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THE ROLE OF WOMEN'S CHARACTERS (POWER & RESISTANCE) IN SELECTED ISIXHOSA WORKS: THE STUDY OF NOBANTU IN *INGQUMBO YEMINYANYA* AND NOLASTI IN *IINKUNZI EZIMBINI*

Klaas, Sibusiso
klaass@unisa.ac.za
0000-0003-2624-8584

Gobodwana, Anele
goboda@unisa.ac.za
0000-0002-6579-7044

Department of African Languages, College of Humanities, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa 0081.

Abstract

This article has argued that African literature often marginalizes and silences women's voices, as exemplified by ***Ingqumbo Yeminyanya*** (Wrath of the ancestors) and ***Iinkunzi Ezimbini*** (Two bulls). These portrayals reflect and reinforce patriarchal cultural norms, resulting in the devaluation of women within contemporary amaXhosa society. By examining Nobantu in Ingqumbo Yeminyanya and Nolasti in Iinkunzi Ezimbini, the article illustrates that literary narratives significantly influence societal perceptions of gender. Therefore, this article has investigated and highlighted the agency, power, and resistance of African women as represented by Nobantu and Nolasti. To systematically address the topic and achieve the article's aims, a qualitative methodology based on secondary data is utilized, employing a narrative literature review. The article's findings and contributions advance women's agency through a feminist perspective, examining how Nobantu and Nolasti confront patriarchal norms in their literary works and broader society. In line with Rubaya's (2022) findings, the study emphasizes the importance of recognizing women's viewpoints in literature to promote gender equity in education and society. Ultimately, the evolution of time influences the acceptance of equality within the amaXhosa community in both African and modern contexts.

Keywords: African Literature, Women's Representation, Gender Roles, Cultural Practices, AmaXhosa Communities

Introduction

This article examines the representation of women in African literature, specifically analyzing Ingqumbo Yeminyanya by Archibald Campbell Jordan and Iinkunzi Ezimbini by Hlumela Elephylet Mothlabane. The article places these works within the larger framework of African literary history. Traditionally, literature has largely conveyed male viewpoints, frequently sidelining women's cultural and spiritual experiences. Olusegun-Joseph (2021, p.90) notes that most of the African literature and its critical discourse are produced by male writers.

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Ngcobo (1988), citing Gordimer, notes that South Africans are often compelled by these themes, thereby complicating gender concerns. By analyzing female characters' responses to patriarchal norms, this article sheds light on the marginalization of women's narratives within cultural teachings. Timothy et al. (2013, p.47) emphasize that women in Africa are frequently marginalized across various spheres, underscoring the ongoing need for justice and equality. In contrast, Thengimfene's (2024, p.108) research on isiXhosa poetry highlights the representation of women as heroines, leaders, and activists within their communities.

Background

This research connects literary representations to the lived experiences of women in contemporary African societies, with a particular focus on the amaXhosa community. It demonstrates that entrenched patriarchal attitudes continue to shape women's roles. Through thematic analysis, the study highlights the importance of valuing women's perspectives and notes recent progress in South Africa, where an increasing number of women are assuming leadership positions, particularly in higher education. This trend suggests movement toward greater equality and inclusion. Nevertheless, Pillay's (2025, p.68) study indicates that "while progress has been made in understanding women's leadership challenges in South African higher education, significant work remains".

Problem Statement

Women's experiences and voices have often been overlooked and pushed to the margins in cultural teachings and traditions. This is evident in Ngcobo (1988, p.300), who mentions that "our own traditional culture gave very little scope for the expression of ideas outside those few areas where women operate exclusively among other women and away from men". Unfortunately, literature has sometimes echoed these same attitudes, reflecting society's tendency to diminish and dismiss the importance of women's roles. Hence, Adebayo (2021), in Bizimungu (2024, p.17), "found that while female characters are increasingly depicted as empowered and independent, traditional gender roles still persist, creating a dual narrative within literature".

