


LANGUAGE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF HEGEMONY IN SELECTED NAMIBIAN PLAYS WRITTEN IN ENGLISH

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Abstract

Reproducing hegemony and strengthening patriarchy, Namibian playwrights present women who are groomed to be good wives and mothers in some selected Namibian plays. Because of these cultural and societal expectations and practices, women assume reproductive roles and responsibilities without much remonstrance. Men, on the other side, assume that women's place is at home and that men's place is outside home, which limits the participation of women outside home and men at home (Husselmann, 2016). Capitalizing on this simple argument and unlocking language as an instrument of hegemony, the main objective of this article is to answer few fundamental questions: Do Namibian playwrights practise derogatory language against Namibian women in the plays? Is language an instrument of hegemony and discrimination in Namibian plays? Where does this language hegemony originate? Theorizing and answering these basic questions, the article follows a feminist stylistics theoretical framework, an interpretivist paradigm, an explanatory design, and a qualitative research approach. Purposively, we selected two Namibian plays: Francis Sifiso Nyathi's *God of Women* (2012) and Keamogetsi Joseph Molapong's *The Woman and the Ogre* (2002). The key purpose of the article is to find out how

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Namibian playwrights use language to represent and characterise women. The article also argues that both Nyathi (1998) and Molapong (2002) used language to present women as inferior to men in their plays. Nyathi (2012) employed language persuasively to characterise women as victims of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse in the hands of their husbands within the Namibian marriage system and set ups. Similarly, we also argue that Molapong (2002) presented women characters negatively as dependent on their fathers. Molapong used language to portray women characters as beauty goddesses who are praised based on how beautiful they are, therefore, reducing and fragmenting their worth to appearances. Both playwrights used a wide range of linguistic devices such as metaphors and other figures of speech to characterise gender roles that are expected of women such as being domestic workers, providing sexual pleasures to their husbands as well as working in the fields to provide food for their families. In these plays, language is a strong instrument of economic hegemony. The article concludes that both Nyathi and Molapong largely practised language to characterise women negatively and Sara Mill's Feminist Stylistic Theory (1995) is successful in unpacking these hidden assumptions, practices and hegemonies.

Key words: language and hegemony, feminist stylistics, Namibian plays, fragmentation, focalisation and gender roles.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

Namibian drama is characterised not only by its conventional style, such as its use of character plot and action but rather its authentic portrayal of the life of Namibians and societal concerns such as diseases, abuse and others. Contemporary themes in Namibian plays, especially after independence, deal with ancestral roots, polygamy, corruption and unemployment. The plays also reflect political themes such as exile (Mbise & Vale, 1998).

Shilemba (2018) adds that after Namibia attained independence in 1990, socio-political issues such as unemployment, violence against women and children, nepotism, corruption, poverty, injustice, and economic window

dressing dominated everyday life. In a study in which Shilemba (2018) critically analysed the literary representations of socio-political issues in the Namibian society as portrayed in Philander's two anthologies, *The Namibian stage chronicles* (2010) and *King of the dump and other plays* (2005), it was established from the plays that inequality and injustice have deep roots in pre-independence Namibia as life after independence has only improved for some individuals but remains a daily struggle for the majority of Namibians.

Namibian playwrights and scholars have written numerous works and plays that reflect on the problems that affect Namibian people in their everyday lives. *Election Fever* (2010), a play by Fredrick Philander, set just before the first independent elections in Namibia and the concomitant commotion. In the play, Philander uncovers how the politicians at the time lied to the masses to vote for them into power as well as portraying the chaos that ensued amongst political leaders. Some of the parties' leaders are given a chance to confess for their political sins and numerous confessions revealing the corruption that they brought to the Namibian society.

In a recent study, Kavazanga (2018) proffers that Namibian drama indeed portrays societal issues, as her study attempted to unearth the issue of poverty according to the plays as represented by the selected Namibian playwrights. Through the plays, the researcher was able to reveal that unemployment is a major cause of poverty as portrayed by the four plays under scrutiny. Furthermore, the study revealed that unemployment not only leads exclusively to poverty, but it is also a major cause of criminal activities and suffering. Equally, the study revealed that poverty leads to malnourishment causing those affected to turn to ill activities such as eating from the dump and using their bodies in exchange for favours to alleviate themselves from the yoke of poverty. Apart from societal issues such as poverty, unemployment and corruption, the issue of gender is also portrayed in Namibian drama as it is in other genres. Francis Sifiso Nyathi, in his play *Tears of the fears in the era of terror* made an effort to expose the strength

and significant contribution of women to the struggle for Namibia's independence. In the play, Nyathi portrays a woman as brave as she takes the risk of losing her life by protecting and providing shelter to Namibian soldiers.

I wrote the play at the beginning of 1996 in recognition of the input of a silent hero of the struggle of Namibia's independence; it was written to celebrate the trials, betrayals, torture, and general tribulations experiences by a rural woman living in the battle grounds during the liberation struggle (Nyathi, 2012).

Another play that depicts the issues of gender is "*The show isn't over until...*" by Vickson Hangula (2000), a Namibian playwright. In the play, women are portrayed as sex objects at the hands of their male counterparts. In the play, Judy who was looking for a job ended up being sexually harassed by her male potential employer, Simon. After revealing her intentions, Simon ended caressing her, as he says, "I can give you the job and we can do this every day, at work, in the toilet, in the car, on the way home and even in hotels (Act 1, scene 1, line 878). Simon's words here prove how he perceives women, as mere sex objects that can be used anywhere.

Andima and Tjiramanga (2014) assert that despite the laws protecting the rights of women after independence, the notion that men are superior to women continues to affect women in post-colonial Namibia. Much of the discrimination against women takes place in their homes and this is perpetrated by their husbands, families, and their communities. These areas of discrimination are usually based on long-standing cultural practices.

When playwrights give attention to social issues such as gender inequality in their literal works, they confirm that the Namibian society is indeed being affected by this phenomenon. Through the use of drama, playwrights bring the problem to the fore, for the society to decide on what to do about it. It is therefore for these reasons that this study analysed two Namibian plays, *God*

of women, and *The woman and the ogre* using a feminist stylistic approach, a form of politically motivated stylistics whose aim is to develop an awareness of the way gender is handled in texts in order to redirect and influence the actions of a society.

1.2. Statement of the problem

It is true that gender differences are manipulated extensively in defining sexes. The problem at hand is that expectations and the traditional roles of women are expressed in language of literature such as plays to serve as a reminder of women gendered place. The choice of words endorses and promotes patriarchal thinking to perceive women as the marginalized group.

Downgrading and subordination of women in patriarchal societies have been a great concern to all those who believe in the equality of the sexes. This has given rise to radical and/or confrontational feminism which has often been used as a tactic by many feminist writers in their women emancipation crusade. This strategy did not always yield the best result for women, in the African context. Regarding the issue raised above, there is a need to redirect attention to a feminist stylistic approach which is devoid of confrontational and radical tendencies. Perhaps, feminism which embraces a symbiotic relationship amongst the sexes may yield greater and more effective results for the women. Since language and style are the major weapons in the dissemination of the feminist message (Ufot, 2012).

Although there are various texts in Namibian literature that empower and reflect positively towards women, this small portion is insufficient to securely imply that women's position in society has improved. Instead of challenging the stereotypical representation of women, some authors reinforce them through language used in their literal work. It only revealed that our culture to some extent is still governed by the patriarchal system. Therefore, as Arikan (2016, p.14) puts it, unless representation of women in literature is

improved, women's status in the society will always remain secondary.

Once poets, authors, playwrights, and other artists write about a certain issue such as gender discrimination, then such an issue has been observed or imagined taking place in society and it will do no harm to research such issues to elucidate the raised concerns. This study on the selected plays was prompted by the fact that what is written in literature reflects what is taking place in society, hence the need for research, to confirm or reject the claims of literature.

In addition, although there have been several studies on the issue of gender and language in the Namibian context, there has been little or no concentration on the approach of feminist stylistics, rather most studies on the issue of gender focused on other frameworks, for instance, a study by Andima and Tjiramanga (2014) concentrated on the oppression of women in African narratives. IKhaxas (2005) also analysed a collection of Namibian women's poetry from a feminist perspective revealing the presence of women's oppression. Rhode (2003) critically evaluated the silencing of the subaltern woman and related that to the novel *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas. Therefore, there is little, or no research done using feminist stylistics analysis which clearly creates a gap for this study.

Feminist Stylistics introduces the concept of gender into the classic stylistic studies, focusing on the discrimination against the women images and sexism and gender stereotype in the stylistic analyses, it challenges the conventional distortion of women's experiences in the interpretation of the text and construct the multiple meanings and diversity of the textual analysis this study will therefore focus on the feminist stylistic analysis of the selected Namibian plays, *The Woman and the Ogre* and *God of Women*.

1.3. Research questions

This qualitative research aims to study "*The Woman and the Ogre*" and "*God of Women*" through a feminist stylistics framework and will be guided

by the following research questions:

1. How do the playwrights portray women in the two plays?
2. How do the playwrights use language to express the gender roles of women in the plays?
3. How applicable is the feminist stylistic framework in analysing the representation of women in the plays?

