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GENDER ROLE PERCEPTIONS IN SELECTED SOUTH-AFRICAN FOLKTALES

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Abstract: The objective of the study was to unpack gender role perceptions in selected South-African folktales. To this end, 65 purposefully selected folktales which reinforce character roles were analysed and interpreted, using narrative analysis. With the exception of a few that are used as instruments of contestation, the studied South-African folktales mainly serve as a tool to confirm the entrenched hegemonic philosophy of patriarchal communal life in terms of marriage, work, character traits, and authority. The rebelliousness of female characters against the patriarchal system in some folktales indicates that there is an emerging dynamism of discourse which aims at transforming the gender stereotype ideology inculcated in the folktales.

Keywords: culture, folklore, folktale, gender, role

INTRODUCTION

Folktales are stories which "are not considered as dogma or history; they may or may not have happened" (Bascom 1965: 4). They emanate from the thinking, perceptions, and experiences of individuals or a community (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson 1993). Tales of marvellous themes (fairy tales), tales which reflect the real world's incidents (novellas), stories where super humans appear as characters (hero tales), tales of unusual events that are presumed to have really happened (legends), descriptions that justify how the present world and its inhabitants are the way they are now (etiological tales) and narrations which personify animals (animal tales) are all versions, with no clear demarcation, subsumed under 'folktale' (Thompson 1951 [1946]). To address the social truth of the time and preach the values anticipated by the people, common characteristics that folktales adhere to are narrating the escapades of characters, employing supernatural adversaries and/or supernatural helpers, rewarding the righteous and punishing the malicious (Norton 1987). With regard to their

literary quality, Dorson (1972: 60) claims that the "folktale embodies the highly polished, artistic story genres that have a relatively consistent, finished form".

Folktales have two purposes: amusement and socialisation. The instrumental value of folktales for these purposes is especially true for pre-literate communities that have no access to modern communication technologies. Though scholars, for example Dorson (1972: 60), argue that "folktales are told primarily for entertainment" so long as the social truth and communal values to be conveyed are imbued in them, distinguishing the primary and secondary purposes may not even be possible. The entertainment and the didactic purposes are inseparable. Along with enjoyment, enlightening the audience about their respective communities' philosophy of life is a central agenda.

Nurturing all necessary skills, knowledge, and attitude, folktales sustainably maintain the life philosophies of communities. Acknowledging the role of folktales in transmitting a community's strength and growth strategies for the generation to come, Opoku-Agyemang (1999: 118) argues that they provide "a closer account of the values of society than other forms of written, imaginative texts, given the context for the creation in both literary forms". Hence, it is safe to argue that folktales, as a component of folklore, offer penetrating pictures of the lifestyles of their respective communities. They are echoes of the psychological and sociological disposition of the communities they belong to (Campbell 1986).

Along with these illuminating roles, folktales, originating from patriarchal communities in which a powerful group undeniably has the lion's share of the production and manipulation of ideas, are bluntly blamed for gender stereotyping. Though gender is "composed of cultural discourses" (Kiesling 2009: 196), Nenola (1999: 21) writes, "The natural division of labour between insemination and childbearing has been thought to indicate that the nature and activities of men and women are different in other ways as well and belong to different areas of society and culture". To legitimise the socially constructed truths and values in connection with gender roles, stories are used as tools to inculcate ideology (Weinger et al. 2006; Furniss & Grunner 1995; Kapteijns & Ali 1999).

The virtues and vices of maleness and femaleness are conveyed in the different male and female characters in folktales. In this regard, femaleness is usually equated to daughterhood, obedient wifehood (competence in women's work) and motherhood (child-rearing). Scholars (e.g. Al-Barazenji (2014: 146)) argue that in doing this, folktales are "objects for the real suffering of this generation because women are subjects of submissiveness, silence, patriarchal authority, or physical and psychological violence". Along with this, scholars like McKay, Dune, MacPhail, Mapedzahama, and Maple (2013) label folktales as destructive

traps for females. Muthoni, cited in Arndt (2000), also condemns literature as a whole as a "sugar-coated poison" for its role in presenting females negatively.

However, there are other scholars that say this is not always the case in the instrumental value of folklore, in which folktales are subsumed. Gold (1997: 103) in her work on Rajasthani women's voices reports that she discovered "neither the modesty and 'embarrassment'… prescribed as appropriate, ornamental female behavior within the culture, nor the voicelessness and submissiveness depicted in many outsider views of South Asian women". Nenola (1999) also claims that as folklore serves the dominating group to legitimise socially constructed truths, it is also a tool of the dominated group for resisting hegemonic stereotyping discourses and transforming them for their benefit. With this background, the objective of the study is to explore gender role perceptions in selected South-African folktales in terms of marriage, work, character traits, and authority.