Objectives

- To investigate and unmask the african woman's agency, Power, and Resistance of Nobantu and Nolasti

Literature review

The Evolution of Women's Voices in African Literary Traditions

African literary traditions have long been shaped by male dominance; a reality tied to men's control over cultural production and the publishing industry. Ojo-Ade in Olusegun-Joseph (2021, p.91) supports this by proposing that "African literature is a male-created, chauvinistic art". In indigenous-language literatures, such as isiXhosa, this imbalance has led to the silencing or marginalization of women's voices. Hence, Made's (2019, p.152) study found that "in the two texts

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discussed, it is clear that traditional culture plays a vital role in oppressing women, and this has resulted in women being afraid to fight for their rights; instead, they fight one another". Mandela (1993), as cited in Made (2019), highlights the notable absence of black women in isiXhosa cultural history, illustrating how patriarchal structures have influenced the production of knowledge. Similarly, Nodeh and Pourgiv (2012) argue that women were compelled to adopt male-dominated literary forms, not because of their superiority but due to cultural dominance, often distorting women's lived experiences. Stratton (1994) notes that female characters have traditionally been portrayed through male-centered lenses, frequently reduced to stereotypes such as caregivers or victims.

Scholars agree that these literary depictions reflect broader patriarchal social systems where women occupy subordinate roles. Historically, women have shouldered disproportionate responsibilities in domestic labor and caregiving while being denied authority and autonomy. Hence, Casaburri (1986) emphasizes that women bear the daily and generational burden of household reproduction, reinforcing their subordinate status. Under customary law, women often lacked adult legal status and faced male control, with practices such as requiring male permission for employment further entrenching their dependency (Meintjes, 1996; Erwee, 1986). These constraints have extended into the labor market, where women are typically found in low-status roles and excluded from legal protections, worsening their economic vulnerability (Casaburri, 1986).

Despite these entrenched norms, recent scholarship and literary production indicate a gradual shift. African women writers, including those in isiXhosa, increasingly challenge dominant gender narratives by highlighting women's agency and complexity. Makhenyane (2024) underscores the necessity of portraying women as agents of change, leaders, and critical thinkers, reflecting a growing consensus for more inclusive representations in African literature. Furthermore, Gobodwana & Mtsi (2025) assert that Xhosa communities are currently undergoing a transformation that seems both unavoidable and largely beyond immediate influence. This complex process is observable in various domains, including language, culture, tradition, and cuisine. Such changes may be marginalizing and suppressing the viewpoints, perspectives, and voices of other genders within Xhosa communities, as patriarchal practices continue to prevail and maintain their dominance.

Theoretical Framework: African Feminism and Women in *Ingqumbo Yeminyanya* and *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*

This study is anchored in African feminist and womanist theoretical perspectives, which prioritize the lived experiences of African women within specific cultural contexts. African feminism serves as a critical framework for examining patriarchal structures that marginalize women in African societies, while also recognizing the significance of culture, tradition, and communal values.

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Unlike certain Western feminist approaches that advocate for a complete break from tradition, African feminism engages critically with cultural practices, exploring how they can be reimagined to affirm women's agency and dignity. It emphasizes women's voices, lived realities, and everyday forms of resistance within socio-cultural systems that have historically favored male authority. Complementing this view, womanism focuses on women's resilience, moral authority, and commitment to family and community welfare. It acknowledges that African women often navigate power dynamics within relational and communal spaces, rather than through individualistic forms of resistance. This perspective highlights women's capacity to challenge oppression while preserving cultural continuity and social cohesion. By valuing cooperation, survival, and collective responsibility, womanism provides a lens that captures the complexity of women's experiences in traditional societies.

Together, African feminism and womanism offer a nuanced framework for analyzing the character of Nobantu in *Ingqumbo Yeminyanya* and Nolasti in *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*. Nobantu and Nolasti's actions and voices represent a form of resistance embedded within amaXhosa cultural structures. This study explores how they challenge patriarchal norms by questioning male authority, asserting their perspective, and revealing the limitations of cultural practices that silence women. Their resistance is not overtly confrontational; instead, it is dialogic and transformative. Nobantu and Nolasti embody an alternative construction of womanhood that highlights agency, critical consciousness, and the potential for cultural change from within, enhancing our understanding of female characters in African literature as sites of resistance and social transformation.

