



The presentation of male same-gender abuse in W.K. Tamsanqa's *Ithemba liyaphilisa*

B.B. Mkonto
Department of Language & Literature
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
PORT ELIZABETH
E-mail: bbmkonto@nmmu.ac.za

Abstract

The presentation of male same-gender abuse in W.K. Tamsanqa's *Ithemba liyaphilisa*

The aim of this article is to analyse the manner in which W.K. Tamsanqa depicts aggression initiated by males against other males and in so doing, engendering same-gender abuse in "Ithemba liyaphilisa". Tamsanqa identifies certain amaXhosa cultural practices as being socially oppressive in same-gender relations within families and society. In addition his presentation of the characters' continuation of traditional gender ideology will be explored to highlight familial conflict. These familial conflicts, seen as horizontal violence, are exacerbated by tribal laws and customs which reinforce vertical violence.

Opsomming

Die uitbeelding van mishandeling teenoor mans binne dieselfde geslag in W.K. Tamsanqa se *Ithemba liyaphilisa*

Die doel van hierdie artikel is om die manier te ontleed waarop W.K. Tamsanqa die aggressie van mans teenoor ander mans uitbeeld. Hierdie aggressie veroorsaak mishandeling binne dieselfde geslag in "Ithemba liyaphilisa". Tamsanqa identifiseer sekere kulturele gewoontes as sosiale verdrukking in verwantskappe binne dieselfde geslag in families en die gemeenskap. Sy aanbieding van karakters se voortsetting van die tradisionele geslagsideologie word ook ondersoek ten einde die familiekonflik uit te lig. Hierdie familiekonflikte, gesien as horisontale

geweld, word vererger deur stamwette en -gewoontes wat vertikale geweld versterk.

1. Introduction

This article examines the issue of male abuse in W.K. Tamsaqa's novel *Ithemba liyaphilisa*. Masculinity as one of the major aspects in a gender-theoretical perspective forms the theoretical framework. The article will argue that gender differences are important even within the same sex, and that these differences have not been studied in any serious way, even by gender theorists. By neglecting these differences, we may still be accused of allowing gender abuse. The differences are not only those between males and females. There are differences between females and females, males and males, females and children, males and children and children and children. The focus of this article is on the differences between males and males. It intends to show that even in African societies, gender is concerned with the dilemma of difference. Thus the theoretical approach to this article will be gender-based.

The power relations between genders have been extensively treated by African theorists like Nfah-Abbenyi (1997) and Lindsay and Miescher (2003) who applied their minds specifically to discover, assemble, interpret and study the role(s) of the sexes in history. According to Nfah-Abbenyi (1997:22) disparity in gender relations is to be found in sexual asymmetry, that is, the division of society into two distinct biological sexes and the sexual division of labour. These differences are multi-dimensional. They originate from a wide and diverse range of traditions and cultures and they have become what they are owing to varying degrees of enforcement. This article will further expand this delineation of the problems of power by arguing that there are important differences between males as a gender on their own, which are often not taken into account in studies of gender power relations. Writing about concepts in the study of African masculinity, Lindsay and Miescher (2003:4) argue that ideologies of masculinity are culturally and historically constructed and that their meanings are continually being contested and are always in the process of being renegotiated in the context of existing power relations. They add that Africa is one of the best sites for the study of gender identity construction, because of the particularly patriarchal nature of traditional African society and the changes it is now undergoing.

Their study is supported by others, such as those by Amadiume (1987), Matory (1994), Achebe (2000), Hodgson (1999), with her

five “generational masculinities” associated with the Maasai age sets, and by Cornwall (2003), who presents interesting case studies in being a man among members of different generations in a small Yoruba town. All these studies show that even within African patriarchy, gender differences apply, and are changing because of the change and westernisation in Africa.

Hierarchy emerges as one of the crucial components of gender criticism, because it plays a constitutive role in the establishment of the dilemma of difference. Since a gender analysis is intended to study a sex grouping in relation to another sex grouping and also to itself as well as to the way of designating cultural constructions, it is appropriate to look into the role of hierarchy as social practice (Tiger, 1970:60). Society is divided into “higher” and “lower” levels. The higher level is assigned more value and worth than the lower ranking and this perception develops and entrenches itself into a societal relationship of superior versus inferior groups or individuals. As soon as a social hierarchy is accepted by a given societal group, those who are in power actualise it by designing strategies and mechanisms for implementing it. One of the major strategies of those in power is to establish the “top” of the hierarchy as the goal to which all societal groups are called to aspire. Closely related to hierarchical social relations is patriarchy, which is a way of ordering reality in which one group, in this case, the male sex, is understood to be superior to the other, the female sex. The patriarch, especially in the African context, is usually a societal king or chief or elder who has legitimate powers over others in the social unit, which may be a family, tribe or community, including other men, all women and children (Pateman, 2004:119-124).