METHODOLOGY

In line with Richardson's (1995: 200) claim that narrative "displays the goals and intentions of human actors; it makes individuals, cultures, societies, and historical epochs comprehensible as wholes", the study uses 65 folktales, a storehouse of the life philosophy of South Africans, to explore their gender role perceptions of marriage, work, character traits, and authority. The stories that show the gender-based depiction of characters in terms of the above-mentioned themes were purposively selected from published and unpublished repositories. The folktales were fairy tales, the novella, hero tales, legends, and animal tales. Bearing in mind that the communities that the study was about convey their worldview through the various characters depicted in the folktales, the study employed narrative analysis, a genre of qualitative research design which is believed to be pertinent to work on "how respondents impose order on the flow of experience in their lives and thus make sense of events and actions in which they have participated" (Chambliss & Schutt 2012: 217).

Czarniawska (2004) contends that one of the features of narrative analysis in the era of postmodernism has to be deconstructing the stories to unpack the power relations in all its forms of portrayal. To this end, the focus of analysis was unmasking the gender-role perceptions of communities as depicted in their expectations of characters in the stories. In other words, emphasis was given to the purposes and representational connotation of the folktales as epitomising the teaching of the life philosophy of respective communities.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Marriage

Marriage, as an important institution that both female and male should be engaged in at a certain stage of their lives to sustain family and community, is one area of focus in folktales. As it is taken for granted that the experience is enjoyable, it is often offered as a reward for individuals who meet communal requirements. Females are mainly expected to be obedient to social norms and able to give birth. Males, on the other hand, should be economically capable and physically able to protect their family and community.

In a community where all extra-marital sexual relations are illegitimate, a girl's sole option is achieving a formal engagement. If a girl is to be chosen as a bride from among her competitors, she has to behave in ways her community and her would-be groom expect her to. This is especially true when the race is to marry a chief or another important person. To achieve success, a girl is usually depicted soliciting the guidance of elderly women who usually test her humility and helpfulness by demanding special favours. Thokozile, who wants to marry Mamba of Maquba (the chief), in Msimang's "UMamba kaMaquba" (Mamba, the son of Maquba), is first tested by old women she meets on her way to the chief's house. The first old woman asks her to lick the discharge from her eyes, while the second woman's demand is to help her to carry the bundle of firewood on her back. After the girl humbly carries out both women's assignments, the first old woman gives her practical advice on the nature of the chief and the tasks awaiting her in the chief's house. The second woman offers her a blessing so that Thokozile will be successful in the marriage she aspires to. As she humbly did what she was asked to do by the old women, and consequently they gave her all the necessary advice and blessings, she is eventually successful in securing the marriage she dreamed of.

In the same story, we see Thokozile's younger sister's unsuccessful attempt to marry the same chief. On her way to the chief's house, the girl meets the same old women and is urged to carry out the same tasks given to her older sister. But because she is not willing to do either of these activities, the women do not give her advice and blessing; she cannot properly accomplish what she was asked to do by the chief's people. Consequently, her aspiration to marry the chief is doomed to failure (Masuku 2005: 200). The girl in "UZembeni noma Uzwanide" (Zembeni and Zwanide), who saved Sikhulumi from a cannibal, could also eventually marry him (De Bruin 2002: 24).

The message that can be deduced from the stories is: in their search for life partners, females are expected to go to great lengths to satisfy the interests of

grooms and their communities. In fact, the choice of either failing or succeeding is left to a bride looking for a groom. As long as she behaves in the way she is expected to, she can get what she wants. Otherwise, she cannot be successful. This characterisation indicates that the main reward for women who behave according to the expectations of their communities is marriage. That is why Thokozile, the helpful, obedient, and hard-working girl, is depicted as successful in securing the life partner she was looking for, while her younger sister (who could not meet these communal expectations) is portrayed as unsuccessful in the same endeavour.

The fact that children are needed to ensure the continuity of families and are considered to be the social security of their parents in their old age makes childbearing and upbringing one of, if not the main, requirements of successful marriage for females. For this reason, life for a barren woman in traditional South-African society is painful, especially in a polygamous marriage where wives compete to win the attention of their husband. One can clearly observe the value to a wife of being fertile, considering the number of evils infertile women experience and how their lives would be changed if by some magic power they are able to have children.

The chief's wife in "The birth of Hlakanyana" was in distress for she could not fall pregnant. Until she gave birth to Hlakanyana and people were overjoyed by the event, her barrenness was an area of concern to the community (Cope 1990). In Msimang's "Unyumbakatali"(The barren one), Nyumbakatali, who looked white because she slept in the ashes, is shown crying because she was barren. Her co-wives laugh at her and insult her barrenness for they have at least given birth to crows; Dumudumu, Nyumbakatali's husband, does not visit her and the crows are dirtying her hut and stealing her food.

When by a miracle Nyumbakatali has children with the help of the pigeons, we see how her life is completely changed for the better. She becomes happy and is observed laughing and singing. The co-wives are astonished to notice that she no longer cries and has started washing and taking care of herself. Her husband, who used to admire the beauty of the crows because he had never seen normal children, is taken greatly by surprise by the beautiful new children. Consequently, as she added to his grace in the eyes of his chief and his community, he crowned Nyumbakatali the head wife of his house.

