

Just when we thought we were producing fine young men

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Literature is highly influenced by society and cultural contexts in which it is produced or read. It is a reflection of how a particular society constructs reality. The values, beliefs and norms transferred from one generation to another reflect, in the main, that society's way of life. When creative writers use verbal art forms like novels, short stories or drama, they do so in order to create an allusive and fictitious setting which enable them to comment on contemporary issues without blatantly seeming to do so. In this sense it becomes a prerogative for artists to remark on what is happening in communities without being directly confrontational. In our view, it is also their responsibility to approach literature from an angle that reflects changing times, thus challenging anything that is contrary. In 2013 we involved our final year undergrad literature class in a project whose aim was to sensitize them on gender disparities still affecting our society today. Five of nine groups comprising ten students each – both men and women-chose to study the work of an acclaimed Zulu writer, D.B.Z. Ntuli (1982). Based on the comments of the male students in those groups the discussion was stretched to the entire class. It was perturbing to discover that we are still producing male students who are not sensitive to gender disparities. In this article we argue that indifference displayed by these young men where issues of gender were concerned call for attention. This article presents the callous treatment of women characters in the selected short story and examples of comments made by male students on their reading of the text. We also contend that we are still far from reaping the fruits of our hard-won democracy given that Zulu men in the study still seems to lack an understanding of basic human rights. Their failure to understand obvious gender-based violence as an intolerable social ill.

En ons dog ons lewer pragtige jongmanne op. Literatuur word sterk beïnvloed deur die sosiale en kulturele konteks waarin dit ontstaan en gelees word. Die waardes, sienings en norme wat van een geslag na 'n volgende 'oorgedra word, reflekteer oor die algemeen die gemeenskap se lewenswyse. Wanneer kreatiewe skrywers literêre vorme soos romans, kortverhale of dramas gebruik, skep hulle dit 'n betekenisvolle denkbeeldige situasie wat hulle in staat stel om kommentaar op aktuele sake te lewer sonder dat dit blatant so voorkom. Sodoende word dit kunstenaars se prerogatief om kommentaar te lewer op wat in hulle gemeenskappe gebeur sonder om direk konfronteerend te wees. Ons siening is dat dit ook hulle verantwoordelikheid is om die letterkunde te benader op wyses wat die veranderende tye weerspieël en wat die teendeel konfronteer. In 2013 het ons 'n projek met ons finalejaars (voorgaads) in die letterkundeklas aangepak wat ten doel gehad het om hulle te sensitiseer vir die bestaan van geslagsverskille in ons huidige samelewing. Vyf van die nege groepe van tien studente elk – mans sowel as vroue – het gekies om die werk van die befaamde Zoeloeskrywer D.B.Z. Ntuli (1982) te bestudeer. Op grond van die kommentaar van die mansstudente in die groepe is die bespreking uitgebrei na die hele klas. Dit was ontstellend om te ontdek dat ons steeds mansstudente oplewer wat nie sensitief is vir geslagsongelykhede nie. In hierdie artikel argumenteer ons dat die onverskilligheid van hierdie mans oor geslagskwessies, drastiese maatreëls vereis. Die artikel beskryf die hardhandige optrede teen vroue in die gekose teks, en ontleed voorbeelde van die kommentaar van mansstudente by die lees van die teks. Ons betoog dat ons nog lank nie die vrugte van die swaar- verworwe demokrasie pluk nie, aangesien die jong Zoeloes in die studie grootliks steeds 'n gebrek aan begrip van basiese menseregte toon. Hulle gebrek aan begrip vir geslagsgebaseerde geweld is onverskoonbaar.

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Introduction

As a result of post-independence and widespread gender activists in the world, the question of male supremacy over women is rapidly receiving attention in African societies generally and Zulu culture in particular. In patriarchal societies, for instance, where people are socialised to believe that masculine gender is superior to feminine gender, literary works have come to be employed as one of the tools to shift mindsets from oppressive cultures that have stood the test of time by challenging status quo. Talbot (1998:3) argues that 'being born male or female has far-reaching consequences for an individual', whilst there is no factual inherent reason why men should be valued more than women. These differential sociocultural evaluative categories are merely used to benefit only one group of society over another. The article brings up contemporary issues of gender-based violence presented through a short story by a prolific Zulu writer, D.B.Z. Ntuli. This short story, selected by five groups as a class project, resulted in a serious class debate, which sadly revealed an outrageous reality that institutions of higher learning have a vital role of engaging students with issues beyond their relevant degrees. One such responsibility would be to contribute towards producing transformed students – male and female students – who demonstrate transformation in every aspect of their lives.

