

## Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)


Volume 7 No. 2, September 2018

pp. 87-101

[ersc.nmmu.ac.za](http://ersc.nmmu.ac.za)

ISSN: 2221-4070

### Men's perceived powers to destroy or rebuild women's lives: Analysis of gender stereotypes portrayed in *Uthando Lungumanqoba*

Sicelo Ziphozonke Ntshangase   
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
[ntshangases2@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ntshangases2@ukzn.ac.za)

#### Abstract

This article is aimed at challenging gender stereotypes portraying men as a powerful species that can either destroy or build the lives of women. Using the critical approach to literature called feminist literary criticism, which embraces pluralism of feminist ideologies, this investigation depicts how gender stereotypes and the abuse of women nearly destroyed the life of a young girl in an isiZulu novel titled *Uthando Lungumanqoba* [*Love Conquers All*], by Maphili Shange. This woman author allows the character of Phindile, a young girl who lost both her parents at the age of 17, to be rescued from the clutches of poverty and prostitution by a man named Thulani—which shows how gender stereotypes have equally infested the psyches of both men and women.

**Keywords:** cultural values, feminist literary criticism, gender-based violence, gender stereotypes, women's rights

Copyright: © 2018 Sicelo Ziphozonke Ntshangase

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License, which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

**Please reference as:** Ntshangase, S.C. (2018). Men's Perceived Powers to Destroy or Rebuild Women's Lives: Analysis of Gender Stereotypes Portrayed in *Uthando Lungumanqoba*. *Educational Research for Social Change*, 7(2), 87-101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2018/v7i2a6>

#### Introduction

This article is written with the aim of interrogating gender stereotypes and gender violence in the post-1994 South African context when women's rights became enshrined in the Constitution of 1996. I believe that the argument raised in this investigation will promote social justice and change in the way that some South Africa men treat women. The novel, *Uthando Lungumanqoba* [*Love Conquers All*], by Maphili Shange (2005), which is the main source of the data used in this investigation, is set in a South African township called Mpumalanga, south of the harbour city of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. The characters in the novel live an urban life, which is characterised by modern challenges such as unemployment, poverty, and crime.

The article engages with the concepts of patriarchy and masculinity that are portrayed in the novel. These concepts are linked to notions, institutions, and systems of oppression or “cultural values and norms [that] serve to condone and reinforce abusive practices against women” (Kim & Motsei, 2002, p. 1243). Ngcobo (2015, p. 32) was of the opinion that “in South African society, cultural and patriarchal attitudes and beliefs regarding physical abuse against women are still entrenched.” It is critical, therefore, that this article, in its analysis of the novel, should point out the failure of institutions of protection such as the police service. It is also necessary to unpack the notions of culture and society as institutions, and how the notions of privilege and subjection are produced and perpetuated in the novel. Given that the article uses a critical feminist lens, it is significant that I do not link the behaviour of masculinity and patriarchy to particular men (such as the character in the novel, Chris Zwane, or the police officer who failed to help Phindile when she came to report rape at the police station) but, rather, to the troubled and inefficient system that sustains such behaviour.

Culture is dynamic, not static, but patriarchal men are convinced that culture does not alter when times change; instead, they “cling to the old ways of what it means to be a man, in order to protect their masculinity” (Hadebe, 2010, p. 5). Such men fail to engage in issues of gender equality because of their convictions that women are inferior and that men’s superiority was ordained by God and therefore should not be challenged (Morrell, 2001). The way that some men view their masculinity not only means that they view themselves as the heads of their families but also extends to the workplace because men have dominated the marketplace for centuries (Connell, 2001).

Research (Boezak, 1999; Glascock & Preston-Schreck, 2004; Hamlin, 2005; Shope, 2004) has shown that the inequality between women and men leads to physical and emotional abuse where women are often used as sexual objects designed to appease and gratify men. This kind of abuse is projected in the novel, *Uthando Lungumanqoba*. Buthelezi (2006) was against the idea of portraying women as vulnerable victims who cannot protect themselves. She argued that the “negative portrayals of women can also mask and even undermine the power that women can exercise to control their lives and resist violence and abuse” (Buthelezi, 2006, p. 507).

It is believed that gender stereotypes begin to manifest when children are still young (Kollmayer, Schober, & Spiel, 2016, p. 5):

*Children begin to show gender typical interests and behaviour at an early age. Pre-schoolers already associate toys, clothes, domestic appliances, occupations, and colours with one gender or another, which is also reflected in their behaviour, preferences and personality attributes.*

It is clear that culture and socialisation also play an integral role in shaping gender stereotypes because of societal pressure on men and women to behave in the manner that is believed to be suitable for their gender (Kollmayer et al., 2016).

The following leading questions are linked to the themes that are deduced from the novel.

- How do the cultural values of respect, trust, and authority build or destroy a relationship between a man and a woman in a South African context?
- How do South African women understand the power to change their lives without being dependent on men?
- How is the notion of marriage viewed in the South African context, especially by the Zulus?

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this investigation is feminist literary criticism. This theory is suitable for the article because the work under investigation is a fictional narrative that gives accounts of violence against women and portrays gender stereotypes and gender inequality. Although there is an interplay with a non-literary theory of psychoanalysis or anthropology in the narration of the characters' experiences, words, and actions in the novel, *Uthando Lungumanqoba*, the preferred theory is feminist literary criticism. I prefer this theory because it focuses mainly on analysing the literary text instead of reducing the analysis to a mere scholarly contribution that conforms to a set of theories that are not related to the text itself.