The chief, who is happy by the new beautiful children of the ex-barren wife, kills the crows of the co-wives. This act of the chief disappoints and angers the mothers of the crows for now they are same with the barren wife. When the co-wives see the children of the ex-barren wife, one dies of shock, another one leaves the house, and the rest are turned into the slaves of Nyumbakatali (Masuku 2005: 196). Thokozile in "UMamba kaMaquba", who marries the chief,

asks to visit her people after she becomes pregnant. When she goes home to visit her family, she is depicted carrying her child on her back (Masuku 2005: 200).

Women are also depicted as deploying all the resources under their control to do their motherly duties. They are seen expressing their care, affection, and concern for their children by feeding them, keeping their hygiene, and working for their security. Mothers' love of their children goes to the extent of sacrificing themselves. Hlakanyana's mother serves him food (Cope 1990: 32) and washes him (ibid.: 12). She says: "I have been troubled, saying to myself you would die, seeing you left me while still small; saying to myself what would you possibly eat" (ibid.: 77). She is also depicted as delighted when they reunite (ibid.: 77). In the same book, we see a mother leopard suckling her children and eventually losing her life in an effort to take revenge on the predator of her cubs (ibid.: 52–55). The woman in "The woman who worked on a Sabbath day" is punished for committing a sin so that her baby would not go hungry (Kganyago 2000: 136–137).

Dominant depictions of the reproductive processes such as pregnancy, childbearing, bringing up children and the problem of barrenness demonstrate that women's ultimate roles in life are getting married, bearing children, and bringing them up. What is needed is not their selves but their reproductive success; a woman's wifehood becomes complete and legitimate the moment she gives birth to her husband's child. The main reason for marriage seems to be having children. Nyumbakatali's appointment as a head wife right after she has children declares that a woman is accepted, respected, and rewarded as a wife if she is in a position to fulfil her duties, particularly her responsibility to reproduce. The man in "A man and two wives" declares that he no longer wants his second wife, because she gave birth to eggs (Motshwari 1998: 40–41). In a society where a man is not condemned for sterility, life for a barren wife is painful and miserable. If she fails to give birth, she has no right even to take care of herself; her co-wives have the right to humiliate her; her husband may legitimately desert her; and she must be a servant for those co-wives who have children. Considering the women suffering due to their competitors, their husbands, and communities when they fail meeting marriage-related expectations, it looks safe to argue that this strengthens Weinger and her colleagues' finding which states that "folktales promote women's rivalry and mask men's culpability in oppressing women by setting the stage for their jealousy, enmity and competition" (Weinger et al. 2006:16).

One of the basic community requirements that enables a groom to secure a bride is economic capacity. He must be at least in a position to cover the dowry; also *lobola* in South Africa is a tradition of presenting cattle or other gifts to the family of the bride by the groom's family, and his family's living expenses.

In "Usiwelewele, intokazi eyayiyogana" (Siwelewele the witch), a father who is ready to offer a dowry so that he will see his son married witnesses how presenting a wedding gift is obligatory for a male in need of a female partner (Masuku 2005: 211). Mamba of Maquba, the chief, in "UMamba kaMaquba" is seen accompanying Thokozile (his wife) to give cattle to her family as *lobola* (wedding gift) (Masuku 2005: 200); AbaHhwebu in "Ucombecansini"(The little mat marker) brings cattle as the bride's wealth to take Ucombecansini as a bride for their chief's son (Hammond-Tooke 1988: 92); Saitsane's husband in "Mosetsana Saitsane" (The girl Saitsane) gives a large quantity of sorghum as a wedding gift and also as compensation for the grain destroyed by a team of dogs that were angered when Saitsane refused their demand (Malimabe-Ramagoshi et al. 2007: 444).

Providing supplies for the survival of his family is the male's responsibility. Jackal and Lion in "Lion and Jackal" agree to hunt on a shared basis, aiming to store meat for the coming winter; in "Lion and Little Jackal", the lioness complains to her husband that she and her cubs are starving to death (Honey 1910: 48, 57). In another version of "Lion and Jackal", Lion returns to his family and the encounter is depicted as follows:

> *After a very successful hunt, which lasted for some time, the Lion returned to see his family, and also to enjoy, as he thought, a plentiful supply of his spoil; when, to his utter surprise, he found Lioness and all the young Lions on the point of death from sheer hunger, and in a mangy state.* (Honey 1910: 48)

Jackal in "Lion's share", as the head of the household responsible for supplies, is also depicted ordering his family to rush to where the game is (Honey 1910: 88). In "How Hlakanyana got a beating", which narrates how some old men were deceived and their meat was taken by Hlakanyana, the wives of the old men are heard saying, "What meat? We are waiting but we have seen none," when the husbands enquire about the whereabouts of the meat they sent by Hlakanyana (Cope 1990: 19). In his effort to scare Tiger and Jackal, who are approaching to attack him, Ram in "The Tiger, the Ram and the Jackal" is also presented as responsible for supplying his child's food (Honey 1910: 21).