Regarding the concept of culture among human beings, Hegel, the contemporary philosopher of Marx, largely maintained that culture is the genuine expression of ideas and values that people hold. Marx, on the other hand, viewed culture as the responses of people to the material conditions of their lives. Marx’s ideas on the subject of social relationships and economy are better elucidated by Raymond Williams (1977) as cited by Davis and Schleifer (1989:370). He says that Marx’s sense of history reflects deep contradictions in the relationships of production and in the consequent social relationships that determine the society’s “superstructure” – its arts and ideology. In addition to this ideology Williams explicates the central tenet of Marxist literary criticism: that literature and art are social practices that cannot be separated from other kinds of social practice in such a way as to make them subject to quite special and distinctive laws.

This article takes the view that literature and art are related as social practices and are inseparable from socio-cultural behaviour.

The traditional notion of the "ideal man" is one of the most interesting socio-cultural phenomena. Rosenberg (1991:68) describes it as an outdoor type of male behaviour which possesses peculiar character traits such as "toughness, resourcefulness, love of being alone, fraternity with animals and attractiveness to women and the urge to abandon them". Close to this definition is the simple and well constructed description given by Pilcher and Whelehan (2004:82) who write that the "ideal man" is "the set of social practices and cultural representations associated with being a man". Regarding its plural form, masculinities, the two writers aver that it is used in recognition of the fact that masculinity varies "both historically and culturally between societies and between different groupings of men within any one society". Though any intensive debate about evaluations of masculinity and explanations of the links between masculinity and masculinities lies beyond the scope of this article, an interesting element of essentialism is raised by Robert Bly (1991) and Pilcher and Whelehan (2004:83). According to Bly (1991), masculinity is being damaged by conditions of modern society and so he "prescribes a remedy in the form of men-only retreats and bonding rituals". However, it must be said that this prescription may not be possible in some societies especially those where masculinity is understood as a form of power relationship, both among men themselves and between men and women. The focus of this article is definitely not "retreats and bonding rituals" but rather power relations among men. The arguments raised will essentially deal with the representation in the novel of the social contexts in which men live, their positions in their communities and institutions as well as in the context of the socially available discourses about maleness. Since no man is born an adult man, the first stage of preparation prior to manhood, namely boyhood, will also be considered.

When reading Tamsaqa's novel, *Ithemba liyaphilisa*, one is struck by the unpleasant relationships between characters of the same sex. The story is set in a remote traditional village called Qhorha, where a western lifestyle is practised by only a few families. Khohlela, father of the main character, Thole, is a renowned traditional dancer and a polygamist married to three wives. His first two wives are childless and when the third becomes pregnant, trouble starts. Thole is born into this undesirable environment and grows up under threat with the result that his mother runs away after escaping several attempts on her life. When she returns to steal him, a new life begins

for Thole who had envied other children going to school while his father forced him to herd his cattle. Thole's daring exploits as a boy and young man in the western lifestyle is fascinating and typifies any man whose worldview has dramatically opened up as he comes across the pitfalls and pleasures of the world. The underlying motifs of the novel are the common ideal male traits found among the amaXhosa, namely toughness and resourcefulness. In what follows I will analyse the manner in which Tamsanqa presents abusive elements in the pursuit of the golden principle of maleness among amaXhosa males as exemplified by the experiences of Thole. Different forms of the development of maleness in respect to male same-gender abuse will be discussed.

2. Man-to-man abuse

Misuse of cultural power emerges very early in the novel. Khohlela, who is the councillor of King Sarhili of amaGcaleka, is invited by King Sandile of the amaRharhabe to a traditional dance. As a renowned traditional dancer, he immediately shows his skills and outclasses all other dancers. King Sandile is very impressed and announces his intention to keep him in his own land. He informs the amaGcaleka people that Khohlela is being held as a model dancer at the amaRharhabe kraal, adding that:

Ngokwesithethe sethu apha
kwaRharhabe ingxilimbela
nentyulubi enje ngalo mfo
wasemaKwayini asibuyi sahlukane
nayo xa sithe sahlangu nayo.

(Tamsanqa, 1979:14.)