2. Feminist Stylistics Theoretical Framework

This study employed Sara Mills' feminist stylistics theoretical framework. Mills (2002) organises what she refers to as a toolkit by dividing her questions according to different levels of analysis. Aside from posing questions about the factual information of the text being analysed, Mills (2002) presents questions for analysis at the levels of the word, phrase/sentence, and discourse. This toolkit enables the researcher to make a careful investigation of features, particularly the dominant and recurring ones in the two selected plays. Motivated by issues concerning gender difference and social injustice conveyed through texts, there is a need for stylistic analysis to be performed from the point of view of a feminist (Mills, 1998). Although not all feminist analysis of texts report on the oppressive nature of texts towards women, feminist stylistics provides insights and awareness of underlying messages, ultimately allowing for a detailed analysis of texts to be given that uncovers how texts represent and describe women in particular (Mills, 1998). Feminist stylistics, which is largely informed by Halliday's social semiotic theory, demonstrates how language, ideologies and dominance are interconnected. It proposes a framework for the texts to be analysed from three levels, word, phrase and discourse.

Sara Mills in the book, *Feminist stylistics* (1995), defines the theories and concepts around feminist stylistics. Mill's (1995) theories and additions by

other theorists (who are Feminist stylisticians such as Deidre Burton, Josephine Donovan, and even herself in later years), have helped to develop this theoretical method, procuring better analytical methods, analyses, and findings. Burton (1982) used feminist stylistics to analyse the transitivity system of *The Belle*. The conclusion was that gender discrimination is an original and profound, while difficult to be changed issue that leads to social inequality.

According to Ray (2013, p. 4), feminism is an awareness of patriarchal control, exploitation and oppression at the material and ideological levels of women's labour, fertility and sexuality, in the family, at the place of work and in society in general, and conscious action by women and men to transform the present situation. Gibbons (1999) explains the concept and aims of feminism as a practice and a philosophy which challenges social arrangements regarding women's and men's relative value, status, positions, roles and opportunities. Henceforth, Holmes (1997) states that: Linguistic behaviour expresses complex social meanings. Through language, we assert or cede control, we indicate the different social groups with which we identify, the social roles we embrace, and the sometimes-conflicting values we espouse (p.195).

Feminist stylistics understands that there is a connection between the structure of language and the social structure. Beyond linguistic details such as lexical choices (generic forms, gender specific nouns and pronouns), the effect of language use on ideology, character representation, and even the point of view that a story is told from is also considered. Other theorists also observe that all these details are analysed within a context: cultural, social, official, and so on. Burton (1982, p. 196, as cited in Mills, 1995, p. 4) further proclaims that, all observation, let alone description, must take place within an already constructed theoretical reality, whether the observer/describer of observations is articulately aware of that framework or not.

3. Major Findings

3.1. Language as an Instrument of Hegemony

In this section, the researchers analysed two plays, *The Woman, and the Ogre* by Joseph Keamogetsi Molapong (2002) and *God of Women* by Francis Sifiso Nyathi (2012) followed a feminist stylistic theoretical framework. The plays are analysed using a point-by-point comparative approach, which means that they are not analysed separately but rather at the same time depending on the content which aligns with Mill's three-part model of analysis, word level, syntactical level and discourse level. Short summaries of the two plays are provided before the analysis and the last section is the discussion of the findings.

The play *God of Women* (2012) revolves around a chief called Lewanika, a village chief who married three wives initially but failed to have the customary male heir to his throne. Because of this, he decides to marry a fourth wife in with the hope that she would finally bear him a son. Lewanika is described as an abusive husband, who abuses and disrespects his wives through insults. His clan starts ailing which encourages him to invite the service of a seer to find the origin and cause of the curse, and to cleanse the clan from further affliction. The seer exposes that the affliction is caused by lust, and that it involves the father and son sharing the same woman. His fourth and youngest wife, Joyce, later announces that she is pregnant, but she is confused as to who the father of the unborn is. In a dramatic turn of events with the revelations and fulfilment of the seer's prophecy, Chief Lewanika decides to kill himself.

The play, *The Woman and the ogre* is centred on a young woman, a daughter of the village's chief, who goes through proposals by different men from the village. The men in turn recite poems and sweet words in the hope

of winning her heart, and she finally finds a man that captured her heart. The chief approves his daughter's marriage to the young blacksmith. The newlyweds take off to build their house on the outskirts of the village, near the mountains. Things, however, turn upside down after the black smith leaves his pregnant wife at home to go and work in the mountains. An ogre comes and enslaves her. After the lost hope of her husband ever coming to her rescue, a miracle bird offers to go and look for him and disclose the suffering that his wife is enduring at the hands of an ogre. At last, the bird succeeds, and the blacksmith comes home. Although the couple manages to kill the ogre, they do not survive the war except their baby boy of whom the chief names Oundu and claims that he shall be his successor.

3.2. A Feminist Stylistics Study of *God of Women and The Women and the Ogre*

3.2.1. Analysis at word level

At the level of words, using feminist stylistics entails looking at individual words with the intention of answering questions like “*what do we understand as ‘natural sex roles’, and how are they influenced by language?*”. Mills (1995) classifies some models of specific types of sexist language used for analysis at word level. The plays *God of Women* and *The Woman and the Ogre* are analysed looking at generic pronouns, generic nouns and pronouns, negative descriptions of women, naming and andocentrism, and euphemism and taboo words as well as endearments and diminutives.

Generic nouns and pronouns

According to Mills (2012), one of the problems in literal language is related to generic pronouns and nouns, which are generally found to be masculine or when feminine, always refers to a profession that has become stereotypically

reserved for women, such as nurse or secretary (Mills, 2012).

- I. Seer: He that hearkens not to mere words will hearken by the sight of his own blood (Nyathi, 2012, p. 3).
- II. Neo: Wasn't it our generation that was taught that, He who listens not with ears, understands only by the site of his own blood? (Nyathi, 2012, p. 7).
- III. Neo: You were not an infant when our previous praise singer said, when a man has nowhere else to put his hands for support, he puts them on his knees (Nyathi, 2012, p. 6).

Examples I and II given above are derived from the play *God of Women*, whereby the characters, The Seer and Neo addressed Chief Lewanika at different occasions. In the examples, the two characters used the pronouns *he* and *his* to give reference to a case that can be applicable to both genders. The literal explanation of their statements is to say that a human being who does not listen to advice will face consequences. It is safe to say that although the pronouns used refer grammatically to the singular male person, the statement speaks to both genders and there is therefore, no doubt that the pronouns used in these examples are not sex specific, but generic. When male generics are used, as in these cases, it is possible to mistakenly interpret them as referring to men only because of the inconsistency and strong association. Nyathi's (2012) usage of generics therefore excludes women and makes them invisible when they should not be.

Example III highlights the use of the gender specific noun, *man*, to refer to humanity as a whole; in the sentence, the word 'man' is generically used, diminishing women as being less important than men which reflects bias. Nyathi (2012) could have used a more neutral pronoun such as 'human' instead of 'man' as a way not to favour a particular gender. In the absence of

the woman in the noun ‘man’, the playwright reinforces the message that humankind and being is an exclusive thing best suited for males.

Gender-specific pronouns are largely used to depict people from stereotypically male and female working domains. Whereas doctors, scientists and taxi drivers are generally labelled as male, secretaries and models are said to be female. The same subjective labelling occurs when the sex of a person is unknown, as we then mostly assume that the person is male. In this case, it was desirable to use non-sex-specific pronouns, like ‘he’ or ‘she’ or ‘they’, so as not to risk the accusation of having stereotypical ideas of male and female professions. Language shapes our thinking and there are huge negative consequences for excluding a certain gender from words; it therefore effectively blots out their existence.

Endearments and diminutives

Mills (1995) argues that there are terms which are apparently endearments, but which are applied more frequently to women than to men and which in fact reproduce asymmetric patriarchal power relations. It is hard to explain why certain endearment terms, which may well be used with affection, can also be used to demean.

- I. Man to Young Woman: Your ears are perfectly ripe like mahangu... (Molapong, 2002, p. 44).
- II. Lewanika to Joyce: You are that hard-to-find grain... (Nyathi, 2012, p. 30).

In the two examples above, Nyathi (2012) and Molapong (2002) used words like *mahangu* and *grain* which are in a category of words in which some men use to refer to their female partners; mostly these words are associated to food, which as in these cases imply an equivalence of women

to eatable items. So the two playwrights imply that women can be compared to *mahangu* and *grain* respectively. The two comparisons reduce the referents to something good to eat or rather available for consumption. It also paints a picture that the roles of women in the society just like food, is merely to feed and satisfy men.

Semantic derogation of women

One area of semantic derogation of women involves insults and derogatory words towards them. Following is the analysis based on this category from the plays *God of Women* and *The Woman and the Ogre*. Chief Lewanika has on several times used insulting and demeaning words towards his wives

- I. Lewanika: It is my pleasure to treasure your mirror rather than suffer the *coldness* of my other *numb* and *chilly* wives (Nyathi, 2012, p. 6).

In the example above, the male character, Lewanika from the play, *God of Women* used derogatory words such as *coldness* and *numb* and *chilly*. According to the *English Oxford Dictionary*, being numb is when one is deprived of feelings or responsiveness, to be cold is when lacking affection or warmth of feeling; unemotional and a chilly person is unemotional, distant, and quiet. From the above explanations of the words used in example I, one can pick out that they mean to describe an individual who does not have emotions. Nyathi (2012), through these adjectives presents women as unfriendly people who do not have any emotions or sympathy; despite evidence from the play that his wives love and provide food for Lewanika as their husband; Ma Inonge the eldest wife advises him and sympathised with him when he was lonely and felt bewitched: “Ma Inonge: Shall I send for a witchdoctor my

Lord” (Nyathi, 2012, p. 22). The representation of women as emotionless is indeed dangerous in the sense that it does nothing but promote the notion that women cannot feel, therefore men do whatever they please with them.