Therefore, in the article we set to do the following:

- Unpack and discuss the short story,
- Present male responses to their reading of the selected short story with particular reference to Mbuthuma, the main character, and
- Provide a sound analysis of the views of our respondents.

The story in gist

The short story entitled 'NguMbuthuma-ke lowo' (This then is Mbuthuma) is about Mbuthuma, a polygamist with three wives: MaKheswa, MaHlengwa and MaMfeka. A man of unpredictable temper, he exposes his wives to various forms of atrocities as punishment whenever he feels they have annoyed him. As a result, the wives constantly live in fear as they do not know what to expect each time he summons them. The short story comes from *Amawisa*—an anthology of short stories by D.B.Z. Ntuli and C.Z.S. Ntuli (1982). This particular chosen story is written by D.B.Z., as he is affectionately known, a notable Zulu writer whose works are timeless. The events that take place in the story will be elaborated upon as the discussion develops.

Examination of gender-based violence in the text

There are several levels at which this short story could be interpreted. Because of the nature of the language used in this short story, some critics might consider it as satire. Simpson (cited in Phiddian 2013:45) views satire as a complexly interdiscursive mode of communication that clearly does not fit easily with literary forms of discourses

such as poems, plays and prose, but which nevertheless appears to have been totally adopted in literary studies. Because of the gross abuse that is found in this short story, we distance ourselves from adopting its reading along these lines as we feel doing so would undermine women by trivialising the experiences of women characters in this story.

In the article we focus on the features of the main character and his actions towards his wives as a way of arriving at the theme of how the title 'NguMbuthuma-ke lowo' (This then is Mbuthuma) encompasses not only what he looks like and what he has done to his wives but also what his final state is. Thus, we view it as appropriate to provide a complete overview of the story, albeit with focus on Mbuthuma, the main character.

As the story begins, the author describes Mbuthuma in this fashion:

Ngumdududla wakwabo. Yinkwishela. Izitho ngamagqikolo. Umkhaba ungaka. Izihlathi zingaka. Amehlo ayalokoza. Ngumshashadu. (Ntuli & Ntuli 1982:73)
(He is an extremely fat man with legs that resemble those of an elephant. His stomach is very big. He has big cheeks. The eyes are small. He has no hair on his head.)

This portrayal of Mbuthuma might be one of the techniques the author uses to give readers freedom to construct their opinion of this character. The title, which could be translated in several ways, such as 'This is Mbuthuma by the way' or 'This could only be Mbuthuma' or even 'This then is Mbuthuma', evokes suspense. We have opted for the latter meaning as it is more neutral. Descriptive translation theorists maintain that translations can never be exact equivalents of their originals because every translation involves a certain amount of manipulation for a certain purpose (Hermans 1985). Taking the point forward, Lefevere (1992) and Bassnett-McGuire (2002) maintain that the sociocultural context in which translations take place should be considered at all times when translating. These scholars argue that translations are never produced in a vacuum but that they are part of a larger system and should therefore be described in terms of the target system. This is very true in the case of this story. In an effort to provide as much of the authentic message as in the original language, 'This then is Mbuthuma' is more befitting in the present context as it opens room for several interpretations of the story.