Methodology

This study uses desktop research, drawing on existing scholarship to build a thoughtful foundation for its analysis. By incorporating feminist literary theory and postcolonial ideas, it situates the portrayal of women in Ingqumbo Yeminyanya and Iinkunzi Ezimbini within broader discussions about gender, power, and culture. Through a close examination of recurring themes, the research explores how female characters either conform to or resist patriarchal expectations. This approach demonstrates how literature not only reflects society's views but also serves as a space where ideas about gender are challenged, reinforced, or redefined. In this way, the study highlights African literature as a vital tool for understanding how womanhood is shaped culturally and the ongoing fight against marginalization and oppression.

Key Arguments

Women's voices deserve to be truly heard, acknowledged, and appreciated, not just in literature, but across all parts of society. For too long, patriarchal stories have muted women's experiences, but alternative narratives are now breaking through, revealing their strength, agency, and resistance. Hence, Made's (2019) study on *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* (1994) by HE Mothlabane and *Inene Nasi Sibhozo* (1965, p. 152) by A Mtingane found that "in these two drama plays, both authors

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have succeeded in promoting patriarchy by allowing their male characters to dominate and practice their supremacy over women in the name of culture". The dismissive attitude that sidelines women in culture and literature continues to affect real lives today, especially in communities like the amaXhosa, shaping how women are seen and treated. This is supported by Diko's (2023) study on *Kudela Owaziyo* (2009) by BP Maphumulo and *Ubomi, Ungancama!* (2020, p. 7) by S Kekezwa that found Tshawe, Bongani, and Mdaluli "exemplify the stark power dynamics within their societies, proving that men predominantly occupy influential positions in finance and the economy, whereas women are relegated to subordinate roles, rendering them vulnerable to GBV". In short, this study reveals how African literature often mirrors the ways women have been sidelined by patriarchal traditions, while also shining a light on their resilience and resistance. By exploring works like *Ingqumbo Yeminyanya* and *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*, we see how stories not only reflect society's challenges but also create room for women's voices to be heard. At the same time, positive change is underway, with more women stepping into leadership roles to help build a fairer, more equal future.

Materials

Methodologically, prior studies often rely on narrow textual selections, focusing primarily on written works and excluding oral literature and performative narratives in which women's voices and agency are prominently expressed. Language and translation challenges further constrain interpretation, as the cultural depth of isiXhosa texts is often diluted in English translations. Addressing these gaps requires broader textual engagement, closer attention to under-analyzed female characters, and interdisciplinary approaches that connect literary representation to lived gender dynamics. Such research would enhance understanding of isiXhosa women's resistance and affirm literature as a site of cultural negotiation, advancing African feminist literary scholarship.

Discussion of Findings

This study examines the representation of women in African literature, with particular emphasis on the isiXhosa novel *Ingqumbo Yeminyanya* and *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*. To deepen the analysis, it considers the character Nobantu from *Ingqumbo Yeminyanya* and Nolasti from *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*, analyzing their choices, dialogue, and interactions as they navigate restrictive cultural expectations. A close reading of Nobantu and Nolasti reveals their systematic questioning of patriarchal authority and their efforts to negotiate autonomy within family and community contexts. By detailing how Nobantu and Nolasti express dissent through both overt and subtle actions, such as challenging prescribed gender roles and asserting their perspectives in family matters, the study demonstrates how female characters actively resist cultural oppression. The research ultimately seeks to explore not only how women are depicted in literature, but also what these portrayals reveal about broader social attitudes toward gender roles and the status of women in culture and society.

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Women's Agency and Resistance in *Nolasti* and *Nobantu*

Scholarship on women's agency within traditional cultures underscores the tension between patriarchal constraints and female self-determination. In many societies, gender roles have historically positioned women as subordinate to male authority, particularly in family structures, marriage practices, and economic participation. Casaburri (1986) and Meintjes (1996) illustrate how customary law and cultural expectations denied women full adult status, reinforcing dependence on male guardianship and limiting autonomy in both domestic and public spheres. These structural inequalities extended into the labor market, where women's work primarily in domestic service and agriculture remained undervalued and legally unprotected, further entrenching vulnerability and economic marginalization.