It is of paramount importance that I explain succinctly what feminism is. To this end, I believe that the work of Butler (1988, 1999, 2004) presents the social scripts and institutional policing of gender identities, power, and privilege. Butler challenged the "ontological insufficiency" (1988, p. 529) in the use of the term feminism. Butler (1988) argued that feminism is not merely about emancipating women from men's oppression; she claimed that it is society that has to be emancipated from the theatrical acts or performances that, for centuries, have perpetuated the generally accepted norms of how men and women should act or behave. Butler elevated the debate about feminism by stating: "Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (1999, p. xv).

Butler (2004) was concerned that gender norms not only regulate ideas of what men and women are supposed to do but also normalise these ideas so that they become a dominant trait of human existence or its surroundings to such an extent that this trait becomes difficult to challenge or eradicate. The naturalisation of gender norms, Butler (1999) stated, is a threat to social change. If gender identities are produced by society, they will probably remain unchanged because "the loss of gender norms would have the effect of proliferating gender configurations, destabilizing substantive identity, and depriving the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of their central protagonists: 'man' and 'woman'" (Butler, 1999, p. 187). Butler therefore suggested that social justice and change can only be achieved if gender identities and norms are deconstructed and subverted.

Feminists have a number of perspectives or ideologies that differ along the lines of radical, liberal, socialist, and black feminisms (Beegan & Moran, 2017). To avoid a one-dimensional focus in my analysis of *Uthando Lungumanqoba*, I decided to take a literary feminist criticism approach that embraces pluralism to ensure that all voices are equally heard. I took a pluralist approach to avoid the risk of being prejudiced against one set of ideologies, or unwittingly promoting certain gender stereotypes.

## Methodology

An interpretive, thematic, and epistemological approach was chosen to analyse the concepts of patriarchy and masculinity that are portrayed in the novel, *Uthando Lungumanqoba*. These themes are linked to notions, institutions, and cultural norms that often fail to protect women. The words, actions, and experiences of the characters in the novel have been captured and analysed qualitatively through the lens of a feminist literary critical approach. To avoid bias in the analysis of the novel, I decided to embrace a pluralist approach that caters for diversity of sociopolitical ideologies, namely, radical, liberal, socialist, and black feminism with special attention on themes of culture, rape, social inequalities, prostitution, and marriage. All these themes are found in the novel and they are analysed in the postapartheid South African context where women's rights are enshrined, and where social justice and change are advocated according to the Constitution of 1996.

The analysis is done in a way that links the experiences of fictional characters in the novel to the real world. Given that the novel explores real-life experiences, it is important that the feelings and actions of the characters are viewed as a reflection of a broader society and as an expression of cultural norms and institutions that are often seen as perpetrating gender stereotypes and gender inequalities. The novel is considered not only as a guide to entertainment but as an educational tool that can be used to facilitate social justice and change, especially with the youth—the future leaders of society.

### **Analysis of the Novel, *Uthando Lungumanqoba***

Social justice and change are used in this investigation to conceptualise the themes of the novel, *Uthando Lungumanqoba*, in a postapartheid South African context. As advocates of social justice and change, researchers should ensure that their research outputs challenge the status quo and defend the rights of marginalised groups (Wilkinson, 1996). This investigation has adopted the feminist approach because it “is a conceptual and methodological research framework that is fundamentally about exploring and pursuing opportunities for social justice” (Reid, 2004, p. 2). The feminist approach helps society with the “understandings of the factors that perpetuate social injustices while providing strategies for responding to such injustices through advocating collective action towards social change” (Reid, 2004, p. 10).

The author of *Uthando Lungumanqoba*, Maphili Shange, has brilliantly crafted the plot of the novel so that we trace the relationships between men and women. At the beginning of the story, we find a man who, consumed by his sexual desires, tries to destroy the life of a young girl by raping her. At the end of the story, the same girl is rescued by another man through marriage. The plot of the novel exposes the societal gender stereotype that men have the power to build or destroy the lives of women. This kind of thinking poses a threat to the holders or advocates of the feminist ideology that women can empower themselves, without any dependency on men. The author has allowed Phindile to be rescued by a man from the clutches of poverty and prostitution and the novel allows its readers to engage critically with, and challenge, gender stereotypes and discrimination against women. We can argue, therefore, that this novel is aligned with the ideals of social change because the author challenges institutions, social cultural beliefs, and gender norms. Through an analysis of the plot, one gains the impression that social change is a collective responsibility. This is fully substantiated in the following analysis of the novel.

#### **The role of the cultural values of respect, trust, and authority in violence against women**

In a traditional patriarchal family, South African women, especially the Zulus, who are the focus of this novel, are taught to respect men as the heads of their families. A study by Hadebe (2010) revealed that cultural values such as respect, dignity, and authority may taint relationships between men and women because it places men right at the top of the pyramid and women at the bottom. Shope (2004) traced this kind of poor relationship between Zulu men and Zulu women back to the pre-colonial era of homestead economy where a Zulu man had his own hut, and his wives had separate huts. This suggests that Zulu men enjoyed their solitary life although they were married. This kind of separation was further extended during the colonial era when Zulu men were forced to leave the rural areas to search for work in the cities as migrant labourers. Women were left alone in the homesteads to look after the children and to do all the domestic work while men joined the market economy as providers for their families (Hadebe, 2010).