Writers of extended fictional prose often use particular devices to give shape to their ideas and to give them structure or form. These include setting, character, protagonist, narrator and narrative technique (Murray 1999). Similarly, we find that the characters, mainly Mbuthuma and the narrator, are the strategies that shape everything that happens in the story. The theme of gender-based violence and how it culminates in the humiliation of the humiliator comes out clearly through the narrator and the characters he chooses. In line with the expectations of the short story genre, which requires one to be economical with words, Ntuli and Ntuli (1982) have gone an extra mile by designating Mbuthuma,

the main character in the story as part of the title. This skill stimulates questions such as 'What is important about the character, Mbuthuma'. The very small and seemingly insignificant joining word '-ke' in the title is so powerful as it hints to the direction the story might take. It suggests that the character, Mbuthuma is controversial. However, one has to read the entire story to get to the bottom of this controversy. This is where text-reception theories become valuable. Hall (1993) identifies three positions from which the text could be viewed by a reader: the dominant hegemonic position, the negotiated position and the oppositional position. From the analysis of the students' views on their reading of the text, which informs the article, the negotiated position is the most applicable because it points to an ability to decode the message (from the text) with the context of the dominant cultural and societal view.

The short story being explored is a story that tackles issues of domestic violence, which, in the 21st century, continue to affect women the African continent over. This is attested to through recent anecdotal evidence covered in numerous media, which reveal, amongst other atrocities, the raping of elderly women and young girls in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal [*Isolezwe* (14 March 2013, 3) and *Ilanga LaseNatali* (14–16 March 2013, 3)]. Being the most widely read newspapers (*Isolezwe* and *Ilanga LaseNatali*) in the province, the news was received with great concern. In some cases, not only are victims raped but they are also murdered as demonstrated in the case covered in Ngcobo (2013). Similarly, television news attested to the situation (SABC1, 18 March 2013, 19h30). Whilst most of the incidents mentioned above have allegedly taken place in rural areas, this situation is not restricted to those places, but they extend to urban areas, confirming that domestic violence knows no boundaries.

The article examines inherent gender-oppressive practices well explained through an exploration of men's violent behaviours prevalent in Zulu culture. The fact that this state of affairs is presented from the male author's perspective makes for an even stronger case for gender activists like us to engage with such texts with an aim of eliciting a discussion on these matters. Through analysis of the short story, 'entrenched' ways of thinking about gender oppression are brought forward with a purpose of contributing towards prospects of moulding transformed men who do not view culture as something to be followed blindly even where women's self-worth is compromised. Furthermore, in the twenty-first century, and within the context of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this deep-rooted issue should not even be a constant subject of debate.

Buikema and Smelik (1995:15) argue that women of all races and cultures have historically been denied certain rights, have been excluded from certain occupations and roles and have been marginalised. Concerned with issues of African women and Zulu women in particular, the article adopts African feminism as the theoretical framework underpinning it; a perspective that is very different from western feminism in that it fights for concerns affecting African women

in particular. Here, we can mention food, shelter, poverty and violence inflicted on women. Furthermore, African feminism believes in and promotes motherhood as well as sisterhood. It also respects culture and language. Motherhood is cherished in African feminism as it makes women special because they are the only ones who can bear children (Muthuki 2004:9). This stance is relevant in the article where, despite the fact that women in the selected short story have fulfilled maternal expectations in every sense, they are still treated with disrespect.

As the argument focuses on gender-based violence, an excerpt from a former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan (Annan 1999) in this context is relevant where he aptly puts the issue into perspective. He captures the state of gender-based violence accurately in the following statement:

Gender based violence is rooted in the historically unequal power relations (social, economic, cultural and political) between males and females. It takes many forms and can include physical, emotional or sexual abuse. It can occur in wartime or in times of peace. While both males and females can suffer from gender based violence, studies show that women, young women and children of both sexes are most often the victims. Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. As long as it continues we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace.

Coming back to the question of gender-based violence, practices such as polygyny render women in such unions precarious, and polygamy is not fundamentally restricted to African countries as it is also practised in the Middle East and America, for example (Philips & Jones 1990). Be that as it may, the root of the problem investigated in the article lies with Zulu people. Amongst studies that have been conducted on polygyny, Tabi's (2010) research is relevant for this discussion as her approach is from a clinical angle where she wants to discover the psychological and emotional strains that such marriages might have on women. Contrary to notions of jealousy amongst co-wives being the cause of frustration for women in such unions, in the short story the common 'enemy' is a man, Mbuthuma, the husband. His wives are constantly in fear of what he might do to them. In fact, Mbuthuma's wives, it would seem, draw strength from the sisterly bond that helps them stand together and which serves as a strategy to help them cope with their daily ordeals as Mbuthuma's spouses; a view advocated by African feminists.