The stories show that the responsibility for providing wedding gifts and necessary supplies is on the shoulders of grooms and husbands. That is why we see dowries go to brides' families and wives waiting for supplies from their husbands. Lioness, along with her children, is depicted as hungry and the women are shown waiting for their husbands to bring food in order to demonstrate that males are indispensable because they are responsible for the

survival of women and their children. Cognisant of this responsibility, males are seen making efforts to fulfil what is expected of them by offering wedding gifts, hunting, and bringing food.

The other requirement for a male who wishes to get a female partner is being able to safeguard his family and community from any threat. The chief's army in "Hlakanyana overcomes the king's army" is portrayed as ready to fight against cattle raiders (Cope 1990: 24–30). In "Lion and Little Jackal", Lion is rushing to attack Jackal to defend his wife (Honey 1910: 60). The husband in "UDemana noDemazane" (Demana and Demazane) is shown to fulfil his duty to protect when his wife is troubled by a bird that repeatedly ruins her work on the farm. He wildly chases the bird to avenge the mischief it did to his wife's work (Masuku 2005: 191). The portrayal of Lioness complaining, "Is it you who sent Little Jackal to beat me and my children?" (Honey 1910: 60), and the woman bringing her problem on the farm to her husband indicate that safeguarding the wife is the job of the husband. The message seems to be that females are weak and need protection. To undertake this responsibility, males are often seen as ferocious and winning all confrontations.

Character traits

With regard to character traits in the tales, worriedness, jealousy, and brutality are demonstrated by both males and females. A man in "A man and two wives", whose wives gave birth to a crippled child and to eggs, is terrified by the situation (Motshwari 1998: 40–41). In "The world's reward", men are startled by aged domestic animals that were disappointed by human beings' ingratitude for the services they had given them throughout their lives (Honey 1910: 28). Tiger in "The Tiger, the Ram, and the Jackal" is heard saying, "Friend Jackal, I am quite out of breath and am half dead with fright, for I have just seen a terrible-looking fellow". Later, in the same story, Ram explains his fear to his wife, saying, "I fear this is our last day, for Jackal and Tiger are both coming against us. What shall we do?" (Honey 1910: 19–20). Hlakanyana's mother in "The birth of Hlakanyana" is greatly frightened by the speech of the foetus in her womb (Honey 1910: 12). The girls in "Sananapo" are very scared by the puppy's song, for fear that it will reveal their secret (Motshwari 1998: 38). Nyumbakatali in "Unyumbakatali" is also scared when her husband and the chief interrogate her about who she was talking to in her hut (Masuku 2005: 196).

Both male and female characters are shown as jealous in different stories. Wolf in "The Monkey's fiddle" is jealous of Monkey's bow and arrow (Honey 1910: 14). Chief Gunqu in "UGunqu" (The Gunqu) and Qakala in "Indaba ka-

Phoshozwayo" (Tricks of Phoshozwayo) are described as envious. The former orders his servant to kill his son, Sivi, whom he envies for his good physical appearance, while the latter gets into trouble when collecting wealth he did not deserve (De Bruin 2002: 26, 30–31).

Often, females are presented as jealous and antagonistic either in their efforts to secure a groom or in their attempts to win the attention of their husbands, who usually have several wives. In "Unyumbakatali" the women's jealousy is revealed by their actions when their husband brings home the children of the wife who had been barren. When the husband enters with the children and gives them to their mother, he says, "One woman died of shock. Another packed and went away". A young girl in "UMamba kaMaquba" is also depicted as jealous of her elder sister's marriage (Masuku 2005: 200). In "Noqandakazana", we see Noqandakazana sabotaging her sister's marriage. She first misleads her into going to a homestead of dogs instead of the chief's house. Subsequently, she misinforms her that the chief no longer wants her because she is in the dogs' homestead. In "UMphangose" (Mphangose), a similar mischievous trick is played by Imbulu on Mphangose, who is competing for the same groom (De Bruin 2002: 15–16). Depictions of marriage as the main source of jealousy among girls in the stories reveal that they are dependent creatures that need males for their survival. In their effort to secure husbands to depend on, they engage in mischievous activities that turn sisters into rivals.

Although mothers, as discussed under the previous theme, are depicted showing love, affection, and dedication to their children, both males and females can engage in brutal acts. In several stories, we see parents taking ruthless violent actions and harassing their children in different ways. In "UDemana noDemazane", we see cruel parents who harshly punish their children (stabbing them, using red-hot tools to the extent the awls go through one ear into the other) because they consumed the curdled milk of the 'amasi bird' and let the bird fly out of the pot it was placed in (Masuku 2005: 191). Hlakanyana's father in "The birth of Hlakanyana" "rushed at Hlakanyana and knocked him flat. Then he jumped on him with both feet and trampled him into the dust" (Cope 1990: 13–14). Saitsane in "Mosetsana Saitsane" (The girl Saitsane) is punished by her mother because the family's sorghum was ruined by dogs (Malimabe-Ramagoshi et al. 2007: 444). Mosidinyana (Albino) in "A certain man and a woman (the frog and the albino)" is abandoned by her parents because she has sores. Eventually, the second daughter, Mosidi (Frog) is also put to death by her father because she is lazy doing her domestic duties (Kganyago 2000: 141–143; Malimabe-Ramagoshi et al. 2007: 445). In "UZembeni noma Uzwanide" (Zembeni and Zwanide) and "UNkombose noSihlangusabayeni" (Nkombose and

Sihlangusabayeni) there is Zembeni, who attempts to eat her daughter, and a woman who kills her son, respectively (De Bruin 2002: 24, 26).