- II. Lewanika: Dry that liquid on your ugly faces (Nyathi, 2012, p.17).

The example above confirms the view that judgment and criticism of appearance in society is primarily reserved for women. In the example above, Chief Lewanika angrily calls out his wives and their ugly faces to mark the stance of their value. Due to the power invested in him as the men in the house and Chief, what he did there is to reduce the women’s worth to their appearance. Most often than not, women are judged based on their looks, while men are judged based on their individual characters which is very unfair and depreciating to the female gender. With the uttered word, *ugly* which means to be unaesthetically pleasing, the women are supposed to look down on themselves and question their worth. With this, the wives’ roles in the society are slyly diminished as their value as human beings and contributors to society is sadly reduced to their looks.

- III. Neo: *Little* women of the chief, what is this pestilence of anguish you invoke...? (Nyathi, 2012, p.12).
- IV. Lewanika: Has there been a funeral in this compound or have you all decided to be *children* (Nyathi, 2012, p.17).
- V. Lewanika: Hey you, Nsala it is the reason for you deciding not to bear children that you want to be a *child* yourself? (Nyathi, 2012, p.18).

In the examples above, Nyathi, through characters, Neo and Lewanika, exposes the use of demeaning words to describe the women character in the play *God of Women*. First, Neo calls Joyce a little woman; the word little implies something small or rather not enough in this case, although it was brought forward in the play that Joyce was Lewanika's younger wife, it is not accurate that she is called "little". The word "little" is therefore derogatory and in this case, it means that Neo regards Joyce as not woman or rather, human enough.

In examples above, Lewanika says that his wives have decided to be children; children are human beings that are still to grow, and they do not have the power and capacity to decide on things on their own and most are uncontrollable in behaviour. For the Chief to call or compare his grown-up wives to children, this means that he does not value them as adults and therefore this is demeaning. It can be said that Lewanika sees his wives as immature or unable to behave as grown individuals. He implies that a woman's mind is not and cannot be fully developed and is thus incapable of carrying out higher intellectual exercises. Moreover, most children depend on their parents economically, and addressing women as children as in the examples given above, this can also mean that they are portrayed as dependent on their husbands for economic stability.

VI. Lewanika: Is there peace in the village? Do people still respect me?

Do they still fear me? Ma Inonge: I don't know.

VII. Lewanika: You must know! Idiot! You are the eldest of all these nincompoops. Your senses must be grown by now (Nyathi, 2012, p. 22).

The words idiot and nincompoop are used to refer to Ma Inonge and her counterparts by Chief Lewanika in the above example are not only mere insults but also validate the stereotypical myth that women are

dump or lack intellect as compared to men in society. What is even interesting is how the last phrase from the above example indicates that women are stupid, and they have no common sense and it is expected that as they grow older they attain these qualities.

VIII. Young Man: I promise strong grandchildren who will be the *sons and daughters*, leaders for the generations to come (Molapong, 2002, p. 48).

The fact that the binary term “sons and daughters” used in **VII** is fronted by the male term *son* prioritizes the male gender and promotes the stance that men are more superior to women in society and that their position will always remain secondary even in the use of language. Moreover, since the elements of which comes first in English are generally seen to be the most important in terms of information processing, daughters in this case are seen as less important.

IX. Young Man: I give to my chief; I give praise to my ancestral sprits... all my heroes and heroines (Molapong, 2002, p. 47).

In terms of the binary term, “heroes and heroines” used by Molapong (2002) in the example above, the suffixed or the male term is neutralised so that it can be used for both males and females. Often one can refer to both men and women as heroes but the same can’t be said about heroines and this gives the female term a more non prestigious meaning. This use of language can therefore be labelled as semantically derogatory to the female gender.

Female experience: Euphemism and taboo

Within this category, Mills (1995) explains the idea that some common concepts in the women’s lives may be difficult to talk about except in endocentric terms that present the experience from a male point of view thus

she considers this category of analysis to look at euphemism and the ways that many areas of women's lives are surrounded by linguistic taboos.

- X. Lewanika: ... you are the oldest of my wives. It does not ring in my memory that you were still *untouched* when I first met you. Did you have a son before? (Nyathi, 2012, p. 4)

In many African cultures, certain aspects about women are tabooed subjects, surrounded with special rituals and language use. Cultural views and society dictate how to address these taboos, of which the most common way to verbally address taboos is through avoidance. One taboo that crosses many African societies is the sex taboo. The subject of sex is most of the times avoided especially among women.

Example X is a question that Chief Lewanika, a character in the play *God of Women* posed to one of his wives, Ma Inonge in particular, to find out if she had had a son or had had sex before. In the example, Lewanika uses the euphemism "untouched" to avoid the word sex. It is evident that despite the Chief's avoidance of the word sex, Ma Inonge still felt disrespected. She replies in anger as the interrogation takes place before the other wives: "Ah, father of my children, where is your respect? How dare you malign me before these young girls?" (Nyathi, 2012, p. 4). From this reply, one can conclude that she is angry because a question of sexual nature which is regarded as taboo was posed to her in the presence of the other younger wives.

Another taboo subject around women that appears in the play is the concept of menstruation. Despite the fact that menstruation is a natural process of the female body, it is considered to be undesirable and dirty. However, there are many instances when it must be addressed and that is where the euphemisms come in.

- XI.** Ma Inonge: ... I danced to the first rhythm of ecstasy. Three moons passed without a fountain of brew, I knew I was carrying (Nyathi, 2012, p.14).
- XII.** Lewanika: Bo Ma Ilenge, our first contact coincided with the intense flow of the river. Were you unattended before, or were you simply on the moon (Nyathi, 2012, p. 4)?

Menstruation is a natural psychological phenomenon experienced by women every month after attaining puberty and it still continues till menopause. It is saddening to note that this natural growth incorporates a social taboo in many societies. In most cases it is considered to be dangerous and unclean and regarded as an unsayable (Kaundal & Thaku, 2014). The euphemism used in the above examples such as “a fountain of brew” and “on the only moon” confirms the culture of silencing menstruation and the inability to discuss it openly as it is regarded as taboo.

The issue of not being able to speak freely about a natural process like menstruation can be damaging to the lives of women. The negative connotations surrounding menstruation can for example, lead them to have to dry their sanitary cloths under the bed and possibly getting urinary infections or worse just because they are afraid to be seen and thus regarded as impure. Karki and Espinosa (2018), comment that the negative cultural views on menstruation only cause embarrassment and low self-esteem among girls who transition to womanhood. The whole notion of being polluted and impure while menstruating defines a series of restrictions that have a long-lasting impact on women’s lives, identities and health. Myths and stigma around menstruation and menstrual hygiene inflict humiliation upon millions of women and girls and discriminate against one gender. Menstruation taboos not only violate women’s rights but also the right to bodily integrity and

equality, and the rights to freedom from inhumane treatment.

- XIII.** Narrator: At a river side as she prepares to bath, men are seen hiding behind the bushes jostling to see the beauty of a women in sunlight (Molapong, 2002, p. 44).

The above example is derived from the play, *The Woman and the Ogre*, and it portrays a tabooed subject, that of the naked women body. The women's naked body is regarded as an unsayable in many African societies and among the Aawambo people for example, it is normal for a boy toddler to run around naked, but the same can't be said about a girl child as girls are supposed to be covered at all costs and their private parts are never spoken about openly. Molapong (2012) too, in example **IX** used the euphemism term "beauty" to refer to the young woman's nakedness. This type of language reinforces the perception about the female body that maintains the patriarchal subordination of women and girls.

Naming and andocentrism

Cameron (1990) proffers that many strands in feminist critiques of language have specifically concerned themselves with representations in which they conclude that our languages are sexist, that is, they represent or name the worlds from a masculine viewpoint and in accordance with stereotypical beliefs about the sexes. Androcentric language is biased in the sense that it promotes the norm where the male is generically taken to be the standard of humanness.

The first case of androcentric language found in the plays *God of Women* and *The Woman and the Ogre*, is the social insignificance of the women (daughter) and her marginal status within the society as opposed to the

glorification and exaltation of the son is distinctively illustrated in the plays. In the play *God of Women*, Chief Lewanika is not happy regardless of his blessings of daughters. He does not feel ‘chief’ enough as he has no son to inherit his legacy.

- I. Lewanika... for long I wanted a son, but all has been in vain. Who shall inherit this chieftaincy when I bid farewell to this earth...? (Nyathi, 2012, p. 8)
- II. Lewanika: It has been decreed I will have a son, an heir. In spite of the ill omen of the oracle, I shall need him. My ancestor’s seed has to be planted, replanted and nurtured to live life eternal (Nyathi, 2012, p. 8).
- III. (After realizing his daughter gave birth to a baby boy) Chief: this is the chief to succeed me Oundu... (Molapong, 2002, p. 50).
- IV. Ma Inonge: Our lord loves you; he is expecting glory from you, a son ... (Nyathi, 2012 p. 14).