In the novel, *Uthando Lungumanqoba*, which is set in the township of Mpumalanga in Hammersdale, west of the city of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal, the protagonist is a young girl, Phindile, who became a victim of gender-based violence because of the cultural values of respect and authority given to her maternal uncle, Chris Zwane. When Phindile’s parents died, Chris and his wife, MaXaba, became

Phindile's guardians. Phindile had chosen Chris and MaXaba to look after her because she respected them. Chris, however, destroyed the trust and respect Phindile had for him when he abused his authority by sexually abusing her (Shange, 2005, p. 12):

*Kwedlula izinsukwana ezimbalwa, waphinda wabuya ephuze kakhulu umalume wakhe, wangena ngendlovu yangena ekamelweni likaPhindile, wamnukubeza. Akakwazanga kulokhu ukudlubulundela uPhindile ngenxa yokuthi konke kwenzeka ngokushesha okumangalisayo. Wathi uyazama ukuklabalasa amemeze, wamvala umlomo umalume. Wamthembisa ukumnquma uqhoqhoqho ngommese uma ekhala. [After a few days had passed, Phindile's uncle came home very drunk and raped Phindile in her bedroom. This time, Phindile could not escape because it all happened instantly. When Phindile tried to scream, her uncle used his hand to block her mouth and threatened to slit her throat with a knife if she did not keep quiet.]*

Phindile could not believe what happened. She respected and trusted her uncle more than all other members of her family. This was why, after the death of her parents, she had chosen to stay with Chris and his wife, MaXaba. As readers of the novel, we can feel the disappointment and betrayal in her voice when she said (Shange, 2005, p. 12):

*Yini kodwa lena oyenza kimi ngikuthemba kangaka? [Why are you doing this to me when I trusted you so much?]*

Phindile obviously did not know that the man was actually a monster who showed no remorse for what he had done, as can be deduced from the threat Chris made to Phindile (Shange, 2005, p. 12):

*Vala umlomo, ngale kwalokho ngizovukwa yikhanda lami ngikugonise amathumbu ngommese. [Shut up, otherwise you will raise the animalism in me and I will cut your stomach open with a knife.]*

Frieze's study (1983) revealed that rape is perpetuated by gender stereotypes, indicating that men believe they are the ones who should initiate a sexual encounter and that when a woman says "no" she actually means "yes." Research (Cloete & Madadzhe, 2004; Hamlin, 2005) also revealed that when trying to defend their indefensible act, the majority of rapists and rape defenders blame the victim by alleging that the sex was consensual and that she "asked for it" by wearing a short skirt or by her suggestive behaviour. As readers of the novel, we are confronted with the gross violation of women, in what the radical feminists call the *terrorism of women by men* (Barry, 1995; Jeffreys, 2010; Raymond, 2013). This, as a result, gives reasons for all feminists, irrespective of their ideological orientation, and all advocates of social justice, to call for social change in the way men treat women.

### **Preservation of women's rights in a patriarchal society**

The novel is set in the post-1994 South African context where women have rights that are enshrined in the Constitution. These rights include the following: (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 1996, pp. 5–6):

- Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law.
- Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.

- The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.

In the novel, the law enforcement agency, as the institution of state that is supposed to protect the rights of women, failed to do so when Phindile went to report the rape at a nearby police station. Instead, she was ridiculed by the male police officer (Shange, 2005, p. 14):

*Ntombazane, ngiyasebenza mina, kanginaso isikhathi sezinganekwane. [Girl, I am working here and do not have time for fairytales.]*

*Kakuyona inganekwane. [It is not a fairytale.]*

*Yinganekwano lena oyishoyo. Akekho umuntu ongadlengula ingane kadadewabo. [It is a fairytale. There is no man who can rape his sister's child.]*

The words and actions of this particular police officer reflect those of the broader spectrum of society, not only in the South African context but also in Africa as a whole, where legislation is on the statute books but its implementation is hampered by "law enforcement agents as well as societal attitudes that enforce the culture of tolerance and silence" (Ngcobo, 2015, p. 33).

MaShezi, who was married to Phindile's paternal uncle, projected the same sentiment by implying that Phindile was having multiple relationships, leading to her being beaten up by her boyfriend (Shange, 2005, pp. 15–16):

*Hawu, seliyakushaya yini isoka lakho nobuhle wakwaMthethwa? [Does your boyfriend beat you, beauty queen of the Mthethwas?]*

MaXaba, who was married to Chris, the perpetrator, decided to side with her husband and accused Phindile of lying (Shange, 2005, p. 20):

*Emva kwezinto ezingaka esikwenzele zona nomalume wakho ukwazi ukumqambela amanga angaka. Hawu! Ubolile ngane yabantu! Wake wanukubenza ubani nje uChris? Ngifuna ukumtshela impela khona ezokubona ukungcola oyikho, hawu ubolile! [After all that your uncle and I have done for you, you thank us by telling lies about your uncle. You are rotten, child! Has Chris ever raped anyone? I want to tell him so that he sees how rotten you are, you are rotten to the core!]*

MaXaba validates the generally held assumptions that a woman would rather put her marriage first than fight for what is right (Ngcobo, 2015). MaXaba could choose whether or not to break the cycle of violence against women by reporting her husband to the authorities, but she decided against doing so. Her silence perpetuated the act of violence because, later in the novel, Chris rapes another girl, Bongiwe.