Apart from the shared traits, male characters are depicted as hot-tempered, physically strong, and greedy. The chief in "The birth of Hlakanyana" is very angry at his son's behaviour. In the same story, the men who were skinning the ox are annoyed by Hlakanyana's interference. The old men deceived by Hlakanyana in "How Hlakanyana got a beating" "were bitter with anger" (Cope 1990: 19) because they thought that the meat was eaten by dogs while the women were talking and laughing together. In the same book, the fighters in "Hlakanyana overcomes the King's army" are upset by being tricked by Hlakanyana (ibid.: 30). Demane in "UDemana noDemazane" is very annoyed because the meat was taken by the cannibals (Masuku 2005: 191). In several stories in *South-African Folk-Tales,* Lion is angry with other animals, especially Jackal, who usually deceives him (Honey 1910).

Almost all of the angry male characters are reacting violently. It should be noted that Hlakanyana's father beats his son harshly; the men who were skinning the ox and the fighters who lost their meat for their festival threaten to beat Hlakanyana; the old men also intend to beat their wives. The hot temper of the men and the subsequent threat of violent reactions show that male characters are capable of confronting those who give them trouble in any way. Likewise, a man in "UDemana noDemazane" is seen violently chasing a bird (Masuku 2005: 191). In "The Lion, the Jackal and the Man" Lion describes man's strength as follows:

> *…when I attempted to turn him to chaff, he spat and blew fire at me, mostly into my face, that burned just a little but not very badly. And when I again endeavored to pull him to the ground he jerked out from his body one of his ribs with which he gave me some very ugly wounds, so bad that I had to make chips fly, and as a parting he sent some warm bullets after me. No, Jackal, give him the name.* (Honey 1910: 27)

Male characters are not only hot-tempered and strong but also greedy. In "The Honeyguide's revenge", a greedy man who refuses to offer a share of the honey to the honeyguide suffers the consequences (Zulu folktale 2014). In most of the stories where Jackal appears as a character, he satisfies his greed by his ability to trick other animals. In "The hunt of Lion and Jackal", "The story of Lion and Little Jackal", and "Lion and Little Jackal" he takes food from the lion's family; in "Lion's share" he refuses the lioness' request to go with him to where the ox had been killed (Honey 1910: 60). Hlakanyana, in *Tales of the Trickster Boy*, is shown as greedy in several stories. In "The birth of Hlakanyana" his

greedy behaviour is depicted in his effort to take all the meat away from the old men serving the chief. This action, as well as his refusal to share the meat with his mother, overtly shows his voracity. In "Hlakanyana overcomes the king's army" his greed forces him to play a trick on the fighters so that he alone will eat the meat prepared for the feast. In "How Hlakanyana thatched hut with Hyena", Hlakanyana threatens Hyena with death because he would not share food with him (Cope 1990). In "UDemana noDemazane" it is through the leadership of the husband that the couple deny their children even a taste of the curdled milk of the '*amasi* bird' (Masuku 2005: 191). What is more, a male character in "USikhulumi kaHlokohloko" (Sikhulumi, the son of Hlokohloko), who is greedy for power, orders all male children to be killed for fear of losing his throne (De Bruin 2002: 35–36).

In terms of specific female character traits, two opposing behaviours are dominant: submissiveness on the one hand and a growing rebelliousness on the other. Wives in several stories are presented as submissive to their husbands. In "UDemana noDemazane", the wife submits to her husband's reproaches, regardless of the difficulties she has experienced with the bird in the farm (Masuku 2005: 191). In "The birth of Hlakanyana", the women being threatened by their husbands for not looking after the meat try to reveal the truth, regardless of their husbands' harshness towards them (Cope 1990: 19). As in "UMamba kaMaquba", the girl who wants to marry a chief has to do what she is ordered to do both by her would-be husband and elderly people authorised to give guidance and blessing (Masuku 2005: 200).

Regardless of their conscious or unconscious consent to the patriarchal ideology, depictions of some exceptional females in some stories indicate that there is a rebelliousness against the existing hegemony. Female characters in some folktales seem to provoke confrontation instead of accepting the domination of the patriarchal ideology. They are depicted as questioning males' orders and quashing their requests. In "Monna le basadi ba babedi" (A man with two wives) women defy their husband's order by eating the prohibited fruit (Kganyago 2000: 143–144); Demane in "UDemana noDemazane" does not obey her parents' order (Masuku 2005: 191). The mother-in-law in "Umkhwekazi namasi" (Mkhwekazi and the cow's milk) violates the custom of not drinking sour milk in an in-law's house (Nyembezi 1985: 59–63).