In this context, isiXhosa literary texts such as Ingqumbo Yeminyanya and Iinkunzi Ezimbini serve as critical spaces for exploring women's resistance and agency. A gynocritical lens raises the question of whether women speak for themselves or are spoken for within patriarchal narratives. Characters like Nobantu and Nolasti exemplify the ongoing negotiation between voice and silence, oppression and self-assertion. Despite being situated within restrictive cultural frameworks, these women articulate agency through nuanced acts of resistance, decision-making, emotional endurance, moral authority, and leadership.

Narrative strategies such as dialogue, first-person expression, and oral storytelling allow female characters to transform silence into speech, positioning their experiences as both personal and political. Notably, resistance often manifests not as overt defiance but through resilience, wisdom, and the reworking of prescribed roles. Nobantu and Nolasti challenge dominant norms surrounding marriage and obedience, redefining femininity as active authorship rather than passive tradition. Collectively, these representations align with broader scholarship on isiXhosa women's resistance and identity formation, demonstrating how women navigate and reshape patriarchal cultural practices. IsiXhosa literature affirms women's roles not only as cultural subjects but also as agents of meaning, survival, and transformation within literary narratives and the broader cultural imagination.

African Women Agency in Literary Studies

Despite the growing scholarship on African women's representation, significant research gaps persist within isiXhosa literary studies. Few investigations focus specifically on isiXhosa texts as critical sites for examining women's agency and resistance, especially given the extensive attention given to more dominant African languages and literatures. Existing research often prioritizes sociological or historical analyses of Xhosa women, leaving literary representation under-theorized as a space where gender norms are negotiated, contested, and reimagined.

Within the limited body of isiXhosa literary criticism, women characters are frequently discussed in general terms, with inadequate attention to individual figures as agents of resistance. Notably,

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Nobantu and Nolasti's roles as complex sites of resistance within patriarchal cultural frameworks have not been adequately explored. Their leadership, decision-making, and moral authority remain largely overlooked in scholarship that emphasizes women's oppression rather than their strategies for survival and self-determination. This gap limits a nuanced understanding of how agency is subtly articulated within traditional contexts rather than through overt rebellion.

Moreover, there is a lack of scholarly connection between literary representations of isiXhosa women and contemporary gender shifts within amaXhosa society. Literary texts are rarely analyzed alongside evolving social realities such as changing family structures, women's economic participation, and reconfigured gender roles. This disconnect limits the potential for literary analysis to meaningfully contribute to broader conversations on gender transformation and cultural continuity.

Patriarchy as Structure and Control

Patriarchy in Sigqibo's household functions as both cultural ideology and material reality. Male authority reigns supreme, with unilateral decision-making, and women are relegated to domestic service. Practices like *isihlonipho* enforce symbolic deference, while polygamy amplifies male dominance, entrenching gender hierarchies. This is evident in Kalabamu (2004) who mentions that "as a gender system, patriarchy is "reproduced through the ability of fathers to bequeath to their sons the power to command resources, direct the labour of their wives and children, monopolize material control of the 'public sphere' and enforce ideologies which legitimate all this as natural, godly and inevitable state of affairs" (Macinnes, 1998, p. 3) or as "system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby, 1990, p. 20)" (p. 238)

NOKHAYA *(Equbula inkonkxa esiya kukha amanzi.) Makhe nditsibe emlanjeni Bafazi adiniwe la manunga akule nkumba. Uza kufika efuna ishi ephungwayo uBawo abe ke akawafuni amanunga amadala. (Indima 1, Umboniso 3, iphepha 6)*

NOKHAYA (*Picks up a bucket to fetch water*.) Let me quickly go to the river, women, the water in this bucket is stale. Daddy will arrive and request tea, and he does not like stale water. (Act 1, Scene 3, page 6)