### **Prostitution as a form of abuse against women**

Socialist and black feminists agree that some women do not become prostitutes to make easy money but are forced into prostitution by "social circumstances, such as poverty" (Buthelezi, 2006, p. 498). In the novel, the 17-year-old Phindile was introduced to prostitution by her flat mates, Buyi and Sma (Shange, 2005, p. 38):



*Sebezofika-ke labo baba bemikhabakazi abanesidina. [These irritating old men with big tummies are about to arrive.]*

*Yibona esisebenza ngabo-ke Phindi lapha. Uma bekucela uxolo ungaxwayi, ukhulume kahle nalowo okucela uxolo kodwa ungavumi lutho olungaphansi kuka-R50 futhi ongayifuni i-cd ungayingeni indaba yakhe. [They are the ones we work with, Phindi [Phindile]. If they ask to speak to you, do not ignore them. Speak to them politely and accept nothing less than R50 and do not entertain anyone who does not want to use the cd [condom].]*

Feminists, especially radical and liberal feminists, have conflicting views about the issue of prostitution. The radical feminist perspective describes prostitution as “the most oppressive act of male supremacy” (Beegan & Moran, 2017, p. 61). Radical feminists do not place the blame on individuals but on men as a group or class:

*The determination of harm must rest on the act, not only individually but collectively in women’s class condition. If the act exploits, it is in itself destructive of human life, well-being, integrity, and dignity. That is violation. And when it is gendered, repeated over and over in and on woman after woman, that is oppression. (Barry, 1995, p. 70)*

When taking a radical feminist approach, one would argue that the novel, *Uthando Lungumanqoba*, depicts a bigger picture of how an act of sexual violence against women is repeated from one woman to another. The act of violence against women in the form of prostitution knows no bounds in terms of age. This is illustrated in the novel when we find one of the old men drooling over Phindile (Shange, 2005, p. 39):

*Sma uphethe u-new one. Waze wamuhle, waze wa-fresh! [Sma, you brought a new girl. She is beautiful, she is fresh [innocently young].]*

This old man, Shakes, becomes Phindile’s first client and he pays her R60 (Shange, 2005, p. 40):

*Nansi imali yakho sisi, keep the change! Isho imnika o-R20 abathathu le ndoda maqede igegetheke kakhulu. [Here is your money my girl, keep the change! Says the man giggling while giving her three R20 notes.]*

Radical feminists would argue that this man is sexually abusing a girl who is young enough to be his daughter and does not see anything wrong with it. The fact that he was giggling while paying Phindile illustrates his lack of remorse about the fact that he has just sexually abused a young girl. Radical feminists would argue that prostitution is dehumanising and degrading to women; it reduces these women to nothing but sex objects who are there to appease men (Jeffreys, 2010).

Liberal feminists have a different perspective on prostitution. In fact, this group of feminists finds it offensive that prostitution is not regarded as a profession, and believe that the term prostitution ought to be challenged (Jeffreys, 2010). Liberal feminists prefer the terms *sex work* or *transactional sex* because they base their argument on contract theory where there is a free exchange of services, which means that as you give your body, you receive a reward in a form of money (Beegan & Moran, 2017). Liberal feminists regard sex work “as a form of resistance to social sexual norms [and] from this perspective [sex work] can combat poverty when used by a woman to support herself and her family” (Beegan & Moran, 2017, p. 63). It must be highlighted that, in this article, the terms prostitution, transactional sex, prostitutes, and sex workers are used interchangeably—to avoid risk of prejudice to any feminist ideology.

In the South African context, transactional sex started trending in 2016 with what are called *blessers* and *blessees* (Verass, 2016). One should, however, stress that despite the development of this new terminology of blessers and blessees, the act of transactional sex has featured in the South African gender discourse for decades (Shefer, Clowe, & Vergnani, 2012). Blessees are also given glamorous names such as *sugar daddies* or *ministers of finance* (Shefer, et al., 2012).

The relationship between the blesser and the blessee is not always driven by poverty, as many people believe. Research (Thobejane, Mulaudzi, & Zitha, 2017) showed that some women who are looking for a blesser–blessee relationship are not poor but are actually doing this to maintain their social status and to show off to their peers. These women usually post messages on social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter about how their blessers have blessed them with luxurious items ranging from expensive clothes, handbags, and gadgets to experiences such as dining in expensive restaurants and sleeping in top hotels (Thobejane et al., 2017).

It is evident, therefore, that women are not always coaxed into transactional sex. Some of them are willing participants driven by a range of reasons such as a desire for economic status, or sexual or emotional needs (Shefer et al., 2012). These complexities challenge a simplified analysis of transactional sex for the following reasons:

*These exchanges of resources and the use of sex as a commodity for exchange by women in particular become a challenge when they are framed by gendered, classed and other inequalities and disparities that undermine agency and that facilitate abusive and exploitative practices. (Shefer, et al., 2012, p. 449)*

However, it is acknowledged in *Uthando Lungumanqoba* that women who practise transactional sex are exposed to harsh conditions such as physical abuse and beatings. Sma, Phindile's flat mate, was once subjected to physical abuse in the form of a beating, merely because she demanded payment for the services she had rendered. The novel projects an impression that prostitution not only poses physical and health hazards to these women, but also has adverse psychological effects such as dependency on men and a lack of self-esteem. It is portrayed in the novel that these women begin to hate themselves and think that they are not worthy of living a decent life without having to use their bodies to earn a living. The following section gives clear examples of this argument.