The author has used a symbolic metaphor of fire, in naming his main character, Mbuthuma meaning furnace, *imbuthuma*. In their article, Zondi and Canonici (2005) offer a useful explanation of what imagery and symbolism mean. They contend that concepts can be described as a reference to or a description of something concrete by means of which the author wishes to express something else that is linked to it. They go on to say that what is being alluded to whilst using well-known and often striking imagery creates a clear impression of what is being said; and these can be things which are concrete, perceived by the senses or even abstract.

In the context of our short story, fire symbolises danger. An anthropologist, Mönnig (1967:105) views the name of the person to be much more than a mere appendage by which a person is addressed. Rather, it is an integrated part of the person that reflects his personality and his whole being. Taking the point further, Rosenthal (2005:59) argues that personal names perform 'evaluative roles as they are deeply embedded in the identity and culture'. In this sense, being a personal name, within a literary text, Mbuthuma is indeed a metaphor for danger; even to himself.

Through good choice of words, given in the following excerpt, we are made aware in the beginning of the story that Mbuthuma's wives were used to beating as a form of punishment:

Abe emcasulile lamakhosikazi amathathu. Kunokuba afake induku wathi uzowabophela. Wathatha intambo endewababophela emaqakaleniUbabophela maqede wathi abagijime bazungeze isibaya kathathu ...Bazungeza. Bazungeza. (Ntuli & Ntuli 1982:73–74). [His three wives had annoyed him. Instead of beating them up with a stick he fastened their ankles with a rope like a span of cattle. He told them to run around the kraal three times. They went round and round...]

The word *kunokuba*, meaning 'instead of', naturalises Mbuthuma's physical abuse of his wives. It means that giving his wives a hiding had become such a habit that it seemed acceptable. But one day they sustained a worse form of punishment: being harnessed like animals cultivating the fields. We are not even told the nature of the offence the women had committed to sanction such chastisement. The emphasis is on the man's feelings: how the women had caused him to feel annoyed. The fact that the degree of the transgression is not stated indicates the importance put on the man and his feelings as opposed to those of his wives. Being tied up on their ankles was a new form of punishment. The language used also suggests disrespect for women. They are treated as if they were children. The phrase *ukufaka induku*, to give someone a hiding, is normally used by mothers to their small children as a warning to stop whatever they are doing or else get a hiding. The status of women as adults is being undermined in phrases such as these as it is out of line when used for adults; worse mothers in their own right. Thus, we are made aware that the common form of punishment for Mbuthuma's wives was, as in the case of children, to be given a hiding. Harnessing was new; and we argue that they would get accustomed to it as well.

The last and worst form of punishment sustained by Mbuthuma's wives happen as a result of their noncompliance with tradition, which expects them to treat the utensils and crockery (amongst other things) belonging to the head of the family *umnumzane* with highest reverence. The poor women had forgotten to bring the earthenware inside the house after their husband had feasted on the contents. When Mbuthuma returned from his errands and found the items still lying outside, where he had sat whilst consuming the contents, his wives paid a high price.

He summoned them. They were so frightened. They never knew what to expect when his rage took the better of him. Amongst three forms of gender-based violence identified by Annan (1999) earlier, the emotional one stands out here. It is detectable in the doubtful speculations of what punishment Mbuthuma's wives think they might sustain. Each of the women's presuppositions illustrates their vulnerability:

MaKheswa: Kazi sizokwenziwani namhlanje?

Uthi sizobuye siboshelwe sizungeziswe isibaya?)

(I wonder what is going to be done to us today.)

Do you think we might be harnessed like a span of cattle again and run around the kraal?

MaHlengwa: Sishaywe kunye namhlanje!

(I have no doubts that we will be beaten up today.)

MaMfeka: Angisho ukuthi uzosishaya. Mhlawumbe...

(I do not think that he will beat us up. Perhaps...)