Rebellion against the established norm that men are strong and hence are protectors of their family and community is noticeable in some deviant female characters. In "Umfazi nemamba" (Mfazi and the snake), an exceptionally brave woman declares that she is willing and determined to kill the snake that caused trouble for the community. This woman's decision is astonishing because she is willing to take a risk no man dares to take (Nyembezi 1985). Thembelet-

sheni in "UNoqandakazana" (Noqandakazana) manages to kill monsters, using her physical strength (De Bruin 2002: 16). Mabhejane in "UMabhejane" is a strangely powerful woman who causes the death of many people (Msimang 1987: 84–87). Mother Nanana in "Unanana kaselesele" (Nanana, the daughter of Selesele) is also portrayed bravely, tackling an elephant which ate her children (Masuku 2005: 203). Sometimes, women's protest even goes to the extent of challenging their creator's order. In "The woman who worked on a Sabbath day", a woman is punished for working on a holiday (Kganyago 2000: 137–41).

In line with Nenola's (1999) assertion, the investigated South-African folktales are not only used to socialise the community in the patriarchal society's life philosophy. They are also tools for combating the hegemony of the already established gender stereotype. The present finding also corroborates Namulundah's (2016: 1) claim that "[s]exist portrayals sanction the marginality of Bukusu women, particularly when these reflect prevailing gender roles and expectations. However, contests over identity and representation are as ancient as (unwritten) history".

Work

One function of folktales is to enlighten the audience about the duties expected of them. In this regard, it is the duty of both men and women, if not mainly women, to cultivate farms. In "Umkhwekazi namasi", both the husband and wife work hard in the field (Nyembezi 1985: 59–63). In "A certain man and a woman", field work is depicted as the regular duty of the husband and wife (Kganyago 2000: 141–143). Nyumbakatali in "Unyumbakatali" is depicted as working in the field (Masuku 2005: 196); a woman who is challenged by a magical bird in "UDemana noDemazane" is portrayed as busy on her farm (Masuku 2005: 191).

Otherwise, community members' obligations are dichotomised on a gender basis. Most of the folktales socialise males to be engaged in activities outside the house, while females carry out domestic duties. Male characters are predominately represented as hunters and herders; females, on the other hand, are portrayed as homemakers.

As a means of sustenance, hunting is predominately the job of male characters. In "Hlakanyana plays a game of cooking", we see ogre hunters who catch Hlakanyana (Cope 1990: 30); warriors in "Hlakanyana goes to a wedding – and what happened" are portrayed fighting with a leopard (ibid.: 87). Demane in "UDemana noDemazane" hunts and feeds himself and his sister (Masuku 2005: 191). Monkey in "The Monkey's fiddle" is offered a bow and arrow for hunting (Honey 1910: 14). A hunter in "The Lion, the Jackal and the Man" bravely con-

fronts Lion (ibid.: 27). In "Lion and Jackal", Lion and Jackal as heads of families are engaged in hunting to secure food for the coming winter months (ibid.: 48).

The involvement of males in hunting is a matter of family survival. That is why Lioness in "Lion and Little Jackal" is heard complaining, "there was no meat … No, he [little Jackal] was not here. We are still dying of hunger", in response to her husband's enquiry: "Did not little Jackal bring a message to my children to carry meat?" (Honey 1910: 57). Males are expected to be good hunters so that they will be in a position to adequately support their families. In accomplishing their duties, hunters are expected to use their own natural skills and power. In "The Cheetah and the lazy hunter", a hunter who tries to use a leopard's cubs for hunting purposes is condemned by his fellows for his unethical action (ANIKE 2011).

The other dominant activity of male characters in the folktales is herding. In "The birth of Hlakanyana", we see boys driving cattle (Cope 1990: 11); in "UMamba kaMaquba", Mamba of Maquba drives cattle to the grazing fields (Masuku 2005: 200); in "UMshayandlela" (The big bull), "USikhulumi kaHlokohloko" (Sikhulumi, the son of Hlokohloko), and "UGubudela KaNomantshali" (Gubudela, the son of Nomantshali) males are shown herding (De Bruin 2002: 13, 36, 22).

In most of the folktales, women are confined to domestic activities in their houses. Hlakanyana's mother in "The birth of Hlakanyana" is in her hut when she hears the voice of her son in her womb; later she cooks and serves meat to her son (Cope 1990: 12–13, 78). Women in "Hlakanyana overcomes the king's army" and "Hlakanyana goes to a wedding – and what happened after" are shown collecting firewood (ibid.: 25, 84). In "Hlakanyana plays a game of cooking", the mother of the monsters cooks for her sons (ibid.: 31–39). The sin of the woman who worked on a Sabbath is collecting firewood on a holiday (Kganyago 2000: 136–137). In "Segwagwa le Leswafe" (The frog and the albino) the girl who was lazy doing household chores is punished with death, while her albino sister who was previously banned is welcomed after it is proved that she was good at dealing with household tasks (Malimabe-Ramagoshi et al. 2007: 444–445).