### **Success and gender stereotypes portrayed in the novel**

There is an unfounded gender stereotype that men are successful in their careers because they are supposedly more intelligent than their female counterparts (Bian, Leslie, & Cimpian, 2017). This gender stereotype is also portrayed in *Uthando Lungumanqoba*. The female author of the book, Maphili Shange, draws a contrast between black urban Zulu women (i.e., Phindile, Sma, and Buyi) and the black urban Zulu young man, Thulani. The women live in poverty and the only option presented to them is prostitution. By contrast, Thulani is portrayed as a successful young man who is in the prime of his career as the chief director of a construction company. Thulani drives an expensive Mercedes Benz and lives in an affluent apartment in Musgrave. He has been featured in the current news because of the big party he held for his girlfriend in Umhlanga Rocks. In stark contrast to this, Phindile, Buyi, and Sma are struggling to make ends meet and they live in an old flat with old furniture in Stanger Street. There is clear evidence of gender inequality in the way these female and male characters are portrayed in the novel.

The second gender stereotype projected in the novel is that women should be dependent on men in order to succeed in life. This is verified by Phindile's reaction when she reads about Thulani in the newspaper (Shange, 2005, p. 41):



*Mh, ngingake ngizitholele yena nje Nkosi yami! Ngingahlukana unomphela nale mpilo ebhedayo. [If only I can get him [date him], my God! I would leave this trashy lifestyle for good.]*

Phindile is convinced that only a man can rescue her from the clutches of poverty and prostitution. She does not believe that she has the power to change her life. More examples of this are given in the section further down, “Marriage as an indispensable cultural institution.”

Phindile’s flat mate, Buyi, does not see the possibility of a man like Thulani dating a woman like Phindile (Shange, 2005, p. 41):

*Futhi nje uyazikhohlisa abafana abafundile abafune mahosha ongafundile njengathi, bafuna ezinye izifundiswa ezinjengabo. [You are delusional because educated men do not date uneducated prostitutes like us, they date women who are educated like them.]*

The same sentiment that prostitutes do not deserve to be treated with respect and dignity is projected by Sma when she says (Shange, 2005, p. 49):

*Unamanga Phindi, akekho umuntu wesilisa ongakhokhela wena uR500 ngokuchitha ubusuku nje naye nixoxa. [You are lying Phindi, there is no man who can pay you [a prostitute] R500 just for spending the night talking [not having sex].]*

When Phindile had spent more time with Thulani and started dating him, she shared the news with her flat mates, Sma and Buyi. Buyi was, however, not convinced (Shange, 2005, p. 50):

*Ngiyathemba akasile nje lo mlisa kaPhindile. Uqamba amanga ngayo yonke le nto ayishoyo. [I have no doubt that this man Phindile is dating is not good [ugly or poor]. She is lying about all [the good things] that she has been telling us.]*

Sma’s and Buyi’s statements not only depict prostitutes as unworthy human beings who do not deserve to be respected, but they also highlight the phenomenon in society where women are seen only as sex objects. To Sma and Buyi, who represent the general societal view of how relationships between men and women should be, it is inconceivable that a man can spend a night with a woman without having to engage in sexual activity and that a decent man can date a prostitute. Sma also feels that Gatsheni, her boyfriend, should rescue her from the life she is living (Shange, 2005, p. 87):

*UGatsheni sengathi akanandaba nje nempilo yami ngoba ngabe usethe angiyeye ukuhoshha. [It looks like Gatsheni [Ndlovu] does not care about my life because he never said I should leave prostitution.]*

Gatsheni’s actions in dating a woman while knowing perfectly well that she is a prostitute, and then not taking their relationship to another level, show that he sees Sma as nothing but a sex object. Liberal feminists would argue that if he really loved Sma as the person who she really is, he would consider marrying her. Gatsheni’s actions are a manifestation of a broader societal phenomenon of judging or even rejecting prostitutes as “trash”—and there is a need for social change in this regard.

### **Societal rejection of sex workers**

Generally, women who are involved in transactional sex are treated as subhumans by members of society who do not want to accept them as they are (Shefer et al., 2012). In the novel, Thulani, the chief director of a construction company in Durban, falls in love with Phindile, a sex worker. Thulani’s

friends and family members expected him to marry Mabusi because they believed she was better than Phindile. Thulani's friend, Sibonelo, calls Phindile a piece of trash (Shange, 2005, p. 54–55):

*Ayi mfowethu, musa ukuganga lapha. Buka nje uMabusi ungunesi ohloniphekile. Le ngane ngumqwayizi ophuzana notshwala abheme nogwayi alale nawo wonke amadoda aseThekwini. Empeleni udoti le nto ayikulungele. [My brother, stop fooling around. Mabusi is a respectable professional nurse. This girl is a prostitute who drinks alcohol, smokes cigarettes and sleeps with every man in Durban. In fact, she is a piece of trash that does not complement you [your status].]*

The same negative and judgmental attitude towards Phindile is shared by Jabulani, Thulani's brother:

*Mnta kababa kodwa yini lena engiyizwayo okuthiwa uyenza lapho eThekwini? Kodwa yini mfowethu udicilela igama lakho phansi ngale ndlela? Sekuphele izintombi yini eThekwini? [My brother, what are these rumours I am hearing about the things you do there in Durban? Are there no more girls there in Durban? (Shange, 2005, p. 55)]*

When Thulani is confronted by his fiancée, Mabusi, about Phindile, he does what very few men would do, choosing the sex worker over the "respectable" nurse:

*Ngicela ukhethe phakathi kwami nalo mqwayizi wakho. Ngeke ungibhanqe nezibi zeTheku mina. [You must choose between me and this prostitute of yours. You cannot cheat on me with the trash of Durban.]*

*Hhayi, uma kusho wena kakunankinga. Ngicela uphume uphele empilweni yami. [If you say so, I have no problem. Please get out of my life. (Shange, 2005, p. 57)]*

Mabusi cannot believe that Thulani would choose a prostitute over her. She drives like a mad woman to get her friend's opinion about the issue. Her friend, Thembi, raises a new argument—that it is only witchcraft that can prompt a decent man like Thulani to date a prostitute:

*Mngani wami le ntombazane imdlisile uThulani. Vele yini nje ongayilindela kulo mahosha? Nawe uyazazi lezi zinto zikhohlakele kabi. [My friend, this girl has bewitched Thulani [used a love potion on Thulani]. What else can you expect from a prostitute? You know how devious these things are. (Shange, 2005, p. 57)]*

When Mabusi finally meets Phindile in person, she even goes to the extreme of suggesting that Chris Zwane, Phindile's uncle, had not in fact raped her. She says, maybe Chris had just refused to pay her:

*Wayengasafuni yini bandla ukukhokha lo muntu wakwaZwane njengoba usuhambe uthi wakunukubeza, nendoda yami kusho ukuthi uma usukhathele yiyo uzothi yayikuhlalise ngenkani eflethini. [Was this Zwane man no long longer paying you as you go around lying that he raped you? It means you will do the same with my man when you get tired of him. You will go around telling people that he forced you to live with him in his flat. (Shange, 2005, p. 76)]*

Thulani cannot stand seeing Mabusi humiliating his girlfriend in public and he punches Mabusi. Can we justify Thulani's actions? No, we cannot. Any form of violence against women is unacceptable, no matter what the provocation is. Yes, Mabusi was out of line by calling Phindile the resident prostitute and accusing her of lying about rape, but it does not justify what Thulani did.

Mabusi was not the only one who believed that Phindile was a liar. One of the male journalists who attended the court proceedings where Chris was sentenced to 20 years for raping Phindile and Bongiwe (Phindile's neighbour in Hammersdale) wrote a disturbing article about Phindile, entitled, "Kazi Yini Enye Efihlwe Yintombi KaThulani Mkhwanazi?" [What else is Thulani Mkhwanazi's girlfriend hiding?].

Phindile was prejudged because of her unfortunate circumstances. She was judged by Thulani's friends and by his family. Thulani's sisters even ignored her when he came to introduce her to his family at Imbali township in Pietermaritzburg. The only person who never judged Phindile before getting to know her better was Thulani's mother:

*umuntu akagwentshwa icala lingakathethwa, ngathi ngizoqala ngikubone kuqala. Kodwa-ke okumele ukwazi ukuthi njengoba uThulani ekuthanda nje, akukho mina engingakusho ngaphandle kokuthi nginifisela inhlanhla nenjabulo. [I will not prejudge you until I get to know you better. What you should know is that since Thulani loves you, there is nothing I can do about it except wish you luck and happiness. (Shange, 2005, p. 61)]*

After this conversation, Thulani's mother talked to him privately and said although she had heard many bad things about Phindile, her face looked promising. Jabulani, Thulani's brother who had previously judged Phindile based on what he heard, also expressed a different view when he saw her in person:

*Nanxa ngingamazi futhi ngingeke ngiphawule kakhulu ngaye kodwa angikusoli mnta kababa, yinhle nayo le ngane, wawungazezi nawe uma ulingeka. Futhi ibukeka izothile. [Although I do not know her well yet and I cannot say anything about her character, but she is a beautiful girl, my brother. I do not blame you for loving her. She also looks like a dignified girl. (Shange, 2005, p. 62)]*

Jabulani was not the only one who changed his mind about Phindile. Thulani's sisters also became fond of Phindile when they spent time with her (Shange, 2005, p. 63):

*Nezintokazi zalapha ekhaya obekubonakala sengathi kaziyingeni ekaPhindile, seziswabulukile manje, sekude kuqhuma uhleko nje zixoxa no'skwiza wazo. [Thulani's sisters, who initially ignored Phindile, have now changed their minds as they are heard laughing loudly as they talk to their sister-in-law [to be].]*

Th relationship between Thulani and Phindile challenges us to look at transactional sex differently and to challenge "the assumption that intimate heterosexual relationships built around material exchanges are only legitimate if preceded by vows of marriage" (Shefer et al., 2012, p. 448). The novel encourages social change because it challenges the societal consecration of marriage where "prostitution is associated with immorality, dominance, and inequality in sexual-monetary transactions [and] marriage is associated with morality, safe selfless romance, love, and egalitarianism" (Selepe, Ngwenya, Albers, & Janke, 2017, p. 169).

### **Marriage as an indispensable cultural institution**

Marriage is regarded highly in an African culture, not only by women and men but also by the living dead. This argument was confirmed by Mbiti when he said:

*Marriage then, is a religious responsibility for everyone. It forms the focal point where departed, present and coming members of society meet. It is the point of hope and*

*expectation for the unmarried and their relatives; once it has been reached and procreation takes place. (1969, p. 144)*

It is clear that marriage is an “integral part of culture” (Ngidi, 2012, p. 44). As much as marriage is an important institution in an African culture in general, and in the Zulu culture in particular, it becomes a contentious subject if it is used to promote the domination of men over women. It raises one’s eyebrows when it creates an impression that women cannot afford to succeed on their own, without being rescued by men.