*According to our cultural traditions as
Rharhabe, we cannot let go a tall
and hefty good traditional dancer
like this man from the amaKwayi
clan after we have met him.*

Khohlela is enthralled by king Sandile who wants him to stay among his people because he is a good traditional dancer. King Sandile denies Khohlela the right to live with his family and forces him to stay in his territory. He uses his power to force him to leave his family and entices him by promising him a house, a herd of cattle and a wife. Khohlela has to obey because of the king's royal position. In this way cultural abuse is meted out to an honest and a traditional law-abiding man who does not question the decision of the king, even though Sandile is not his own king.

Sandile's actions should also be seen as an ill-conceived decision driven by selfish interests to marshal excellent entertainers for the amaRharhabe at the expense of dispossessing a family man and warrior of the amaGcaleka. He oversteps his "political bounds by seeking the status of senior masculinity" in using the cultural symbol of dancing as the main reason for abducting Khohlela (Obeng, 2003:205). He thinks only of the interests of the amaRharhabe – if not of his own.

Khohlela succumbs to this cultural power, because it is not only an acknowledgement of his talent, but also an enhancement of his reputation. However, his popularity emphasises the fact that African culture, like any other, is saturated with what Goldberg (1991:62) calls "successful male zombies". His willingness to accept and play by the rules of the game is typical of men who lose touch with, or are running away from, their feelings and awareness of themselves as people. In a sense, this is acceptable exploitation to the victim who seems to gladly don the social mask since it implies that he fulfils the traditional definitions of masculine appropriate behaviour in his community. Such tolerated and acceptable abuse frequently brings benefits to both the victim and the offender. In the case of Sandile, he is being entertained for a number of years by the best dancer in greater Xhosaland. Khohlela, the victim, harvests a priceless reward from cultural domination. During his stay in the Rharhabe area of King Sandile, Khohlela does not think about his two barren wives at home. Instead, he arranges for a third wife by whom he is to beget an only son.

Emerging from this episode is the cultural practice which requires people to conform to norms and values of their nation even if these social artefacts carry elements of oppression. Although Khohlela and King Sandile are both traditionalists, King Sandile is using his autocratic powers to exploit Khohlela. In this case the misuse of cultural power occurs among people who share the same traditional values. In a sense, it raises the perception of a victim engaging in conformist abuse. The social control placed on the individual means that he/she is called upon to do things they would not choose to do were they placed in a situation completely free to decide, or not do things they probably would do were they free to choose.

3. Man-to-boy same-gender abuse

A persistent question in the perpetuation of same-gender abuse is why male adults, in spite of their own remembered pain, inflict similar pain on their sons. Many men still remember how they felt in

their own childhood, yet they continue the process with their own offspring. Carby (1987:76) emphasises the fact that painful practices mark the passage to adulthood for both males and females in many societies. It is common to find individuals who have struggled hard to reach certain levels of life insisting that others must undergo the same struggle. This is a stressful situation for both men and women. Compulsory rites of passage are very important in socialising men in particular to accept these constraints.

We live most of our daily lives in settings such as households and societies where traditional customs obtain. The family household is constituted by a number of rules that define the traditional social hierarchy. The social hierarchy reflects ideas that young women are subordinate to old women and young men subordinate to old men. Thus, the same-gender structure of social inequality is maintained and is determined by age, family status as well as bravery. This structure of social inequality is more pronounced among male members of the society especially among boys who strive to assert themselves on the social ladder (see below). The structure of social inequality has much to do with same-gender abuse. Customs and traditions are the main indicators of male and female social status. Cultural traditions always limit the public role of young people. They must conform to traditional ideas and cultural values. Tolson (1977: 22) reminds us that parents tend to reproduce what they have learned from their own parents and this is enshrined in clichés such as “big boys don’t cry” or “boys will be boys”. Tamsanqa probably had this in mind in presenting the father-son relationship of Khohlela and Thole.

Khohlela deprives his son, Thole, of educational opportunities. When the latter sees other children going to school, he also wishes to go and naturally, like other children, wants to experience what others do. He is disappointed by his father’s negative response and anger, “ethetha into eninzi ebuza into yokuba uza kuthi, xa elibele kukuya kuchitha ixesha esikolweni, zaluswe ngubani iinkomo zakhe” (Tamsanqa, 1979:37) (*saying many things and asking who is going to look after his cattle while he spends time at school*). This incident confirms the scepticism of Khohlela regarding formal education which is based on the belief that going to school is a waste of time. It is a belief set against the background of traditional life where the boys are expected to look after the cattle. In order to be considered as a man of status, someone must have a herd of cattle. Khohlela deprives Thole of educational opportunities. This proves that he does not care about the future of his son, and is rather prepared to

make personal compromises to suit his own desires. He stubbornly defends his own male prerogatives in the family by arguing that he is protecting his family and son against the onslaught of western and Christian influences on the lifestyle of his people.