In the examples above one comes across a connotation that a boy child is regarded to be more important compared to a girl child. Examples I- IV express the common attitude towards a boy as one who is the successor and who has to continue with the family name, the heir, and the master.

The first example reveals Chief Lewanika’s stance on the boy child and it is clear that he indeed believes that the prosperity of his clan and family depends solely on a son that he wishes to have and his status. The last example shows how even women feel useless for not bearing a son and the example sadly shows that in order for women to be loved, they need to give glory to their husband through giving birth to a son. As a result, it is not only the pressure for women to make sure that they bear children in marriage but to produce male ones in particular.

The examples above also bring to light how the two playwrights, Nyathi (2012) and Molapong, (2002) portray the stereotypical concept that women are not to be leaders. For them to represent the fullness of human nature, it is necessary that the chief be male. What can be observed is the androcentric presupposition whereby the male possesses generic leadership skills and that women are born to be followers and to be submissive both in the society and in their homes.

Nyathi (2012), through Chief Lewanika, further shows how men feel superior over their wives. At the end of Act I, Scene I, while drinking beer with his best friend, Neo, Lewanika says to him:

We culture them . . .

We give them a little civilization . . .

We domesticate them . . .

They are ours . . . (Nyathi, 2012, p. 9).

The above examples suggests that women do not have equal status as men in the particular African setting. The example confirms the fact that men perceived women as empty vessels that need to be moulded to fit their husband's preference or standards of the ideal women, hence Lewanika believes that it is their responsibility to *culture* them. In other words, the wife is reduced to the status of a minor. The quote further paints a picture that women need to be civilized, but only a little bit so that they will not overshadow men. Lewanika says that they need to "domesticate them". In this context, being domesticated positions the woman into a slave status, whereby they perform any required needs for their masters. Lewanika's wives are expected to work in the fields, cook, and take care of the children and their husbands, and to provide sexual pleasure for them. This kind of beliefs can be damaging to the lives of women as they will always look at themselves

as objects that belong to men.

The other issue represented from the male point of view is sexual inactivity between men and women. Although sex is supposed to be an act meant to be enjoyed and that provides pleasure to both parties, yet it is used as a practice that men do to women. What example **V** below shows is the dominance of men in the sex act, and what represents sex is the word *met*? So instead of him saying when we met, Lewanika excludes the women from the act and limits it to his actions only, which indeed only objectifies the woman.

V. Lewanika: It does not ring in my memory that you were still untouched when I met you (Nyathi, 2012, p. 4).

VI. Lewanika: ...Ma Inonge your traditional *dish* has lost its delicacy (Nyathi, 2012, p. 4).

VII. Lewanika: Women, I shall continue feasting in your huts (Nyathi, 2012, p. 4).

VIII. Ma Inonge: I am not on duty today my lord please consult your roaster.

Lewanika: I command you to come immediately.

Ma Inonge: Yes, my lord I am sorry, I thought you wanted your daily *food* (Nyathi, 2012, p. 4).

Interestingly, examples **V**, **VI**, and **VII** all relate sexual intercourse to something that is to be eaten or fed to man, which is a sexist credence that makes it difficult for women to express their own experience of sex. What Nyathi (2012) illustrates is how women bodies once again are reduced to mere dishes which their husbands feast on. The suggestion in Ma Inonge's answer in **VII** infers that whenever a woman is called by her husband, she is called for sexual intercourse, which is referred to as "daily food" within the

traditional setup. That is why Ma Inonge is heard responding that she is not on duty, alluding to the fact that one of the roles of a woman is to provide sexual pressure to her husband.

3.2.2. Analysis at phrase and sentence levels

The scope of this part of analysis is enlarged to cover phrases and sentences. At this level, meaning can be inferred from both plays and the context in which they both occur. For individual words, this could be quite difficult as some words can have several meanings. Deciding which meaning to accept can possibly be problematic and lead to misinterpretations. Mills (1995, p. 128) says that the way that meaning takes place often involves the process of the meaning production not being accessible at the literal level of the individual words of which the sentence is composed.

Ready-made sentences

Mills (1995) argues that there are some 'ready-made' phrases which are sexist, and so, could be subjected to phrasal analysis, and, ultimately, alterations.

I. Lewanika: All this *woman talks* reigns supreme over your unknowable world... (Nyathi, 2012, p. 3).

I is an example taken from the play *God of Women*, whereby the character, Chief Lewanika is speaking to himself in an attempt to question his strength as a Chief in the midst of all chaos that has been happening in his clan and in the process he uses the sexist phrase, *women talk*, and this phrase is belittling women. Although it is difficult to counter because it is presented in a form which is not personal: the person using the phrase does not claim responsibility for inventing it, but is simply calling upon pre-existing

knowledge, the knowledge that suggests that women are weak, therefore he should not be bothered by the women's talks around the clan as they are rather useless and weak too just like the gender they are named after.

Metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 5) describe a metaphor as the essence of understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. That is, it is associated with a particular rule of transference called metaphoric rule that indicates that the figurative meaning is derived from the literal meaning. Therefore, a metaphor could be considered as a fundamental element in the way that we structure our thoughts and words. A metaphor, in this view, is seen not as a literary form or as a deviation from some supposedly literal language, but rather as one of the building blocks of our thinking, at both the level of language acquisition and language-use.

The concept of the metaphor is one that directly compares two things. It is therefore, not rare to see some sexist comparisons.

I. Lewanika: ... You must treat her as one of you, she is my fourth wife.

I know that, this has upset some of you, but know yourselves why it happened, you, Ma Inonge, your granary has been depleted. Ma Ilenge your traditional dish has lost its delicacy and you, Nsala, all my hopes lay on you until you proved yourself barren beyond an ordinary desert... (Nyathi, 2012, p. 5).

In example I, Nyathi (2012) uses sexist and derogatory metaphors to refer to the Chief's wives' state of barrenness and womanhood. Ma Inonge's womb is compared to an empty granary, meaning that she can no longer give birth and now her childlessness identifies her. Ma Ilenge's vagina is compared to a traditional dish and the chief adds that it has lost its taste referring to sexual

feelings when engaging in sex.

Nsala's barren womb is compared to a desert, which is a land mass that has very little or no vegetation at all. It is clear that Nyathi takes on fertility, and especially the bearing of male children which is believed to be something that guarantees the continuation of the lineage, and traditionally viewed as the main task of a wife, the fulfilment of her marriage commitment, the repayment of the cattle that were paid for her in the form of lobola. In this case, Nsala is regarded as a failure in life for failing to give birth and as a result she is most often miserable: "My bosom swells with anguish at this spell of impotence cast on my womb. I sink beneath this condemnation piled on me repeatedly by a man to whom I gave my heart and soul (Nyathi, 2012, p.170).

II. Lewanika: You that hard to find grain amongst the dull sand on the riverbanks (Nyathi, 2012, p. 3).

III. Ma Ilenge: I had forgotten I would also age like her and that he would seek for greener vegetables (Nyathi, 2012, p. 25).

IV. Man 2: ... I will water your beauty and forever you will look like a sunflower (Molapong, 2002, p. 4).

In examples **II** and **IV**, Nyathi (2012) uses food as a metaphor for women. In the examples above, *grain* and *green vegetable* are used as comparisons of women characters in the play. The use of these kinds of metaphors reinforces the objectification of women, implying that they are just there for male consumption, and they are both powerless and inanimate. In example **III**, a female character, Ma Ilenge, is made aware by the society that there is a similarity between her and fresh vegetables, they both are to be desired and consumed, and this type of language is demeaning to womanhood.

- V.**Ma Ilenge: You see, Ma Inonge, you and I and perhaps Nsala grumble a little now and then, but there is no change achieved. We are all the same: women who have fallen prey to a cunning beast (Nyathi, 2012, p. 29).
- VI.** Ma Inonge: Of all the bulls in the village, why did you decide to choose John? (Nyathi, 2012 p. 4).
- VII.** Ma Ilenge, I saw a vulture in a dove's feathers, he did it again and again (Nyathi, 2012, p. 25).
- VIII.** Joyce: You wild imbecile, where is your compassion? Have you ever reflected on who you are and where you come from? You are just a little devil and animal, like them (Nyathi, 2012, p. 20).
- IX.** Young man: I am stunned by her natural beauty and attracted to her like a bee to nectar (Molapong, 2002, p. 48).

The examples above illustrate the use of animals as metaphor for men by the two playwrights. Nyathi (2012) and Molapong (2002) represent male power and supremacy by labelling men as vultures, bulls, beasts and bees and women as flowers and nectars thus casting women as powerless. Also, the comparison of men to animals only grants those excuses for their uncontrollable behaviour especially towards women. No man is born an animal and while society's influences may encourage his transformation, there is a need to ensure that they are fully human to be held completely accountable for their actions towards women in society.

Ideology

According to Mills (1995), ideology is a set of statements which have certain conceptual links, but which individual subjects will negotiate, affirm or resist. An ideology is a dogma that guides thoughts, actions, and language use. Every individual and culture subscribe to different ideologies that reflect in their daily lives and how they use language. This study acknowledges some

sexist ideologies found in the plays *The Woman and the Ogre* and *God of Women*.

We live in a man's world and men are considered superior to women, and as such there is a sexist ideology that dictates that the male is the more valued child. In the play *God of Women*, Lewanika believes that all his three wives have failed him as a Chief for failing to give him a son. It is because of this that he decided to marry the fourth wife, Joyce, in order to try his luck to get a male child.