It was mentioned in the section above, “Success and gender stereotypes portrayed in the novel,” that Phindile believed that it was a man, such as Thulani, who could rescue her from poverty and prostitution. This does indeed happen in the novel when Thulani asks Phindile to move in with him:

*Phindile sweetheart, ngicela uyothatha izimpahla zakho endlini, kusukela manje usuyohlala nami eMusgrave. [Phindile, sweetheart, please go and fetch your clothes from the flat, as from now you will live with me in Musgrave. (Shange, 2005, p. 58)]*

When Phindile was earning money by transporting parcels for Lindi and by being a prostitute, she did not go back to school to finish her matric. It was only when she moved in with Thulani that she finally had the opportunity to finish her matric. This implies that women cannot succeed on their own without the help of a man, especially because Thulani paid for her studies:

*Esizoqala ngakho nje ngukuthi kuzomele sizame indaba yokuthi uye koqedela izifundo zakho zebanga leshumi laphaya eFutura High School ngase-ML Sultan Technikon. [The first thing to do is for you to finish your Standard 10 [Grade 12] at Futura High School, which is near the ML Sultan College. (Shange, 2005, p. 60)]*

Indeed, Phindile did finish studying for her matric examination and passed with distinctions in English and biology but says she could not have done so without the help of Thulani, her man:

*Ngempela wusuku olumnandi lolu kuPhindile njengoba esebona amaphupho akhe okuya enyuvesi esezofezeka emuva kokuhlupheka okungaka asedlule kukhona. Impela le nsizwa yakwaMkhwanazi wayilethelwa yindlozi. [Indeed, this is a special day to Phindile since it is now clear that her dream of going to university is about to come true. There is no doubt that this man from the Mkhwanazi was sent by her ancestors. (Shange, 2005, p. 85)]*

By the ancestors, Phindile means that it was her late parents who blessed her with a man like Thulani so that her dreams of studying medicine at university could become true. Does this mean that men were created with the mission of fulfilling women’s dreams, and that women cannot actualise their dreams on their own, without help from men?

Thulani and Phindile eventually get married and Phindile cannot not hide her joy at marrying a man like Thulani:

*Ngangingakaze ngiphuphe ngisho ukuphupha ukuthi ngiyoke ngishade umshado oyindumezulu kangaka! Impela ingathi ngiyaphupha namuhla. Kangikholwa ukuthi selize lafezeka iphupho lami lokushada nawe. [Never in my wildest dreams have I seen myself having such a huge wedding ceremony! I feel like I am in a dream. I can hardly believe that my dream of marrying you has finally come true. (Shange, 2005, p. 90)]*

Although marrying Thulani was like a dream come true to Phindile, it raises a number of questions for feminists. One question is whether Phindile, as a Zulu woman, knew that she had the power to change her life without being dependent on a man. The second question is whether Thulani really loved Phindile or whether his intention in marrying her was aimed at boosting his masculine ego and demonstrating that he had the financial means to change Phindile's life. The third question is what would have happened to Phindile if she had not agreed to move in with, or marry, Thulani. The main question is why Maphili Shange, a woman author, chose to end the novel by portraying Phindile Mthethwa as Cinderella, who finally meets her Prince Charming, Thulani Mkhwanazi. What is the author of the novel trying to say about the ability of women to emancipate themselves from the ills of this world, and to succeed in life without showing any dependency on men?

## Discussion and Conclusion

In a postcolonial era, or post-1994 South Africa, women have rights that are guaranteed in the Constitution. The Constitution gives women the freedom to live freely without being physically or sexually abused or discriminated against on the mere grounds of being women (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 1996).

Phindle and the other women characters in the novel, *Uthando Lungumanqoba*, become victims of gender-based violence and discrimination. Their rights are violated in different ways that include sexual abuse such as rape, and physical abuse such as beatings. They are discriminated against and treated as trash because prostitutes, in a traditional patriarchal society, tend to be social outcasts. Phindle, for example, was prejudged and condemned as a woman who was unfit to be the girlfriend and potential wife of a decent career man like Thulani. But when Thulani decides to marry Phindle instead of the educated professional nurse, Mabusi, our perceptions of what is generally accepted as right and wrong in a woman, are challenged immensely.

This article encompasses all feminist ideologies and it inspires social change because it makes us think carefully about the cultural values of respect, trust, and authority that we attribute to both men and women. There is a Zulu proverb, namely, *Inkunzi isematholeni* [the bull comes from the calves], which means that the future is in the hands of the youth. The youth, as future leaders, are the ones who could steer change in their societies if novels such as this one were read and analysed in schools and universities. Such literary work would awaken young people's consciences to their responsibility to challenge gender stereotypes and gender-based violence. While reading the novel, learners, students, teachers, and lecturers could brainstorm and discuss the interventions or mechanisms that might be used to "challenge the attitudes that reproduce cultures of violence" (Ngcobo, 2015, p. 33). Consequently, gender-based violence should not only be seen as a topic that hounds the mind of the novelist alone. It should also be a topic that is brought into classrooms and university lecture halls so that learners, students, teachers, and lecturers are able to engage at an intellectual level about gender-based issues. Phindle was in Grade 12 when her uncle raped her; young girls and boys of her age might identify with what she went through. Her experiences could definitely spark robust discussions around these issues of gender. It is for this reason then that the educational discourse is brought into play in this investigation. Smith illustrated the claim well:

*To see a fictional text not only as a literary investigation into issues of concern to its author but also as a site of educational research is a very liberating way of extending our understanding of what counts as an appropriate site of research. (2000, p. 245)*

This article challenges the traditional norms of gender constructions through the lenses of the postapartheid South African values of equality, social justice, and human rights. It attempts to illustrate the misalignment between the South African democratic ideals of social cohesion and the social

realities of oppression within the heterosexual gender binaries. Various intersectional aspects of gender and class, gender and economy, as well as gender and literature are depicted and contextualised in postapartheid South Africa.