Thole is subtly influenced by his father to embrace the fact that manhood is a perpetual future, a vision of inheritance and an emptiness waiting to be filled (Tolson, 1977:22). Subsequently, Thole reluctantly accepts the situation, because, as a boy, he also senses that his destiny is somehow bound up with an image of his father. Thus Thole's identification with his father becomes the foundation of all his childhood experiences.

As Tolson (1977:25) suggests, a boy's achievement of masculine identity gradually becomes a quest for resolution as he strives to fulfil a compulsive need for recognition and reward. Thole envies other village children who attend school. He is thus caught in the middle and begins to develop an ambivalent feeling towards his father, seeing his father as both a perfect gentleman and a cruel man who denies him the right to go to school. In containing his frustrations, Thole cherishes the hope that one day he will attend school. The author presents his hope in this fashion:

... kodwa alizange liphele ithemba lokuba uya kuze aye kweziya zindlu, akayeka nokuhlala ecaleni kwendlela abukele abantwana besikolo xa baya esikolweni (Tamsaqa, 1977:37).

... but his hope that he one day would go to those houses never came to an end, he never stopped sitting next to the road watching scholars going to school.

This can be understood as an implicit reference to norms and values espoused by Khohlela who regards school as a place for those people who do not respect the ancestors. In this instance, there is a suggestion of definite culturally imposed ideas about the old and young and their appropriate attitudes, values and behaviour to one another. In our households there are those members of the family who must conform to all the cultural constraints. Sometimes they are forced to conform without considering the time and educational level of the victims. This leads to a clash of cultural values and the young ones are subjected to cultural values which are in essence abusive.

Dress code is another area that excites an adult male. Thole returns from the mines of Johannesburg and as a typical amaXhosa boy, buys strange attire intended to impress girls and other boys. On

seeing his beloved son dressed in that manner, Fikizolo, his foster father, calls Thole to order saying:

Imikhuba yehagu injengale yakho kanye ke mfo wam. Ihagu njengokuba uyibona ungayikhupha phaya ehokweni uyihlambe, uthi wakugqiba uyifake kweyona ndawo icocekileyo uzama ukuba ingaphindi ingcole, kodwa ... iya kuthi ukuphuma kwayo kuloo ndawo icocekeleyo iye iphala eludakeni ifike iziqika-qike kulo ithi ukusuka apho uyive imbombozela ithetha yodwa isithi, 'ndibhadle mu!' Wenza loo mikhuba yehagu kanye wena ngoku njengokuba ndikujongile nje. (Tamsanqa, 1979:117.)

The habits of a pig are like yours my son. As you know, you may take a pig out of its sty and wash it and then put it in a clean place hoping that it will not be dirty again, ... it will gallop to the mud and roll over and afterwards will move out mumbling alone saying 'I'm clever'. You are behaving exactly like a pig does as I am looking at you.

The verbal abuse couched in the pig imagery is unmistakable: Thole is placed on the same level of filthiness. Fikizolo, the western civilized and Christian man, is astounded to see his foster son behaving like this. He who had been taught to maintain the high standard of a western lifestyle befitting an educated family in the midst of an environment which still embraces traditional outfits. He castigates him knowing that the young man is someone who, by tradition, is not allowed to retaliate. Indeed, the pig comparison by Fikizolo would arouse the ire of a man of the same age. Such a same-age confrontational scenario is set up in the next section.

4. Boy-to-boy same gender abuse

The socialisation of boys differs among cultures in the ways which aggressive and violent display are encouraged. There are, of course, great variations between individual boys as well as between social classes. Tolson (1977:22) correctly observes that the "foundations of masculinity are laid down in boyhood, in a boy's experience of family, school, and his peers". Each boy's family provides the basic emotional orientation which is later extended to other institutions like school, church and peer groups in the community. Tolson (1977:22) argues that the family, school and peer group, together make up the primary context of masculine socialisation. I believe therefore that the institutionalisation of boys leads to a sense of self-identification which is directed into socially acceptable behaviour. The generalised conception of maleness represented in literature suggests that the "central concern and capacity of males for

toughness, bravery, confident assertion, violence and related phenomena is probably species-specific" (Tiger, 1970:182-183). There emerges in a boy a feeling of ambivalence about his masculinity and so he begins to feel the need to prove himself among his peers. A masculine sensibility develops an awareness of the power conferred upon men by the society in which they live.