Even though the author presents the women's predicaments in a humorous manner (satire), it is apparent that they are fearful of their husband. What punishment did he resort to? Mbuthuma's blazing temper drove him to physically manipulate his wives' maternal organs; their breasts: a revolting form of brutality. This is what he declared and put into effect:

Namuhla ngizonisenga.... Eqinisweni kuthi angingene nani esibayeni ngiyonisengela khona njengazo zonke izinkomo. Nifana nazo nje nani ngaphandle kokuthi nina ningezikhulumayo. (Ntuli and Ntuli 1982:73). [Today I am going to milk you.... In fact I feel like taking you in the kraal and milking you there like cows. You are all like them with the difference that you are talking cows. Nonsense!]

The above scenario illustrates Mbuthuma's wayward character where, in anger, he transgresses one of the key cultural norms, where it is taboo for women to be found near cattle kraals. Whilst this action may be viewed as satire, it is actually unacceptable in the present context.

Mbuthuma also levies verbal abuse of a large degree to his wives when he uses derogatory language whilst 'milking them'. When he cannot get milk out of MaKheswa's breasts because of the fact that as an older wife she is beyond breastfeeding years, he refers to her as *isigqala*, a name used to describe a cow that does not provide milk. He says: *Sichitha isikhathi sami lesi sigqala lesi* (This milk-less cow is wasting my time). MaHlengwa is big as a result of recently having given birth. Mbuthuma refers to her postnatal physical appearance as *umvoondovondo*, an offensive term denoting an ugly look not befitting a woman; an above-average height and body weight. Lastly, he calls MaMfeka *imfukumfuku* because of her huge body and big breasts. Mbuthuma does not have vocabulary of affection towards his women whatsoever. It is distressing to see a man imbued with no affection for his wives at all. Why he married them in the first place is a point of conjecture!

It is also worth noting that for every evil Mbuthuma inflicts on his wives, he lays the blame on them. It is always all about him and the respect he commands from his wives. Before the

horrendous act on the day of milking his wives, he had sarcastically said to them:

Ngiyabona ukuthi niyedelela. Kokunye anelulekwanga kahle mhla niphuma emakini. ...Kumele ukuba baniyale ngokuthi izitsha zomnumzane ziyahlonishwa, noma ngabe lowo mnumzane mncanyana uyedeleleka njengami nje. [I can see that you are rude. Perhaps you were not taught in your families how to behave ... they were supposed to teach you when you got married that the utensils of *umnumzane* are respected even if he is a disrespectful one like me.]

In saying the above words, though sarcastic, Mbuthuma acknowledges that he does not deserve the respect of his wives for his brutality towards them; from beating them up to tying them with a rope like a span of cattle eventually milking them like cows. These women were literally treated like animals devoid of human dignity portraying gross domestic violence and gender-based violence. As maintained by De Klerk, Klazinga and McNeil (2007), repeated experience and patterns of behaviour reinforce existing social structures and practices as 'normal' and limit the potential for change. The culture of chauvinism, framed within a context of patriarchy, misogyny, gendered role constructions and gender inequality, which view women as potential subjugations, objectified and dehumanised, propagate gender violence (De Klerk *et al.* 2007). Whilst we are fully aware that the article is investigating a work of fiction, it demonstrates to a great extent the reality that women in some sectors are still prone to absurd forms of abuse at the hands of those close to them. In the maintenance of traditional hierarchy, these men see women as inferior; objects of pleasure and dominance.

Elaboration on the theme of the text

It cannot be contested that the various abusive forms exerted by Mbuthuma towards his wives constitute the theme of gender-based violence as reflected in the short story. By portraying Mbuthuma as some kind of a monster through his physical appearance and behaviour, the author of the selected short story paints a picture of a man who is ugly through and through. By creatively attending to detail in his appearance and behaviour, it seems that the author wants to prepare his readers for the downfall of this character. A person like that cannot go unpunished after the gross humiliation he has put his wives through. The fact that one of the wives' brothers confronts him when he finds him red-handed manipulating his sister's reproductive organs shows that he is not invincible. In shock, Ngqeku says:

Wenzani kodwa mkhwenyawethu?...Wenzani mkhwenyawethu kudawethu? (Ntuli & Ntuli 1982:77)
(What are you doing my brother-in-law?... What are you doing my brother-in-law to my sister?)