I. Lewanika: You must treat her as one of you, she is my fourth wife, and I know this might upset some of you, but you know yourselves, why it happened. ...The lords have spoken; a son shall feast with me (Nyathi, 2012, p. 5).

II. Ma Inonge: Girl, you are now a married woman, our husband loves you and he is expecting glory from you. A son. (Nyathi, 2012, p. 6).

In example I, Lewanika reminds his wives that he shall search for a third wife as they have failed to perform their duties as wives to produce a son for him. In the second example there is pretty much evidence of how the women have internalised the concept that the only glory one can give their husbands is a son as Ma Inonge is quoted reminding Joyce of how lucky she is that Lewanika is expecting a son from him.

Another sexist ideology is that which grants a man the right to physically harm women; this ideology is depicted in the play *God of Women*. Nyathi (2012) portrays the men in a household as a symbol of authority, although the truth is that every family needs a head because it is an institution like any other. The sexism realised in this notion is how the man is seen as the disciplinarian that punishes wrong behaviours of both his children and his

wife which in many cases leads to domestic violence as the men are made to think that women are their properties.

III. Neo: I heard and saw in my youth the frailty of her ribs crushed by the merciless fists of a father I have since denied fatherhood. Killed for not warming him water for a bath . . . (Nyathi, 2012, p. 6).

IV. Seer: Here, take this rod of correction, with it, you shall bind your subjects to you. With it you shall keep your spouses together ... (Nyathi, 2012, p. 27).

V. Lewanika: Slaps the woman and continues pounding on her with fists as his friend Neo rescues her (Nyathi, 2012, p. 7).

VI. Lewanika: (whilst beating the woman). You will seal your mouth when I say so, you will obey instructions in this house, you will do as I say woman (Nyathi, 2012, p.7).

In example **III** Nyathi (2012) uses Neo, Chief Lewanika's best friend to show how women are subjected to physical harm, and no actions are taken against such men. Neo, in pleading with Chief Lewanika not to exercise punishment on his wives, shares a brutal memory of how his own mother died at the hands of her husband. The author, whether intentionally or accidentally uses the character of Neo's mother as a vehicle to show how heartless men can be that women's lives could be lost for petty issues such as failing to warm water for bathing.

Examples **IV** and **V** portray how Lewanika finds that he needs to exercise physical violence on his wives in order to demonstrate his superiority as the head of the house. Lewanika seems quite satisfied in the pride of his superior power to watch his wives suffer and cry and he sees nothing wrong with the cruel act. Men like Lewanika believe that their wives are their property which they own and as such they have every right to abuse and to torture with an excuse that they are disciplining them.

VII. Joyce: I understand your regret. But you cannot reverse what was begun many years ago. What choice did I have when my people decided to exchange me for some handsome herd of cattle? (Nyathi, 2012, p.11)

VIII. Lewanika: ... y'all crept here as destitute. I sliced my land for you. I traded you for half of my stock none of you standing here can claim hunger. Now where is my reward...? (Nyathi, 2012, p.17).

IX. Chief: You want to marry my daughter, son of the soil?

Young Man: With blessings from the great one, I will marry her.

Chief: You can have my daughter for a wife my son (Molapong, 2002, p. 47).

The above examples portray an ideology of the objectification of the female gender. Example **VII** identifies Joyce as 'something' that is paid for and passed from owner to owner, and this is quite dehumanising because Joyce is reduced to mere property. In the same example, Nyathi (2012) shows how it is the norm for societies to sell off their daughters to wealthy husbands, especially in situations where the parents are poor. Women are human beings and under no circumstances are they supposed to be exchanged as this mentality instils a sense of unworthiness in the women's mind.

The aspect of women being used by their parents and or family in exchange for material possessions through marriage is emphasized. Nyathi (2012) uses Chief Lewanika to suggest that indeed, during those times, women were acquired for marriage to redeem them and their families from a life of hunger. Joyce suggests that she was a priced commodity sold to the Chief as suggested by the words "handsome herd of cattle", inferring that this a good price for sacrificing her youth and happiness by conforming to the cultural

perspective which involves the activity of paying a 'bride price'. The above tells us that women, having been accorded a lower status in a patriarchal society, were voiceless victims at the receiving end of discriminating and oppressive patriarchal dictates. Joyce shows that she did not wish to marry the Chief, probably still in waiting for her betrothed John, but unfortunately, she could not go against her parents' wishes, especially in a situation where she would be the salvation to their life of hunger and poverty.

In example **VIII**, the impression is that what is being paid for must be rewarding is inferred. The fact that Chief Lewanika paid for his wives implies that he expects them to be worth of it by working tirelessly and performing their wife duties to his satisfaction. As their buyer, he even feels entitled to speak to them in whichever manner he pleases and he does not for a second consider their feelings, for to him the women are just his properties. Furthermore, in example **IX**, Molapong (2002) supports the idea of how in order for the women to be married, it should be with the permission of their fathers. Again, the concept of men's entitlement to women is brought to light by the two playwrights.

Furthermore, the plays also portray the different ideologies surrounding the gender roles of women in society, which is one that accords women as sole disciplinarians for children. It makes women to be the ones responsible for the bad behaviours of the children, thus excluding men from the blame. The sexist ideology permeates not only in the thoughts, actions, and use of language of the men in the society alone; it is now deeply rooted in that women have been made to think that taking care of the home and children is solely their responsibility.

X. Ma Inonge: Girl, you are now a married woman, our husband is expecting glory from you. A son. Keep your eye level. Leave John

alone. You are no longer yourself anymore. Didn't your grandmother tell you this? (Nyathi, 2012, p.15).

Example **IV** shows the transference of this ideology into the mind-set of a woman. The speaker, Ma Inonge is a woman, and she has been made to believe that the responsibility of Joyce having "good manners" or rather knowing how to behave well is her grandmother's.

Another ideology on gender role assigns the women to domestic workers. Instead of being seen and treated as equals in relationships and marriages, women are sometimes seen as quasi-servants whose role is to keep the home and perform domestic chores for the husband and family. In the plays *God of Woman*, and *The Woman and the Ogre*, such depictions of women as domestic servants are present.

XI. Lewanika: Go to your mother and tell her to bring something to please our visitors (Nyathi, 2012, p. 5).

XII. (Women one comes in with a calabash filled with traditional brew and hands it to the chief ... (Molapong, 2002, p. 43).

XIII. Ma Ilenge: What has gone wrong?

Nsala: I have burst the blister on my right thumb.

Ma Ilenge: Take a break.

Nsala: Break?

Ma Ilenge: Yes!

Nsala: What about the meal, he is about to come, and I have to complete my duty on time (Nyathi, 2012, p. 24).

XIV. Nsala, you were the last to bring your first harvest at the start of the previous season; this should not repeat itself (Nyathi, 2012, p. 5).

XV. Ma Ilenge: Listen to me, mother of the children. Lewanika does not till the field – you and your children do it. He does not help with the harvesting; neither does he help with mending your granary when termites destroy it. (Nyathi, 2012, p. 29).

XVI. Ogre: Cook woman, I am hungry and thirsty (Molapong, 2002, p, 54).

Examples **XI** and **XII** display how the two playwrights are indicating that it is indeed a women's duty to serve guests, when visitors arrive at homes to visit, the wives or women are expected to prepare welcoming food for the guests as a gesture of hospitality as how they portrayed to serving the chief some calabash. Nyathi (2012) shows this when Neo comes to visit his friend, the Chief Lewanika. The chief calls for his wife to prepare an alcoholic beverage for the guest of whom Ma Inonge brought the drink and the two men entertain themselves.

Example **XIII** depicts that the ideology of women as domestics is instilled in them such that they sense failure if they do not do their duties as assigned to them by patriarchal societies no matter the situation or circumstances, they find themselves in. In the example given, Nsala, despite her injured thumb insists that she has to cook the food as her husband is about to come, so even though in pain, women are pressured to work as servants and voiceless wives, irrespective of how difficult the circumstances are. Their wifely tasks must be completed without any excuse. One could therefore interpret this as bondage of wives or as marital slaves at the expense of husbands.

Examples, **XV** and **XVI** spell out that men marry women in order for them to labour and create wealth for their husbands through working for them. Despite Chief Lewanika being the head of the house, it is still the duty of his

wives and children to cultivate and harvest, cook for him and in fact perform all household duties while he sits and relaxes. Nyathi (2012) confirms that the patriarchal culture suggests that women are suited for such services while men engage in social and political issues that are regarded as men's domain.

Finally, a sexist ideology of limiting women's worth to their appearance is portrayed in the play *The Woman and the Ogre*:

XVII. As she passes, men admire her beauty and women envy her extraordinary beauty (Molapong, 2002, p. 44).

XVIII. Man 1: I have been waiting for you all my life, I have been dreaming of a beautiful queen like you (Molapong, 2002, p. 44).

XIX. Man 2: With you as my dear wife, I will be most happy to give you the finest jewels to decorate your beauty (Molapong, 2002, p. 45).

In the above examples, Molapong (2002) promotes the society's system that uses beauty standards to dictate the women's worth to her appearance. A woman must be beautiful to be noticed but a man must be strong. With this ideology, language diminishes her role and her value as a contributor to society. The young woman in the play is admired only because of her beauty, not because she is strong or has a great personality.