Thole's habit of sitting next to the road and watching scholars going to school lays him open to verbal abuse by the school boys. They call him *iqaba*, meaning an illiterate raw heathen. When they see him they chase him away, insult him, and they throw stones at him. Themba, one of his leading persecutors, once charged that:

Uyazi ukuba iincwadi zam izolo ndithe xa ndifika esikolweni ndafika zinembola, azosulelwa leli qaba kodwa? Qabandini ungabuye uphinde uhlale ecaleni kwale ndlela uza kusosulela ngembola. Ukuba ndikhe ndaphinda ndafika uhleli apha uya ... (Tamsaqa, 1979:37).

Do you know that when I arrived at school yesterday my books were smeared with ochre, were they not smeared by this heathen? You heathen, never sit next to this road again because you will smear us with ochre. If I come across you seated here you are ...

The author tactfully cuts out Themba's swear word and leaves it to our imagination by employing an ideophonic expression, "watsho wamthi sintsilili ngesithuko" (*he weighted him with a vulgar expression*). This is ironic. A literate boy, Themba, becomes a reviler, using indecent language against someone who has done absolutely nothing to warrant such a verbal attack. What is, however, evident in this attack is beautifully described by Tolson (1977:33) when he says that the whole world of childhood both inside and outside the family is oriented towards the confirmation of gender identity. Themba, like other boys of his age and perhaps those younger or older than him, learns appropriate forms of behaviour and picks up other strange habits from his peer-group. The masculine aggression that Themba shows against Thole is a fact of life.

Nofundile, Thole's mother, takes him away from Qhorha and arranges that he goes to school for the first time in Zazulwana, a village close to Butterworth. The writer skilfully portrays him as an object of ridicule. The author also presents the clothes his mother gives him to wear on his first day as a spectacle. Tamsaqa (1979:100) writes:

Enye into eyayibabulala ngentsini abantwana lelo waxu-waxu lehempe lalimtsho abe lixazi-xazi nje akuma ngeenyawo, akuhlala phantsi imthi wambu abe ngathi ufakwe engxoweni, akuhamba itsho ngengxolo abe ngathi ukhaba iseyile.

Another thing which makes them laugh at him is the large shirt he is wearing which makes him look awful when standing, and when seated it covers his whole body as if he is in a hessian bag, and when walking it produces a noise as if he is kicking canvas.

The presentation of Thole's appearance on his first day in school is a tactical ploy by the author who is keen to introduce him to a new life experience. Thole is wearing modern clothing for the first time in his life and is exposed for the first time to the company of many boys of his age assembled in the same place, the school. He is therefore presented as an easy target for ridicule and abuse.

Tiger (1970:182) observes that maleness typically involves bravery, speed and the use of force. He admits that though there are enormous intercultural variations in the definitions of maleness and femaleness, there are also some core characteristics that most cultures attach to males and females. Males are without any doubt inclined to mastery of the environment and "a creative rather than reactive interference with physical and social realities". On the other hand boys, by nature, look to their fathers and other male role models. Logically, boyhood experiences are romanticised and it is no wonder that they frequently engage in daring exploits and dramatic confrontations. All these daring activities foreshadow the patterns of adult mastery which in part comprise the manly adult style.

Goldberg (1991:60) believes that most males live in harness and that some have little awareness that their male harness is choking them until their personal life crumbles and falls apart. This harness develops at a very early age when boys start to develop a deep, resonant "masculine" voice which enables them to enjoy the attention not only of the opposite sex but also of their peer group. It is in this state that a boy begins to embark on role-playing masculinity and in so doing neglects his own personal feelings which would otherwise detract from his "male image". The boy easily loses touch with, or runs away from, his feelings and awareness of himself as a person and unwittingly wears a social mask fulfilling the traditional definition of boyhood: "masculine-appropriate behaviour" (Goldberg, 1991:62). Such a condition is subtly demonstrated by the behaviour of the young school boys found in *Ithemba liyaphilisa*.