In "Usiwelewele, intokazi eyayiyogana", collecting firewood is the regular obligation of Siwelewele (Masuku 2005: 211); the old lady in "UMamba kaMaquba" gives her blessing to Thokozile because she helps the old woman by carrying her bundle of firewood on her back (Masuku 2005: 200). In *South-African Folk-Tales*, Jackal's wife is responsible for arranging a classroom for Leopard's children; Mrs Jackal and the little Jackals are assigned to dry the meat that Lion and Jackal provide and other women are shown performing domestic activities such as milking, serving meals and taking care of young children (Honey 1910: 37, 48,129–133).

More plainly, Hlakanyana's cry in "Hlakanyana goes to a wedding – and what happened after" is as follows:

> *Give me my shield*
> *The shield the young men gave me*
> *The young men having torn my blanket in two in the night*
> *The blanket the young girls gave me*
> *The young girls having dropped my beer pot*
> *The beer pot the women gave me*
> *The women having broken my axe*
> *The axe the boys gave me*
> *The boys having broken my hunting-assegai*
> *The assegai the other boys gave me*
> *Those boys having broken my milk pail*
> *The milk pail my mother gave me*
> *My mother having eaten up my wild roots*
> *My sweet wild roots that I dug up on a little hill on my way back from the weeding…*
> (Cope 1990: 88)

Meticulous examination of who gave what to Hlakanyana reveals what belongs to whom. While the tools of the male characters are a shield, an axe and an assegai (a slender hardwood spear with an iron tip), the females possess a blanket, a beer pot, and a milk pail. The materials owned by the male characters are used outside, while the tools of the females are mostly used in household chores. Hence, the narration depicts male and female boundaries in terms of the activities they are engaged in and the materials they employ in accomplishing their socially demarcated tasks.

The fact that most of the activities of female characters are confined to domestic chores implies that they act as supporters who work for the smooth running of males' lives. Women's essential task is carrying out domestic chores. If they fail to do them, they may not have the right to be considered as members of the community or even the right to live, as the action taken against the lazy girl in "Segwagwa le Leswafe" testifies (Malimabe-Ramagoshi et al. 2007: 444–445). The finding of the present study on the division of tasks among female and male actors is in line with the findings of Louie (2012) and Dionne (2010), among others.

Authority

Examination of the selected folktales in terms of who has what authority reveals that characters have both communal and gender-specific powers. While possession of magic power is common to exceptional males and females, authoritarian leadership and being a helpless victim are dominant depictions of ordinary male and female characters respectively.

In some stories, a few female and male characters are presented, using animals and objects with magic power as their tools to accomplish activities that in their normal human status they could not otherwise address. On some occasions, we see human characters turning themselves into other beings. In some of the folktales, characters are presented as omniscient. We also see excessive male power to the extent of challenging big events such as death.

In "Monna le basadi ba babedi" a man sends a bird as a messenger to a husband whose wives are dead. In the same story, we see the husband exercising his magic power to heal his dead wives. The traditional doctor (*inyanga*) and his patient in "Monna wa Setlhare mo tlhogong" (A man with a tree on his head) use magic power to pass an order to the messenger bird, which is sent to remind the patient about the payment for his medication (Kganyago 2000: 143–145). In "UMshayandlela" (The big bull) a boy uses magic power to manage his cattle (De Bruin 2002: 13). A man in "Selekane" offers his magical blue stone to a girl so that the chief whom she wants to marry will be under her control (Motshwari 1998: 48). A king in "The girl and the whirlwind" sends a big whirlwind to Ntiatiagatsana's home to catch and bring her to him (Kganyago 2000: 143). In *Tales of the Trickster Boy,* Hlakanyana is converted from human to animal and vice versa (Cope 1990).

Female characters are depicted as owners of magic power that helps them know all the requirements for a successful marriage with a prestigious person of the community. They give instructions to obedient young women and men on what, how, and when they should do things in their effort to secure the persons whom they want to marry. An old woman in "UMamba kaMaquba" gives practical guidance to an obedient girl who meets her requirements (Masuku 2005: 200). A mother obsessed by her daughter has the magic power of attacking and killing people who come to herald her daughter's marriage proposal, and an old woman in "UMabhejane" gives advice to the groom's team on how and when to handle wedding matters. She gives the magic gallbladder of a hose lizard with instructions on how to use it on a chief who is travelling to the wedding (Msimang 1987: 84–87). Siwelewele, the beautiful bride in "Usiwelewele, intokazi eyayiyogana", has the power to change from human to animal and vice versa (Masuku 2005: 211). In "UNoqandakazana", Thembeletsheni is capable

of producing food using a magic stick; similarly, Maphangose in "UMphangose" has the magic power of producing food and cattle (De Bruin 2002: 15–16). Nokuthula in "UNokuthula" (Nokuthula) employs magic power to safeguard girls under attack by their cannibal mother (De Bruin 2002: 20–21). Escaping their natural and biological constraints, both male and female characters employ magic power to accomplish activities beyond their normal capability.