Mbuthuma's violent reaction towards his brother-in-law when he asked him a relevant question is the direct cause of his downfall and ultimately his change of heart. After an altercation that ensues between the two men and the wives'

support of Ngqeku, Mbuthuma finds himself humiliated beyond words when Ngqeku, taking a cue from his sister, takes the milk jar (with the contents from the women's breasts) and pours it into Mbuthuma's mouth. Even though he spits it out, an amount thereof had gone down his throat because he was breathing through his mouth when Ngqeku overpowered him. Powerless, he goes to sit under the shade—the place symbolically meant to suggest his transformation and ultimately his wives' emancipation. In the same way that a shade provides fresh air, Mbuthuma's wives were finally free from his bullying tendencies. Even though in anger he had threatened Ngqeku with a court order for coming to fight him in his homestead, in the finale the author leaves us with these words of hope:

Usathanda ukuzihlalela ngaphansi komthunzi. Akakaze amangale. Akukaze kwenzeke okunye (Ntuli & Ntuli 1982:79)
(He now loves to sit under the shade. He has never taken anyone to court. He has never repeated his cruel actions).

Presentation of male students' responses

After understanding gender issues found in the short story just presented, we now offer some remarks from male respondents to the question guiding the discussion. The question was: In a sentence share what your views on Mbuthuma are with regards the way he treats his wives in the short story studied.

In the class of 40 male students and 60 female students, more than 30 male students (constituting over 75%) gave negative responses to the question posed. They were either sarcastic or did not take the issue of violence against women seriously. We also observed, to our dismay, that 12 female students aligned themselves with the male students who had negative notions about the women in the story. Even though they make only 20% of the entire female group in class, that does not warrant silence. However, in the article, it is with responses from the masculine gender that we confine ourselves because it is their insolence during the class discussion that was the reason behind the conception of the article in the first place. Without being exhaustive, the 15 verbatim comments reproduced below serve as samples of responses obtained. Whilst the following remarks were made in isiZulu, for brevity they have been translated into and presented in English taking into account what was described earlier about the nature of translations:

1. 'But surely Mbuthuma's wives knew what provoked their husband's fury and as such should have stayed away from doing those things'.
2. 'They were not coerced into marrying their husband and therefore they were right to tolerate him'.
3. 'Mbuthuma did them a favour by marrying all of them in light of there being more women than males in all societies anyway'.
4. 'Mbuthuma loved his wives. Some form of physical abuse makes women respect their partners and take them seriously'.

5. 'The conversation that takes place among Mbuthuma's wives where they raise their fears about possible punishment they might get is an indication that they knew exactly what their husband expected of them at all times. His outrageous behaviour was not out of context. If you love your partner you must work hard to keep them happy so that there will be peace at all times'.
6. 'If only you knew what the ladies in our group said about Mbuthuma's actions towards his wives, you would be surprised to know that they do not think he is such a monster themselves'.
7. 'Well, Mbuthuma's punishment that he imposes on his wives was rather extreme. However, they were supposed to avoid anything that would trigger his anger'.
8. 'A woman who is properly raised in her family would not have met with the kind of wrath demonstrated by Mbuthuma. They call it upon themselves'.
9. 'Women must tolerate men because the ratio between men and women is disproportional. Even in this class the ratio of women to men is almost 2:1; an indication that if men focused on one woman other women would feel neglected'.
10. 'Oh give a man a break. He is practicing his manhood'.
11. 'Why are we making a storm out of a tea-cup? Women in this story have no problem with what they go through or they would abandon their men and return to their parents' homesteads. Also, does the bible not say women must humble themselves before their men?'
12. 'The women stand there staring at him when he suggests he will send them back to their homesteads. If they really thought he was a monster that was an opportunity to flee. But did they?'
13. 'As for me I am indifferent towards Mbuthuma's actions. I have nothing to say'.
14. 'It is a pity that the actions of women in this story are overlooked. Surely they are not 100% innocent'.
15. 'I think Mbuthuma is a funny man'.