The unwritten or unrecorded cultural practice of status assertion (a human phenomenon) among adolescent amaXhosa boys is a very interesting dimension of same-gender abuse. This appears to be an accepted norm. A new arrival is customarily tested by others in order to rearrange the pecking order of the group which is determined by prowess and skill at stick fighting. The practice of establishing a social position is beneficial in terms of respect and dignity. However, it causes physical pain and frustration. The young Thole's first experience of school is marked by the usual boys' teasing, coaxing him to fight. He is harshly welcomed when he is challenged by Zola, a boy of his age who suddenly attacks him:

Qhwaa ngempama, 'Uthi ungeza kubani kwedini?' Watsho uZola ebetha uMangaliso. Uthe xa afuna ukuphinda kwanqandwa. (Tamsaqa, 1979:93.)

He slapped him, 'Do you think you can fight me boy?' Zola asked as he was beating Mangaliso. When he wanted to beat him again he was restrained.

Thole does not fight back; he is shocked, surprised and a bit uncertain whether he should fight since he has just become a Christian, living in a Christian family. Perhaps the surprise is also caused by the disorderly manner in which Christian children arrange for such boys' teasing instead of setting out a day for an orderly stick fighting session as is customary in a traditional set-up. Nevertheless, Simphiwe comes to his rescue and hits Zola.

The generalised conception of maleness among amaXhosa as presented by Tamsaqa in *Ithemba liyaphilisa* seems to prepare boys for a gruelling future. In the above incident Thole is physically abused while still undergoing the emotional stress caused by the verbal abuse inflicted on him by all the school boys except Simphiwe, his stepbrother.

Young males seek self-validation. Tiger (1970:183) sees the self-validation of boys as a process of attachment to specific male peers and superiors who become defined as the "significant others" with respect to whom the individual seeks validation. He adds that the process of attachment itself facilitates the effort of validation and in fact leads to a demand that satisfactory evidence of maleness be a prerequisite for group membership. However, he admits that validation does not occur only once. The need for validation recurs throughout the different stages of the male's career and is expressed by the different symbols of success, achievement, power, goodness and many other desirable aspects. Ceremonies of initia-

tion or *rites de passage* chiefly signify changes in criteria by which individuals are judged and ranged.

On the day set for welcoming Thole, Themba helps them to prepare stickfighting Zola. Thole does not make any move to face them, but Sonwabo commands them to attack Thole, saying

'Yibetheni maan izokusukela ingca', watsho uSonwabo. Wathi ukuba atsho zamilela uThole. Zathi ukungena kwazo ezi ntwana zombini zimhlanganyele zanga ngamaxhalanga engena ehasheni. (Tamsanqa, 1979:102.)

'Beat him to make him flee', Sonwabo said. When he said this, they both attacked Thole like vultures devouring a dead horse.

Hunter (1979:160) correctly observes that fighting with sticks is a constant occupation of the amaXhosa. It is thus not surprising to find that there are boys who give themselves the task of arranging these fights. Sonwabo is such a character. He knows that whoever declines a challenge is regarded as a coward and like all boys would rather die in battle than risk being called a "coward" or "not man" enough. This is an unsaid rule in a society in which the law of the jungle applies. Goldberg (1991:62) is of the view that the male's inherent survival instincts have been stunted by the seemingly more powerful drive to maintain his masculine image. The preoccupation with being good at maintaining an unquestioned masculine image is often propelled by a hypersensitive concern over what others thought about him as a "boy". This is how a boy is socially fixed and fitted into his male harness early in his teens so that he can become a brave and fearless male adult prepared to defend his family, community, tribe and country when the need arises. Alas, for Thole who does not want to fight, the converse applies. He is regarded as a coward and so, in the eyes of Sonwabo, the instigator of fights and the perpetuator of this unsaid rule, deserves to be punished.

5. Reversal of roles: perpetrator becoming victim of abuse

Sandile, the earlier abuser of Khohlela, is later in the novel challenged by Sarhili, a senior king of amaXhosa. The issue of Khohlela is brought to a head when Sarhili tries to impose his authority over Sandile. After a protracted debate with his councillors, Sarhili alludes to past strife between his amaGcaleka and the amaRharhabe of Sandile. He interprets Khohlela's continued abduction as an indica-

tion of disloyalty from Sandile. Thus he shows his royal superiority by sending his councillors to Sandile saying:

Kuko konke oku kwenziwe ngumntakwethu ke mawethu ndiphetha ngelithi, ndimfunu apha uKhohlela. Yizani naye. Ukuba akanakho ukumkhulula yazini mhlophe lifile ilizwe kumaGcaleka namaRharhabe, into ke leyo engathandekiyo, ukuphakamiselana izikhali kwabantu bezalana. (Tamsaqa, 1979:17.)