Coming to normal males' peculiar traits, they seem to have undisputable absolute control of females and children. Husbands have the right to order, discipline, and even kill their wives and/or other females and children. The husband in "Monna le basadi ba babedi" is authorised to give or deny permission to his wives to do something. His authority is also legitimised by the death of his wives the moment they ate the fruits that were forbidden to them (Kganyago 2000: 143–144). The lioness in "Lion's share" solicits Jackal's permission to go with his family to the place where an ox has been killed (Honey 1910: 89). In "Umkwekazi namasi" (Mkhwekazi and the cow's milk) an old woman is punished by her son-in-law (De Bruin 2002: 27). The chief in "Unyumbakatali" kills the crows that were born to the wives of Somaxhegwana (Masuku 2005: 196).

In "How Hlakanyana got a beating", men are seen rushing home to give orders to their wives; following the announcement that the women received no meat, the men say, "Foolish women! While you gossip and cackle together, the food is stolen from under your eyes" (Cope 1990: 19). In the same story, some of the men intimidate their wives with sticks. In "UDemana noDemazane" a husband insults his wife by calling her 'lazy' after she tells him how the magic bird ruined her work on the farm (Masuku 2005: 191). In "Segwagwa le Leswafe", and also in "A certain man and a woman", it is the father who takes the initiative to investigate who is doing the household chores, and he is also the one who punishes the lazy girl with death (Malimabe-Ramagoshi et al. 2007: 444–445). The husband in "Usiwelewele, intokazi eyayiyogana" beats and stabs Siwelewele, his wife, to death (Masuku 2005: 211).

Regardless of the differences in physical size and physical strength, we see a male character beating a female character. In "Lion and Little Jackal" we hear that "Little Jackal thereupon struck Lion's wife in the face and went back to the place where the ox was killed" (Honey 1910: 60). This implies that being a male is enough to exercise one's power over any female. Females, no matter that they could be stronger than their male counterparts, should remain obedient to the patriarchal power relations of their communities. Their passiveness and compliance with the men and husbands' world is their depiction of womanhood and wifehood. It could be argued that this is done to indoctrinate the idea that males have power over females and other subordinates in every way. As

a result, males' orders should be obeyed, and their requirements should be met by their wives and children. Otherwise, the punishment is as severe as death.

On the other hand, being a helpless victim of an attack is a peculiar depiction of ordinary females in several folktales considered in this study. In "Phothi le tau" (The duiker and the lion), a duiker cries for her child that was abducted by a lion (Kganyago 2000: 146–147). In *South-African Folk-Tales*, Lioness is heard saying, "Is it you who sent Little Jackal to beat me and my children?", and Jackal's wife is beaten by her husband (Honey 1910: 50–60). In "How Hlakanyana got a beating" the wives are insulted and threatened through no fault of their own (Cope 1990: 19). In "UDemana noDemazane" a woman who goes to cultivate her field is the victim of a magic bird that ruins her work on the farm. The woman does not take any action to resist the attack (Masuku 2005: 191). This shows that females, who are usually vulnerable to attack, are not capable of defending themselves. This agrees with Madoda's (2013) finding which states that female characters in the studied folktales are depicted as weak and helpless.

CONCLUSION

Folktales "serve a descriptive, as well as prescriptive role" (Namulundah 2016:1). As a mirror of South-African communities, folktales have much to say about their life philosophies. The analysis and interpretation of the selected folktales show that communities nurture social roles, assigning both communal and gender-specific duties. Obedience to norms and being able to bear children for women, and economic capacity and providing protection for men are the predominant marriage-related requirements. With regard to character traits, males are predominantly described as hot-tempered, physically strong, and greedy. Females, on the other hand, are shown to display two opposing behaviours: submissiveness on one hand and rebelliousness on the other. Worriedness, jealousy, and brutality are also the predominant traits across genders. In terms of the division of tasks, males are engaged mainly in hunting and herding while females are responsible for homemaking. Cultivating the farm is presented as the shared task of females and males. Though both exceptional males and females are depicted as exercising magic powers to address issues beyond their natural ability, the former are authoritative leaders and hence have the right to discipline women and children. In fact, the folktales teach that regardless of other requirements such as physical strength, being male is sufficient to make man a master of women and children. In this regard, females are helpless victims of powerful males. Predominantly the findings indicate that

the traditional female and male role perceptions were inbuilt in the studied folktales. The findings of the present study are more or less in line with the findings of Namulundah (2016), Madoda (2013), Louie (2012), Weinger et al. (2006), and Kasner (2004).

From the perspective of socialisation, South-African folktales have an instrumental role in inculcating the entrenched hegemonic patriarchal communal life philosophy. They educate community members to conform to the gender stereotype requirements on marriage, character traits, work, and authority. The depiction of women as both submissive and rebellious reveals a contestation which aims at transforming folktales into tools to produce gender-egalitarian communities. Folktales reflect communities' lifestyles and portray both areas of strength and areas where improvement is needed. These portrayals should therefore serve as an input for interventions by concerned parties to maximise the areas of strength and transform the areas of improvement to work towards gender-egalitarian communities.

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