SIGQIBO *Le nto ingazange ibe yingxaki nje kubafazi ababekho ngaphambi kwakho kweli khaya yintoni? Uyaqaphela phofu ukuba uNokhaya noNofinishi bonwabile kuba bona bayayazi indawo yabo? Wena lo ukhalaza rhoqo usithi ndichitha ixesha elininzi ndincokola nabo ngaphezu kwakho, into ongafuniyo ukuyiqonda kukuba xa ndikunye nabo andikho dabini lamagunya njengokuba kusiba njalo xa ndinawe. Nangoku nje ukuba ubundimamele kwakuqala ngale nto kaLuvuyo, ngesesincokola ezimnandi ngoku. Kodwa ke kuba wena wasoloko uyiphikisa into endiyithethayo, siyawaxambula ke nangoku. Ingaba akuyiboni le mpazamo yakho? (Indima 2, Umboniso 6, iphepha 29)*

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SIGQIBO What is this that was never a problem for the women who were in this home before you? Do you notice that Nokhaya and Nofinishi are happy because they know their place? You constantly complain that I spend more time talking to them than I do to you. What you don't want to understand is that when I'm with them, I don't have to fight for power as I do with you. Even now, if you had listened to me from the beginning about Luvuyo's situation, we would be having a pleasant conversation. However, since you consistently contradict what I say, we are arguing again, as usual. Can't you see your mistake? (Act 2, Scene 6, page 29)

Nolasti upends this order through bold defiance. By addressing her husband by name, speaking out, and insisting on shared decisions, she contests the naturalized primacy of male rule, exposing its fragility.

NOLASTI *Ngowakho wedwa na lo mntwana Sigqibo? (Indima 2, Umboniso 6, iphepha 28)*
NOLASTI Is this child yours alone? (Act 2, Scene 6, page 28)
NOLASTI *Aniyiqondi nina eyona nto indicaphukisayo kuyo yonke le nto. USigqibo akanakusuka athi akazukuva ngam, ngokungathi mna andimzali uLuvuyo. (Indima 2, Umboniso 8, iphepha 32-33)*
NOLASTI, you don't understand what annoys me the most in all this. Sigqibo can't just say he won't listen to me, as if I didn't give birth to Luvuyo. (Act 2, Scene 8, page 32-33)

Yet, patriarchy theory predicts a backlash: when ideology falters, coercion tends to surge. Sigqibo's assault on Nolasti embodies this shift, transforming personal rage into structural violence—a tool to reimpose hierarchy and discipline dissent.

SIGQIBO *Uligagu kangaka nje kanti ukwakhala kangaka? Yithi cwaka! Akuziva ukuba ungxolela abantu? (Itsho induku.) Siphi isimilo Nolasti? Ngubani lo uthi usisilingo? (Indima 3, Umboniso 2, iphepha 39)*
SIGQIBO You are so courageous, and yet you cry this much? Shut up! Can't you hear that you are making noise for people? (*He beats her with the stick*.) Where is the respect, Nolasti? Who is this that you say is the devil? (Act 3, Scene 2, page 39).

In the analysis of **Ingqumbo Yeminyanya Nobantu**, particularly regarding Patriarchy as Structure and Control, the novel argues that Nobantu exhibited a robust character and a distinct voice in her actions within her relationship with Zwelibantu. Furthermore, she is depicted as strong, resilient, and humble, refusing to be dictated to regarding her actions or roles in her environment. Additionally, this article posits that Nobantu's upbringing in a Western context has endowed her with a strong character that resists conformity to the African diaspora within the amampondomise clan. Although the book does not extensively detail her family background, her portrayal as a strong woman supports the assertion made in this article that Nobantu has never been subjugated by the patriarchal framework of amampondomise.

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Ultimately, Nobantu has always maintained her autonomy, even in the naming and nurturing of her child Zweliyazongoma; she has consistently expressed her own voice, opinions, and perspectives, while Zwelinzima is depicted as notably submissive in the narrative. He acknowledges his love for his wife and his support for her. **Zwelinzima**: *UNobantu yinkosikazi yam, hayi eyamampondomise* (Nobantu is my wife, not the Mpondoimise clan). The elders expressed their dissatisfaction regarding her choice not to wear traditional African Xhosa attire as a makoti.