Fellows, in all that has been done by my cousin-brother, I conclude by saying, I want Khohlela here. Bring him here. If he can not release him know full well that war will break out between the Gcalekas and Rharhaves despite it being undesirable for close relatives to fight.

King Sarhili registers his suspicions about the Khohlela issue and interprets it as a threatening deed that challenges his own authority and his people. The reference to Sandile as his brother is proper, because they are indeed cousins who share a blood relationship. According to Sarhili, a blood relationship which threatens the security of his subjects and undermines his own authority deserves settlement even if it means loss of life in war. The manner in which he has lost a single person, Khohlela, to the amaRharhabe is viewed as a contemptible and a despicable act. King Sarhili is prepared to declare war even against his brother, not only to punish Sandile but also to regain any loss of dignity caused by the Khohlela issue as well as to reaffirm his own prestige, courage and valour. It would therefore not be incorrect to view King Sarhili's response to the Khohlela crisis as typical of the male preoccupation with war in which fearlessness and military power are displayed.

According to Tiger (1970:81) there is a very rigid relationship between force and maleness which can be observed cross-culturally. Tiger further proposes that organised aggression remains an all-male phenomenon, in part as a result of human evolutionary history. He ascribes the political order, which is also a male concern, as deriving from the same history (Tiger, 1970:84). In view of this assertion, it is not unnatural for King Sarhili, who is a proud and brave warrior, to feel that he cannot sit back and look on while one of his brave warriors and best entertainers is unceremoniously kept in thrall.

A reversal of roles is now displayed. Sandile who had earlier kept Khohlela in his power by, among other things, rewarding him with a wife and cattle, is subjected or degraded to a lower rank. Sandile

becomes the victim who, to avoid war, submissively and humbly hands Khohlela over to his king, saying to the emissary councillors:

Mawethu, ngenene isenzo sam ibingesiso sandelelo nakuqhwaya chuku, bendifekethela nje umntakwethu. Ndifumana udano olukhulu nomothuko kukuva ukuba isenzo sam simkhathazile. Ngoko ke uKhohlela ndiyamkhulula abuyele kokwabo. Nenjenjalo mawethu ukundicelela uxolo kumkhuluwawam, nithi ndithi, tarhw'ameva, lingaqumbi liqalekise ithole lesilo. (Tamsanqa, 1979:18.)

Fellow men, indeed my actions were not directed at either undermining or causing discord; it was brotherly sport with my brother. I am greatly disappointed and shocked to hear that my action has troubled him. So I release Khohlela to go back to his home. Fellow men, kindly extend my apologies to my elder brother and tell him that I say I am sorry; the calf of the animal must not be wrathful and cursing.

Sandile is portrayed here as being emotionally vulnerable to another man, Sarhili. His own masculinity is indirectly undermined, by his submission to the latter's authority and the resultant apology. The eulogising reference to the calf of an animal is frequently used by *iimbongi* (traditional poets) and signals the highest point of Sandile's submission. While *iimbongi* are expected to use such phrases as subjects and subordinates of kings and chiefs, it is rather discomfiting and almost dishonourable for another king, even if he is junior, to make such a proclamation. The reader can easily detect that Sarhili has successfully proved his own masculinity and virility without even personally confronting Sandile.

Connell (1995) as cited by Lindsay & Miescher (2003:89) examines the concept of hierarchy and relations of power and discovers the idea of "hegemonic masculinity" with "subordinate" or "subversive" variants. Though this appears to be a reasonable model, Lindsay & Miescher (2003:80) is critical of its shortcomings for it "fails to recognize historical and cultural situations within which several hegemonic forms of masculinity may coexist". However, Connell's comment about masculinity occupying a higher rank than femininity in the gender hierarchy is pertinent to African societies. One may add that a similar hierarchy may be experienced where some men occupy a higher rank than others. There is indeed what he calls "hegemonic masculinity" which is a culturally dominant ideal of masculinity centred on authority, physical toughness and strength. The above incident testifies to amaXhosa hegemonic masculinity. King Sarhili occupies a higher rank in royal circles than Sandile. The latter occu-

pies the next level, called by Connell "complicit masculinity". The response of Sandile to Sarhili's macho style is amazingly subservient.