## References

- Barry, K. (1995). *The prostitution of sexuality*. New York, USA: New York University Press.
- Beegan, R., & Moran, J. (2017). Prostitution and sex work: Situating Ireland's new law on prostitution in the radical and liberal feminist paradigms. *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies*, 17(1), 59–75.
- Bian, L., Leslie, S. Cimpian, A. (2017). Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early and influence children's interests. *Science*, 355, 389–391.
- Boezak, S. (Ed.). (1999). *Redefining politics: South African women and democracy*. Johannesburg, South Africa: CGE.
- Buthelezi, T. (2006). 16 Days of Activism and gender stereotypes in Ilanga, Isolezwe and UmAfrika newspapers. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 24(4), 497–509.
- Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), 519–531.
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, USA: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2004). Gender regulations. In *Undoing gender* (pp. 40–56). New York, USA: Routledge.
- Cloete, M. J., & Madadzhe, R. N. (2004). Sexual harassment, myth and culture in Southern Africa: Interpreting the link between fiction and reality. *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies*, 14(2), 20–33.
- Connell, R. W. (2001). The social organization of masculinity. In S. M. Whitehead & F. J. Barrett (Eds.), *Masculinities reader*. Cambridge, UK: Blackwell.
- Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, Republic of South Africa. (1996). *The South African Constitution*. Retrieved from <http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/constitution/constitution.htm>
- Frieze, I. (1983). Investigating the causes and consequences of marital rape. *Signs*, 8, 532–553.
- Glascok, J., & Preston-Schreck, C. (2004). Gender and racial stereotypes in daily newspaper comics: A time-honoured tradition. *Sex Roles*, 51(7/8), 423–431.
- Hadebe, L. (2010). *Zulu masculinity: Culture, faith and the Constitution in the South African context* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.
- Hamlin, J. (2005). *Rape myths: Sociology of Rape*. Retrieved from [www.d.umn.edu/cla/faculty/jhamlin/3925/myths.html](http://www.d.umn.edu/cla/faculty/jhamlin/3925/myths.html)
- Jeffreys, S. (2010). The sex industry and business practice: An obstacle to women's equality. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 33, 274–282.
- Kim, J., & Motsei, M. (2002). Women enjoy punishment: Attitudes and experiences of gender-based violence among PHC nurses in rural South Africa. *Social Science and Medicine*, 54(8), 1243–1254.
- Kollmayer, M., Schober, B., & Spiel, C. (2016). Gender stereotypes in education: Development, consequences, and interventions, *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 15(4), 361–377. doi:10.1080/17405629.2016.1193483
- Mbiti, J. S. (1969). *African religions and philosophy* (2nd ed.). Oxford, UK: Heinemann.



- Morrell, R. (Ed.). (2001). *Changing men in Southern Africa*. Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Ngcobo, N. (2015). The use of film as an intervention in addressing gender violence: Experiences in a South African secondary school. *Agenda*, 29(3), 32–41.
- Ngidi, E. B. (2012). The use of personal names in respect of the living-dead within traditional polygynous families in Kwamambuli, Kranskop (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.
- Raymond, J. (2013). Not a choice, not a job. Lincoln, USA: Potomac.
- Reid, C. (2004). Advancing women's social justice agendas: A feminist action research framework. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(3), 1–15.
- Selepe, K., Ngwenya, B. N., Albers, A. N., & Janke, O. N. (2017). Transactional sex relations among tertiary education students in the urban-village of Maun, Botswana. *Botswana Notes and Records*, 49, 168–183.
- Shange, M. (2005). *Uthando lungumanqoba*. Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Shuter & Shooter.
- Shefer, T., Clowe, L., & Vergnani, T. (2012). Narratives of transactional sex on a university campus. *Culture, Health and Sexuality: An International Journal for Research, Intervention and Care*, 14(4), 435–447.
- Shope, J. H. (2004). When words are not enough: The search for the effect of pornography on abused women. *Violence Against Women*, 10(1), 56–72.
- Smith, A. (2000). Girl power in *Nervous Conditions*: Fictional practice as a research site. *McGill Journal of Education*, 35(3), 245–260.
- Thobejane, T. D., Mulaudzi, T. P., & Zitha, R. (2017). Factors leading to “blesser-blessee” relationships amongst female students: The case of a rural university in Thulamela Municipality, Limpopo Province, South Africa. *Gender & Behaviour*, 87(15), 1596–9231.
- Verass, S. (2016, May 26). Blessers: Inside South Africa's sugar daddy culture. *SBS*. Retrieved from <https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/life/culture/article/2016/05/26/blessers-inside-south-africas-sugar-daddy-culture>
- Wilkinson, R. G. (1996). *Unhealthy societies: The afflictions of inequality*. London, UK: Routledge.