3.2.3. Analysis at Discourse Level

Characterisation

Characters are made of words - they are simply words which the reader has learnt how to construct into a set of ideological messages drawing on her knowledge of the way that texts have been written and continue to be written, and the views which are circulating within society about what women and men are (Mills, 1995, p.16).

The play *God of Women* shows that there is a difference in the characterisation of women and men. The women characters in the play are: Ma Inonge, Joyce, Ma Ilenge, Nsala, and Inonge. The male characters are Chief Lewanika, Neo and John. The narrative pathways of the play expose the behaviour and performance of women and men. The men appear to be the ones who are bold and hold authority.

To begin with, the main character, Chief Lewanika is described as the one who is in control of his four wives, and they are supposed to do as he says. In Act one, Scene one, readers are introduced to his bossy attitude as he vulgarly calls his first wife Ma Inonge shouting: “Women I command you to come here immediately” (Nyathi, 2012, p. 3). The instruction emphasises the power he holds over the women in the play. Other examples in which Lewanika presents authority in the play are as follows:

I. I said bring that rod of correction, will you?

Neo: Why do you batter your wives?

Lewanika: Shut up, nobody, and I mean nobody lays down rules in my house except me (Nyathi, 2012, p.16).

II. Lewanika: You will seal your mouth when I say so. You will obey instructions in this house. You will do as I say women (Nyathi, 2012, p. 7).

Examples I and II show that Lewanika, as male being, is the only authority in the household. It does not matter to him as to who started the quarrel or who is wronged. In such situations women or wives realise who is more favoured among them. However, to save themselves from punishment they have to do as instructed.

The other characteristic of men portrayed in the play is that of bravery and

boldness.

III. John to Joyce: Wasn't it you who sought my hand when a serpent spat its venom into your eye? I battled to get you goat's milk to treat your eye... (Nyathi, 2012, p. 9).

IV. Lewanika: Wasn't it you who brought to this soil a spotted leopard with your bare palms... (Nyathi, 2012, p. 30).

In examples **IV** and **III**, Nyathi showcases how the male character is portrayed as a hero. John rescued Joyce from blindness or further harm when he got sip venom in the eye by a snake, by providing milk to treat the eye; had he not provided the aid she could have been blinded by the venom. In example **IV**, Lewanika speaks to himself remembering hope he had killed a leopard with his bare hands. The act shows how strong and brave the Chief is.

A male character, Chief Lewanika is also depicted as charming, intelligent, and esteemed.

- Joyce: My lord I know you to be a man of honour, the destitute, that the sick and even the wise seek refuge in your wisdom (Nyathi, 2012, p. 32).
- Ma Inonge: ... all of the budding girls admired his youthful charms (Nyathi, 2012, p.15).
- Ma Ilenge, I wonder how a man of high esteem can marry such a witch (Nyathi, 2012, p. 7).

The women characters are characterised differently from men in the sense that their portrayal seems to be in contrast with those of the men. While the men are portrayed to be in power, women are portrayed to be submissive,

powerless and voiceless. In Act I Scene III, Ma Inonge confides in Joyce that she does not like the idea of having had sex with Chief Lewanika before he became chief during his youthful years.

V.Ma Inonge: I don't know whether I like this either, but I was meant for it. I feel so . . . (Nyathi, 2012, p. 14).

What Nyathi (2012) infers is that Ma Inonge, as a girl like all the other girls who were coming of age, should accept sexual advances from male suitors? She therefore recounts that although she did not wish to have sex with the young Lewanika, rather, she was made for it, which means that she has no say over her sexuality, but rather simply to comply, even in situations when she does not wish to have sex.

Women are further shown to be labourers who have no power in marriage as can be evidenced in the speech in which Nsala who has hurt her thumb while preparing food for her husband is asked by her counterpart, Ma Ilenge, to rest and attend to her thumb. Nsala, for fear of punishment if the food is not ready on time refuses to do so in fear, declaring that:

VI. What about the meal? He is about to come, and I have to complete my duty on time (Nyathi, 2012, p. 24).

This demonstrates the voicelessness of Nsala, irrespective of how difficult the circumstances are that she may find herself in as a wife; her wifely tasks have to be completed without any excuse. One could therefore interpret this as bondage of wives or as marital slaves. The female character in the play is also characterised as stupid and lacking sense.

VII. Neo: It is easier to cope with one small brain than many (Nyathi, 2012, p. 8).

VIII. Lewanika: Since when has a women thought on behalf of a man? (Nyathi, 2012, p. 22)

IX. Lewanika: Is there peace in the village? Do people respect me? Do they still fear me? Ma Inonge replies I don't know. Idiot. You are the eldest of all these nincompoops and your senses must be grown by now (Nyathi, 2012, p. 22).

Examples **VII**, **VIII** and **IX** paint a demeaning picture that women are born with small brains and that there is no way they can think better than men. What Nyathi implies is that women's senses and intellect grow as they age.

Women are also characterised as each other's rivals. The petty fights start with Ma Ilenge and Ma Inonge, the two most senior wives of Chief Lewanika. Ma Inonge seems to have been provoked by Ma Ilenge's gesture of giving food to Inonge, Ma Inonge's daughter. She claims that as the second wife and a rival in marriage, Ma Ilenge should not have given her daughter food because she is a poor cook (Nyathi, 2012, p. 7).

The actual issue that the author gives the reader is that of rivalry in marriage, which disguised as food related. It is Ma Inonge who seems still angry and who has not forgiven Ma Ilenge for coming into her marriage as the second wife. The two women continue with their fight again in Act II, Scene III when Ma Inonge asks Ma Ilenge to hurry with the cooking as she also wants to use the fireplace. The two rival wives of Chief Lewanika exchange words until Nsala, the third wife and ally of Ma Ilenge intervenes (Nyathi, 2012, p. 27).

Characterisation in the play, *The Woman and the Ogre* also portrays the

women differently from the male characters. The characters in the play do not have specific names but, in order to differentiate them, Molapong (2002) made an effort to name them as follows: Chief, Young Woman, Young Man, Man 1, Man 2, Man 3, Man 4, Man, 5, Woman 1, Woman 2, Woman 3, Woman 4, Woman 5, the bird and the Ogre.

To begin with, the women characters through Young Woman are presented as beautiful, innocent, and vulnerable. Young Woman who is the main character of the play is presented as a woman of great beauty. She has the beauty that various men in the play admired so much and wished to nourish, and from Scene one of the play the readers are exposed to different suitors who take turns to admire the Young Woman due to her beauty.

X. Narrator (as she passes, men who admire her beauty and women envy her...
(Molapong, 2002, p. 44).

XI. Man 1: ... your beauty is a temptation, impossible to resist its allure...
(Molapong, 2002, p. 44).

XII. Man 2: ...I will be most happy to give you the finest jewels to decorate your beauty (Molapong, 2002, p. 45).

Apart from the beauty the female character, Young Woman is also portrayed as vulnerable, and she is also presented as the one who needs protection from men. She claims that “My heart has only room for one man – that man is strong and handsome and humble. He can give me protection and love” (Molapong, 2002, p. 45).

XIII. Man 1: I would protect you with my simplicity...
(Molapong, 2002, p. 44).

XIV. Ogre: Who is here? Young Woman: It’s only me. Please spare me! My husband is away, and I am pregnant with a child. Please,

don't harm me, I...I... can do whatever you ask me, if you spare my life. Please, I am begging you, please! Ogre: Haa! Haa! Haa! I will spare you your life, but you will cook for me and when you get lazy or weak, I will eat you (Molapong, 2002, p.50).

XV. Bird: I can fly into the mountains and search for your husband and if I find him, I will tell him that an Ogre enslaved you (Molapong, 2002, p. 51).

XVI. Man 5: You should go home. Who will help you if the ogre attacks again? (Molapong, 2002, p. 55).

Women characters in the play are also portrayed physically weak. Young Woman was left alone by her husband after he left for work. Fate came to her when an Ogre decided to invade her house to enslave her. It ordered her to cook for it and in return starved her. Molapong (2002) in this case paints a picture that women are weak, and they would rather die than defend themselves from their enemies. If the man had not left it could of course not come to that house in fear of it being killed of which it was when the Young Man fought with it. Sentence **XVI** is also evidence of Molapong's portrayal of women as weak as in the example, the man instructs women to go home and stop staring at the dead Ogre as they do not have the strength to defend themselves if it strikes.

Fragmentation

In terms of fragmentation, there is a significant difference in the way that the bodies of women and men are described in the play. Evidently, more detailed descriptions are given to women than to men. The character, Young Woman in the play *The Woman and the Ogre* is described in terms of the qualities of her body parts, such as the following:

- I. Narrator: ...She is humming a love song as she walks and responds to the melody with
The sensual movement of her body (Molapong, 2002, p. 43).
- II. Man 1: ...to see and feel the sweat-swamped face of the one I love
(Molapong, 2002, p. 45).
- III. Man 2: I will be most happy to give you the finest jewels to decorate your beauty for the tasteful eyes of my love... my small soft hands have been a blessing from my mother, to squeeze and care for a body so perfectly structured body.... Without wasting time, I kindly ask for your lovely hand (Molapong, 2002, p. 45).
- IV. She is walking proudly on her way to bathe in the river and to fetch some water.
(Molapong, 2002, p. 43).
- V. She responds to the melody with the sensual movement of her body
(Molapong, 2002, p. 43).

