successful, powerful and independent.
- Women themselves should break away from the notions that idealise women, and consequently repressing them.
- Women should be independent and educated, for education is an enabler to move out of repressive circumstances.
- Children should be taught from a young age that they are all equal, and that the idea of gender superiority is nonsensical. They should all be treated equally and be imparted the same information and knowledge about humanity and not solely about the superiority or inferiority of their gender.
- Both men and women should equally take care of and be more involved in the upbringing of children, irrespective of their gender.

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