The reversal of roles is also registered in the boys versus boys' same-gender abuse. The author reveals reasons why victim of abuse did not retaliate Fikile, Thole's godfather, once told the latter that '*umfana waseNazarethe*' (the young man from Nazareth, i.e. Jesus Christ) does not allow boys to engage in fights. Had it not been for this ideological reason given to Thole, he would have definitely fought back. When the abuse of Thole is reported to Fikile he comes to the rescue by saying to Thole,

Umfana waseNazarethe akalifuni igwala, akatsho ukuthi umntu makabethwe ziintanga zakhe angalwi. (Tamsaqa, 1979:103.)

The young man from Nazareth does not want a coward, he does not say someone must allow himself to be beaten by his peers without fighting back.

Fikile's change of heart is not surprising considering that though he is a leading Christian man he espouses the societal belief that "boys will always be boys". Thole's response to this freedom to fight is to challenge all his tormentors, namely Themba and Zola, to a stick fight. He beats them as well as Sonwabo, the fight promoter. From that day on Thole established himself among his peer group.

6. Conclusion

The core argument of this article is that cultural norms, values and beliefs shape the ideology of masculinity in the portrayal of gender among the amaXhosa in particular and Africans in general. My attempt to explore and analyse the manner in which W.K. Tamsaqa employs the device of aggression initiated by males against other males through the forms of men against other men, men against boys and boys against other boys to exemplify the social malady called same-gender abuse is rather ambivalent. It intends to show, as in the Khohlela-Thole case, that the cultural constraints of amaXhosa are imposed on men and boys causing them to commit cruel acts indiscriminately against one of their own sexual grouping. The writer presents characters who think that it is a good thing to emulate their grandfathers. The onslaught of Sonwabo and other boys on Thole typifies the informal and basic emotional orientation of boyhood in the cultures of peer groups. Potentially abusive tribal laws and customs may have a crippling effect on the lives of their victims. However, it should be admitted that in some cases, as in the

Khohlela-King Sandile case above, the converse is equally true. Finally, the reversal of abuse as shown above appeals to the same male characteristics: authority, self-assertion, competitiveness, physical strength and aggression.

List of references

- ACHEBE, N. 2000. Farmers, traders, warriors and kings: female power and authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. (Ph.D. Thesis.)
- AMADIUME, I. 1987. Male daughters, female husbands: gender and sex in an African society. London: Zed.
- BLY, R. 1991. Iron man: a book about men. Dorset: Element.
- CARBY, H.V. 1987. Reconstructing womanhood. New York: Oxford University Press.
- CORNWALL, A.A. 2003. To be a man is more than a day's work: shifting ideals of masculinities in Ado-Odo, South-western Nigeria. (In Lindsay, L.A. & Miescher, S.F., eds. Men and masculinities in modern Africa. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.)
- DAVIS, R.C. & SCHLEIFER, R. 1989. Contemporary literary criticism. New York: Longman.
- GOLDBERG, H. 1991. In harness: the male condition. (In Ashton-Jones, E. & Olson, G.A., eds. The gender reader. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. p. 60-62.)
- HODGSON, D.L. 1999. "Once intrepid warriors": modernity and the production of Maasai masculinities. *Ethnology*, 38(2):121-150.
- HUNTER, M. 1979. Reaction to conquest. Cape Town: Phillip.
- LINDSAY, L.A. & MIESCHER, S.F. 2003. Men and masculinities in modern Africa. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- MATORY, J.L. 1994. Sex and empire that is no more: gender and the politics of metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- NFAH-ABBENYI, J.M. 1997. Gender in African women's writing. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- OBENG, P. 2003. Gendered nationalism: forms of masculinity in modern Asante of Ghana. (In Lindsay, L.A. & Miescher, S.F., eds. Men and masculinities in modern Africa. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p. 205.)
- PATEMAN, C. 2004. Fraternal social contract. (In Adams, R. & Savran, D., eds. The masculinity studies reader. Malden: Blackwell. p. 119-124.)
- PILCHER, J. & WHELEHAN, I. 2004. Fifty key concepts in gender studies. London: Sage.
- ROSENBERG, H. 1991. Masculinity: style and cult. (In Ashton-Jones, E. & Olson, G.A., eds. The gender reader. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.)
- TAMSANQA, W.K. 1979. Ithemba liyaphilisa. Alice: Lovedale.
- TIGER, L. 1970. Men in groups. London: Nelson.
- TOLSON, A. 1977. The limits of masculinity. London: Tavistock.

Key concepts:

masculinity
patriarchy
same-gender
socialist realism

Kernbegrippe:

dieselfde-geslag
manlikheid
patriarg (aartsvader)
sosialistiese realisme