These descriptions convey to the reader the gendered assumption that women are usually noticed with regards to their fragmented body parts and not to their body characteristics that catch the interest of the reader, and that in reality, they easily attract men. It is apparent that the physical descriptions given to women are more complicated and rather sensationalised than those of men. This shows that the women presented in this manner are described according to their sensuality and sexual attractiveness. Their description of women includes their bodies as a whole, and, more abundantly, in fragmented parts. Although clothed, they are described in a way that can compel the reader to imagine them as if they are unclothed.

Throughout the analysis of the plays, *God of Women* and *The Woman and the Ogre*, it is clear that the two playwrights (Nyathi, 2012 and Molapong, 2002) did not challenge the stereotypical representation of gender but reveal

a rather disturbing pattern of oppression against women in particular. It is clear from the analysis of the language of the two plays using a feminist stylistic approach that although there is a rich representation of women in the novel, they are represented as subordinates to men. Most of the female characters in the plays are inactive and dependent on men. The secondary question of this study was to analyse how the two playwrights presented women characters in their plays. It is safe to say this research achieved this as the following representations of women have been discovered from the plays.

Belsey and Moore (1997, p. 1) posit that “A feminist analyst does not necessarily read in order to praise or to blame, to judge or to censor, more commonly she sets out to assess how the text invites its readers, as members of a specific culture, to understand what it means to be a woman or a man.” It is, therefore, necessary to note that though these representations may not have been intentionally meant to reflect patriarchal bias by the authors, the reader with a feminist perspective may find them inferring to patriarchal bias.

The study found that one distinct representation of women found in both plays is that of *‘the other’*. Both Nyathi (2012) and Molapong’s (2002) use of language places the women character as second to men. The importance of a man as the head of the house is emphasised in the plays; Lewanika rules his homestead and is the village chief, Young Women’s father is a chief and her husband as the head of the family is regarded as the provider, thus the need for him to go and work in the mountains. The women character on the other hand is portrayed as passive that has a role of taking care of the home and serving the man. This finding agrees with Spender (1980)’s views as he remarks that: While for men, every appointment of a man as head, as director, as warden, as official, may ‘prove’ men are the best candidates, for women this constitutes proof that men have set up the system so that it works

in the interests of men (p. 51).

This system is further depicted as women characters in the two plays are also found to be represented as secondary through the placement of the male child as superior. This is observed in the play *God of Women*, when the Chief was distrusted for not having a male child. He felt that he was not chief enough until he has a son. In the play *Woman and the Ogre* too, Molapong (2002) illustrated the importance of the male child when the chief rejoiced that the child left by the deceased parents was a boy and that he can indeed succeed him.

Brown-Guillory (1996) argues that the misogyny and devaluation of daughters leads mothers to hope for a boy when they are pregnant because girls do not strengthen or enhance their lineage; they merely function as objects of patronymic exchange. A female child does not contribute to the securing of power for the maternal position.

This observation supports the idea that although childbearing in marriage was important, it was more significant to give birth to a boy child. This sends off a message that places a girl child as secondary and that she is married for the sole reason of giving birth to a male child. This is illustrated in the following: “Look, this man does not love me. He just wants a son out of me and thereafter he will treat me as he treats you. You know very well, Ma Inonge that love is not found in the market” (Nyathi, 2012, p. 15).

Furthermore, the study also found that the representation of women characters in the plays is a form of exchange objects for marriage purposes. In *God of Women*, women characters such as Joyce are traded for marriage with cattle and used as materials to safeguard their families from poverty and this is done without their will. Joyce explains how her marriage transpired:

“What choice did I have when my people decided to exchange me for a handsome herd of cattle?” and “He has paid my family fifteen cattle in exchange for me... He saved them from hunger” (Nyathi, 2012, p.11). This type of practice in Africa is referred to as lobola.

Leboa et al. (2004) indicates that lobola is more often seen as payment for a bride, meaning that the husband and his family have purchased the woman, including her future domestic production and children. This practice relegates wives to a rather powerless position within the family unit, promotes sexual and physical abuse and limits wives’ ability to negotiate safer sex. This study supports this claim as the analysis also found that the consent and feelings of women is not considered. Men cared less whether their supposed spouses were in love with them or not. Joyce tells John that she was married to Chief Lewanika by her parents, not because she loved him (Nyathi, 2012, p.11).

Molapong (2012) in his play also makes room for this representation of women, when Young Man, although he was given a green light by Young Woman to marry her, still proceeded to ask further permission from her father, Chief. If the Chief was not happy about him marrying his daughter, then the wedding would’ve not taken place. Women not having a say about their lives is of course negative and degrading. The tradition of forcing a child to marry a man or woman that he/she does not love reflects the way in which men in particular abuse their powerful positions in society.

The finding of women being represented as inferior to men in the plays and the overview of the gendered position of women in Namibia by Andima and Tjiramanga (2014) contributes to a better understanding of the claim by Mills (1995) that “literature is one of the many forms of writing which play a role in the constitution of the subject,

and the reproduction of messages about what women and men are like in society” (p.17). It is evident from the findings that being Namibian playwrights, Nyathi (2012) and Molapong (2002) indeed represented women as they appear to be in the actual Namibian society.

Victims of physical and verbal abuse is another representation of women characters that was found in the plays as the plays show women going through violence at the hands of husbands and monsters. In the play *God of Women*, the reader is brought to the attention of how Neo’s mother was constantly abused and later killed by his father. “I heard and saw in my youth, the frailty of her ribs crushed by the merciless fists of a father I have since denied fatherhood, killed for not warming his water (Nyathi, 2012, p. 16). The Young Woman in the play *The Woman and the Ogre* was also constantly abused, and she ended up being killed by the monstrous Ogre. Moreover, Lewanika is portrayed as constantly hitting his wives with a ‘rod of correction’. The abuse of women may lead not only to death, but it may convey a message of worthlessness to the woman who suffers against it. This is corroborated by the following:

Patriarchy requires violence or the subliminal threat of violence in order to maintain itself. The most dangerous situation for a woman is not an unknown man in the street or even the enemy in the wartime, but a husband or lover in the isolation of their own home (Edwards-Jauch, 2013, p. 396).

In terms of verbal abuse, the study also found that women characters especially in the play *God of Woman* consists of women that are presented as objects of insults. The study showed how Ma Inonge, Ma Ilenge, and Nsala are ridiculed and insulted whenever their husband, Chief Lewanika, wishes to. This is also reflected in the utterance of Chief Lewanika when he is angry

and insults the wives: “You must know! Idiot! You are the eldest of all these nincompoops, your senses must be grown by now” (Nyathi, 2012, p. 22). This is psychological abuse of the wives; the use of the word idiot can lead them to question their intelligence and mental stability.

The second research question of this study was to seek how the playwrights used language to present the gender roles of women in the two plays. Ambunda and De Klerk (2003), state that gender roles are the characteristics, duties and responsibilities attributed to members of the two sexes by virtue of the fact that they are male or female. This is prominent within the sphere of the family household. The study found how Nyathi (2012) and Molapong (2002) used different linguistic devices to portray the roles of women in plays.

The playwrights used metaphors assigned to women characters to demonstrate the role of being sex providers. Chief Lewanika uses metaphors that carry strong connotations that can be understood as providing sexual pleasure to their husband. Chief Lewanika after his session with the seer, orders Ma Inonge, his most senior wife to call her counterparts to a meeting where he wants to disclose the revelation of the seer. Ma Inonge responds by saying that, “I am not on duty today, my Lord. Please consult your roster” (Act I, Scene I). She continues: “I am sorry, my lord, I thought you wanted your daily food” (Nyathi, 2012, p. 4).

The metaphor used here is that of comparing sexual intercourse to daily food. What can be taken out of this quotation is that Nyathi (2012) through Ma Inonge’s answer in the above paragraph exposes that whenever a woman is called by her husband, she is called for sexual intercourse because she is made to believe that it is her duty as a woman to do so. That is why Ma Inonge responded that she is not on duty. Nyathi (2012) also used an idiomatic expression to elaborate this: “Father shall eat with son. Eating the abominable

fruit of the sun” (Nyathi, 2012, p. 2), in reference to Chief Lewanika taking over the son’s girlfriend as wife, therefore indicating the role of women as sexual objects that can be passed on around from one man to another.

Furthermore, Nyathi (2012) and Molapong (2002) assign women characters to the role of domestic workers in their plays. In the play *The Woman and the Ogre*, Molapong used a metaphoric phrase that compared a woman to a nectar and the man to a bee. A bee feeds from the nectar; therefore, this metaphor can be interpreted as exposing that it is a societal role for women to feed men as indicated here: “Young man: I am stunned by her natural beauty and attracted to her like a bee to a nectar” (Molapong, 2002, p. 48). What can be inferred from this statement is that a woman in a traditional setting is set to cook and feed a man. Nyathi’s (2012) language in the play *God of Women* also highlights the gendered role of women characters as house domestics as illustrated in Act I Scene I, when Neo comes to visit his friend, the Chief. The Chief calls for his wife to prepare a calabash of alcohol to drink.

The placement of women as housewives who perform all duties in the house, from cooking, serving guests and cultivating fields is unfair and it conforms to the patriarchal culture that suggests that women are suited for such services while men engage in social and political issues. Moreover, this result builds on Mills (1995) claims that the expectations and the traditional roles of women are instilled in the language of literature such as plays to serve as a reminder of women’s gendered place.