Women's Agency: Beyond Victimhood

Traditional views cast abused women purely as victims, but women's agency theory disrupts this binary. Agency isn't limited to escape or separation; it emerges through negotiation, endurance, strategic compliance, or subtle resistance. Hence, Mahmood (2001) in Charrad (2010) suggests that we "think of agency not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create (203)." (p. 518)

Nolasti demonstrates multiple forms of agency:

- **Economic Agency**: She works, earns income, and contributes financially to the household.

NOLASTI *Besekukade. He wethu Sigqibo! Yintoni le nto uthi uzazi ukuba utsala nzima ube uzenza ngathi unekratshi? Uyazi ukuba kule mbalela asisavuni nto iyiyo, siyalamba. Ukuba ibingeyiyo le mali ndiza nayo kwaba beLungu ngesekukudala abantwana bethu bengasahlawuli esikolweni. Ngesingakwazi nokumondla uMama wakho, andisathethi ke ngemali yoogqirha bakhe. Kutheni le nto usuka undenze umoni ngokuza nemali yokukuncedisa ekwenzeni ukuba intlalo yekhaya ibe lula? (Indima 2, Umboniso 2, iphepha 18)*

NOLASTI, I knew it. Sigqibo! What is this thing of knowing you are struggling but still having pride? You know that in this drought, we are not reaping much; we are starving. If it weren't for the money I bring from my employers, our children would have stopped paying school fees long ago. We wouldn't even feed your mother, let alone pay for her doctor's visits. Why do you make me a sinner by bringing money to help you make our life at home easier? (Act 2, Scene 2, page 18)

- **Moral Agency**: She advocates for equal treatment and believes women deserve rest and love.

NOLASTI *Yekani oku kumphatha okwesitshixo uSigqibo! Nini aba baziphathise kakubi ngoku kumoyika kangaka. Unani yena le nto engenakuze akhe azenzele nto? Khaniphumle torho nidiniwe, niyayixikixa nempilo yenu ngale nto yokusoloko nisebenza ngexhala. (Indima 1, Umboniso 3, iphepha 7)*

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NOLASTI Stop treating Sigqibo like he is a king! You are the one making him mistreat you because you are so afraid of him. What is it that he has that makes him never do anything for himself? Rest, please. You are tired; you are ruining your health with this constant work. (Act 1, Scene 3, page 7)

NOLASTI *Enkosi Mama wethu ngokundipha le mbeko yokukhe ndithethe noodade wethu aba. Makhosikazi njengoko thina singamaKrestu sithanda ukwenza njengoko iLizwi Lisixelela. UMpostile uPawulosi walicacisela kakuhle ibandla lase-Efese nelaseKolose indlela ekufanele ukuba baphathwe ngayo abafazi. Masimcaphule kulaa ncwadi wayeyibhalela abaseKolose kwisahluko sesithathu ivesi yeshumi elinesithoba xa esithi. 'Nina madoda, bathandeni abafazi benu, ningabi bukhali kubo.' Ngelishwa ke abethu abayeni babukhali ngohlobo olungathethekiyo kuthi, abasiniki thuba lakuthetha emizini yethu. Silapha nje ke sifuna ukukhe sifakane imilomo ngohlobo esinokuphucula ngalo impatho yabaseTyhini. (Athi esithi vu zibe ziyintaphane izandla eziphakamileyo.) (Indima 2, Umboniso 5, iphepha 25)*

NOLASTI Thank you, our mother, for giving me the honor of speaking to my sisters. Ladies, as Christians, we love to do as the Word tells us. Apostle Paul explained to the church in Ephesus and Colossae how women should be treated. Let us quote him from the letter he wrote to the Colossians in the third chapter, verse nineteen, when he says. 'Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.' Unfortunately, our husbands are incredibly harsh on us; they don't give us a chance to speak up in our homes. We are here to discuss how we can improve the treatment of women. (*Hands went up immediately after she sat down*.) (Act 2, Scene 5, page 25)

- In addition to her economic and moral agency, Nolasti exercises discursive agency: she speaks back, challenges decisions, and refuses silence.