Analysis of respondents' views

Current research suggests that there is a wide difference in attitudes and values about gender issues in sexual education from formative ages (Halstead & Waite 2001:60). The attitude and values from which the majority of male responses (and a small percentage of women) emanate point to social and cultural norms which most of the times include gender stereotypes. Morrell (2003:42) postulates that a culture of silence around sexuality in South Africa is partly responsible for gender violence and the continuation of these stereotypes and disempowers young girls (O'Sullivan *et al.* 2007:100). We contend that gender ideas about sexuality should not be viewed as fixed entities but that because they are actually constructed, institutions of higher learning have a role in deconstructing them. Tolman and McClelland (2011:2430) recommend that positive as well as the usual negative aspects of sexuality should be included in sexuality education for young people. The raw comments presented above and those which have not been mentioned here indicate that it remains a responsibility of everyone, institutions of higher learning in

particular, to make a contribution towards alleviation of the situation; otherwise, it will continue to aggravate such that the children of these students will continue to perpetuate the situation thus continuing the cycle. In fact, teachers involved in teaching at primary schools could make a positive impact in this regard (De Palma & Francis 2013).

It follows that in a discussion of this nature, it would seem legitimate to provide an analysis of the views of my respondents with an objective of exposing and cautioning against a 'culture of silence' around sexuality in South Africa, which is partly responsible for gender violence and continuing stereotypes that disempower women and young girls (Morrell 2003:42). Accordingly, we conceptualise the respondents' views as situated within socially constructed and gendered power relations (Clowes *et al.* 2009) as well as notions held by DePalma and Francis (2013) who argue that within the educational environment those in charge of influencing society such as teachers, sometimes, unknowingly, promote gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms. The appropriateness of these conceptualisations derive from the fact that of the 40 male students in the class who took the module that informs the article, more than 80% come from the Department of Education. Being in their third year of study, we argue that these students are left with 1 year before going out to the field to influence society. If nothing is done to correct their world view before they leave our institutions, their role as community builders will not yield positive results to the future of those entrusted to them.

The male responses are discussed within the themes of misogyny and patriarchy that run through them. The ignorance amongst male respondents towards hate speech such as 'Thula! Ngithi vala lo mlonzana wakho!' (Ntuli & Ntuli 1982:75) (Shut up, I say shut up this little mouth of yours) found in the text under review justifies the theme of misogyny. The general perception in the responses was that men are decision makers, which also validates the theme of patriarchy (see responses 1–15).

The first ever conference on gender-based violence held in Windhoek, Namibia, in 2007 revealed that women in the Southern African Development Community are continually victims of domestic violence inflicted on them usually by intimate partners (Kiremire 2007:100). Sadly, it is exposure to violence such as that demonstrated in this short story by Mbuthuma that render male respondents complacent and see women as being directly responsible for pain inflicted on them (see responses 1 and 7). Male responses in this study (see responses 5 and 8) attest to the reality of gender as a social construct. Because of socialisation that teaches women to be subservient, the characters in the story deprive themselves a right to happiness by constantly living in fear of their husband. These women characters represent women in real life who, because of indoctrination, remain victims of similar situations (Giddens 2001; Jenson & de Castell 2013).

The views of the respondents may be summed up as speaking of aspects of misogyny and patriarchy in that

women are supposed to obey the rules of their husbands; once married, women are supposed to endure marriage rather than enjoy it; the man has the prerogative to choose his wives and that the man is the rescuer of the woman.

Conclusion

It has been established in this study that African cultures epitomise patriarchy in which cultural practices are inherent and in that way translated through certain practices. Some of the patriarchal beliefs, whilst present in African cultures in general, do sometimes put emphasis on the relationship between men and women. It would thus be folly for any critical debate on patriarchal gender discourse not to mitigate women's grief. The article has illustrated that whilst gender issues are a universal concern, some societies are far more deeply affected by them than others as illustrated in the short story analysed and remarks by its Zulu male student readers. Through literature as a 'mirror' of society, the article has highlighted how issues of culture can be seen to perpetrate and justify violence against women. From the foregoing discussion, it has become apparent that all women deserve to be treated with fairness and justice, even in traditions where women play subservient roles, like the one depicted in the selected short story. Finally, fully aware that one of the characteristics of literary texts is that 'they never quite fit the critical grids that readers try to place over them' (Murray 1999:47), the analysis we have presented in the article are our own response to the reading of Ntuli's work of fiction.

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The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing the article.

Authors' contributions

N.B.Z. and T.J.M. contributed equally to the writing of this article.

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