The third research question aimed to find out how the playwrights used discourse to present women characters in the plays. It is through the analysis at discourse level that the findings were able to be revealed. In the category of characterisation, Nyathi portrayed women characters to be voiceless. In

Act I Scene III, Ma Inonge confides in Joyce that she does not like the idea of having had sex with Chief Lewanika before he became chief during his youthful years. Ma Inonge: I don't know whether I like this either, but I was meant for it. I feel so . . . (Nyathi, 2012, p. 14).

What Nyathi (2012) infers is that Ma Inonge, as a girl like all the other girls who were coming of age, should accept sexual advances from male suitors, She therefore recounts that although she did not wish to have sex with the young Lewanika, rather, she was made for it, and has no voice to resist, which simply means that she has no say over her sexuality, but rather simply to comply, even in situations when she does not wish to have sex.

Through characterisation, Nyathi also portrayed female characters as powerless .This is exposed through a female character, Nsala who, when she hurt her thumb while preparing food for her husband, Lewanika is asked by her counterpart, Ma Ilenge, to rest and attend to her thumb. Nsala, for fear of punishment if the food is not ready on time refuses to do so, declaring that: What about the meal? He is about to come, and I have to complete my duty on time (Nyathi, 2012, p. 24).This demonstrates the powerlessness of Nsala, irrespective of how difficult the circumstances are that she may find herself in as a wife; her wifely tasks have to be completed without any excuse or therefore she shall face the consequence. One could therefore interpret this as bondage of wives or as marital slaves.

Still on the aspect of power, Young Woman in the play, *The woman and the Ogre* was also portrayed to be powerless as Molapong (2002) presented her as the one who needs protection from men. She claims that "My heart has only room for one man – that man is strong and handsome and humble. He can give me protection and love" (Molapong, 2002, p. 45). In addition, Molapong (2002) Women characters in the play are also portrayed physically

weak. Young Woman was left alone by her husband after he left for work. Fate came to her when an Ogre decided to invade her house to enslave her. It ordered her to cook for it and in return starved her. Molapong (2002) in this case paints a picture that women are weak, and they would rather die than defend themselves from their enemies.

The findings of this study through the analysis of characterisation at discourse level also disclosed, that Nyathi (2012) presented women characters as each other's rivals for the attention of men, this is seen through the trivial fights between Ma Ilenge and Ma Inonge, the two most senior wives of Chief Lewanika. Ma Inonge seems to have been provoked by Ma Ilenge's gesture of giving food to Inonge, Ma Inonge's daughter. The actual issue that the author gives the reader is that of rivalry in marriage, which disguised as food related. It is Ma Inonge who seems still angry and who has not forgiven Ma Ilenge for coming into her marriage as the second wife. The findings on characterisation conforms on Mills (1995) claims that:

The characters and gender roles constitute the most significant part of an analysis at the level of discourse. Sara Mills states that characters and gender roles that are attributed to them in texts are related to ideological concerns to a great extent, so they are just constructions: Characters are made of words, they are not simulacra of humans –they are simply words which the reader has learned how to construct into a set of ideological messages drawing on her knowledge of the way that texts have been written and continue to be written, and the views which are circulating within society about how women and men are. (Mills, 1995, p. 26)

Through fragmentation a category of analysis at discourse level, the study found that, Molapong (2002) presented women with regards to their fragmented body parts and not to their overall body .Man 2: I will be most

happy to give you the finest jewels to decorate your beauty for the tasteful eyes of my love... my small soft hands have been a blessing from my mother, to squeeze and care for a body so perfectly structured body.... Without wasting time, I kindly ask for your lovely hand (Molapong, 2002, p. 45). It is apparent from this example that the women presented in this manner are described according to their sensuality and sexual attractiveness.

Conclusions

This study analysed two Namibian plays, *God of Women* (2012) by Francis Sifiso Nyathi and *The Woman and the Ogre* (2002) by Joseph Keamogetsi Molapong following feminist stylistics theory, a framework that allows us to see the way in which language contributes to sexist stereotypes in society. It is a subversive discourse aimed at helping to reconstruct how the woman is represented in the literary world, and how she is perceived and treated in the real world. It also alerts society to social injustice against women. The study adopted the qualitative, desk top approach and the texts were interpreted through content analysis.

The study revealed that the two playwrights presented woman characters as subordinates throughout their plays because of the beliefs that women are passive, submissive, dependant on men, inferior to and unequal to men. Nyathi (2012) and Molapong (2002) through their use of language place the women character as second to the men character. The importance of a man as a head of the house and family is emphasized in both plays. In *God of Women*, Lewanika rules his homestead and is the village Chief. In the play *The Woman and the Ogre*, Young Woman's father is a Chief and her husband as the head of the family is regarded as the provider, thus the need for him to go and work in the mountains.

Furthermore, the study also concluded that women characters are

represented as objects of exchange for marriage purposes. In *God of Women*, women characters such as Joyce are traded for marriage with cattle, and they are used as materials to reassure their families through unwanted poverty without their will. Joyce explains how her marriage transpired: “What choice did I have when my people decided to exchange me for a handsome herd of cattle?” and “He has paid my family fifteen cattle in exchange for me... He saved them from hunger” (Nyathi, 2012, p.11). This type of practice in Africa is referred to as lobola.

In the plays *God of Women* and *The Woman and the Ogre*, the representation of women as victims of physical and verbal is evident. In *God of Women*, the reader is brought to the attention of how Neo’s mother was constantly abused and later killed by her husband. “I heard and saw in my youth, the frailty of her ribs crushed by the merciless fists of a father I have since denied fatherhood, killed for not warming his water (Nyathi, 2012, p.16). Lewanika is constantly hitting his wives with a rod of correction. The abuse of women may lead not only to death but may convey a message of worthlessness to woman who suffers against it. The Young Woman in the play *The Woman and the Ogre* was also constantly abused and ended up being killed by the monstrous Ogre.

The study concluded that through linguistic devices used by the playwrights such as metaphors and idioms, women characters are assigned to the role of sex suppliers. Chief Lewanika in the play *God of Women* uses metaphors that carry strong connotations that could be understood as showing that the women’s role is to provide sexual pleasure to their husbands. Chief Lewanika, after his session with the seer, orders Ma Inonge, his most senior wife to call her counterparts to a meeting where he wants to disclose the revelation of the seer. Ma Inonge responds by saying “I am not on duty today, my Lord. Please consult your roster” (Act I, Scene I). She continues: “I am sorry, my lord, I thought you wanted your daily food” (Nyathi, 2012, p4). The metaphor used here is that of comparing sexual intercourse to daily food

that women have to provide to their husbands.

Furthermore, the study revealed that Nyathi (2012) and Molapong (2002) assign to women characters the role of domestic workers in their plays. In the play, *The Woman and the Ogre*, Molapong (2002) used metaphoric phrases that compared a woman as nectar and man as the bee. A bee feeds from the nectar; therefore, this metaphor can be interpreted as exposing that it is a societal role of women to feed men. What can be inferred from the analysis is that a woman in a traditional setting is supposed to cook and feed a man. Nyathi's (2012) language in the play *God of Women* also highlights the gendered role women characters as house domestics as demonstrated in Act I Scene I, when Neo comes to visit his friend, the Chief. The Chief calls for his wife to prepare a calabash of alcohol to drink.

In terms of the discourse used to represent women characters. The playwrights through the analysis of characterisation are found to have presented women characters as voiceless, powerless each other's competition. Nyathi (2012) presented women characters as each other's rivals for the attention of men; this is seen through the trivial fights between Ma Ilenge and Ma Inonge, the two most senior wives of Chief Lewanika. Ma Inonge seems to have been provoked by Ma Ilenge's gesture of giving food to Inonge, Ma Inonge's daughter.

Through fragmentation a category of analysis at discourse level, the study found that, Molapong (2002) presented women with regards to their fragmented body parts and not to their overall body as indicated in the following: Man 2: I will be most happy to give you the finest jewels to decorate your beauty for the tasteful eyes of my love... my small soft hands have been a blessing from my mother, to squeeze and care for a body so perfectly structured body.... Without wasting time, I kindly ask for your lovely hand (Molapong, 2002, p. 45).

A feminist stylistics approach allowed this study to achieve its goals through a close linguistic scrutiny of the plays. The researchers were not only

able to study how the playwrights represented women, but also interpreted the meanings of the expressions they used. Mills (1995) pointed out that a feminist stylistic analysis develops awareness of the way gender is handled in texts. The analysis of the plays *God of Women*, and the *Woman and the Ogre* therefore, provides readers with a view of how the women characters are depicted in the plays in order to create awareness. It can be concluded through the above major findings that the feminist stylistic framework was indeed relevant to the analysis of the two plays and successfully aided in detecting aspects of how gender is handled and particularly the representation of gender roles that are granted to female characters in the two plays.

All in all, analysing the plays *God of Women* and *The Woman and the Ogre* through a feminist stylistic analysis demonstrated that literary texts such as drama can have negative sociocultural norms and ideologies around gender. So, the possibility of changing negative ideologies is the responsibility of people and institutions in society. It is also worth stating that it is important for researchers to continue approaching sexism in language in order to change it. As Mills (2008 p.159) argues, “It is one of the methods necessary for changing a sexist society”.

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