SIBONDA *Wenzani na Rhadebe Mfondini? Kaloku imfundiso encancwe nguNolasti lo kwezi zizwe zasemzini kukumelana axhomane nendoda akuva ethanda. Akukho nto unokuyigqiba ngosapho lwakho angaceli mngeni. Yinto leyo eyenza ukuba sisoloko sijamelene okwemiqhagi kulo mzi kuba intokazi le ithetha isondele kanye ebusweni bendoda. (Indima 1, Umboniso 4, iphepha 11)*

SIBONDA What are you doing, Rhadebe? Because the lesson that Nolasti has learned from these foreign tribes is to be stubborn and to hang around with a man whenever he feels like it. There is nothing you can decide about your family without her challenging it. That's what makes us always clash in this house because this woman speaks right in the man's face. (Act 1, Scene 4, page 11)

- **Beyond everyday home negotiations, Nolasti's awareness extends to legal consciousness: s**he marries in court and understands the role of formal justice systems.

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NOLASTI: *Ndimyeke mna xa endibetha hi? Angalal'evuya. Ikhona kanti nenkundla xa enokundongamela, angahlazeka athi shu kuba uyixabise ngolona hlobo le nto yobubonda. Kaloku kuphela kwento anokuze abaluleke ngayo. (Ahleke kancinci). Owu! Kunzima ke torhwana ukungafundi, umntu ubambelela kwiqhuzwana elingephi, oku kokuba abizwe ngento naye. Uyandibona mna tshomi, andicengi mendo undibonanje, kwaye andinaxesha lakuthantamisa ndoda inomphefumlo owozelayo apha. Ukuba umntu uyazoyikisela apha kum makarhoxe kaloku. Akukho nto ndiyinyanya njengoku kusoloko ethetha ngam ebantwini endikwekwa. (Indima 1, Umboniso 2, iphepha 4)*

NOLASTI And just let him beat me? That could never happen. If he overpowers me, he will be ashamed because he values the position of ruler too much. That's the only thing he can be important about. (*She laughs a little*.) Oh! It is hard to be uneducated; a person clings to anything just to be called something, too. You see me, my friend, I don't care about being a wife, and I have no time to flatter a man with a sleepy soul. If anyone is intimidated by me, they must back down. There is nothing I hate more than him always talking about me to people, subbing me. (Act 1, Scene 2, page 4)

NOLASTI *O-o! Ninethemba lokuba ndiza kunishiya apha? Nakutshel'emcingeni maqobokazana. Nditshatile mna noSigqibo andishweshwanga njengani aba. Nakuhamba kuqala ukuba kuyahanjwa. (Indima 2, Umboniso 3, iphepha 21)*
NOFINISHI *Kutsho bani ukuba sishweshwile sakugqiba ukududa sinyathel'inkundla? Utsho kuba wena ungazi nanye kwezo mbeko zobufazi? Ungumfazi wena le shi ihotiswa ngabaNyepha! (Indima 2, Umboniso 3, iphepha 21)*
NOLASTI Oh! Do you think I will leave you here? You will never get that. I am legally married to Sigqibo. I was not asked in a traditional way, just like you. You will leave first, if we must go. (Act 2, Scene 3, page 21)
NOFINISHI Who said our wedding was a traditional arrangement, after we did all the traditional ceremonies to be wives here? You say that because you don't know any of those wives' honors? You say that you are a wife, but white people arranged your marriage! (Act 2, Scene 3, page 21)
Even her refusal to let her husband dictate her choices asserts her selfhood; crucially, her agency endures post-abuse, as rejecting his jailing isn't weakness but a layered calculus of emotion, culture, survival, motherhood, and community ties.
In the Ingqumbo Yeminyanya, Nobantu primarily faces challenges from her in-laws, who have subjected her to bullying and compelled her to adhere to the teachings and values of the amampondomise. Meanwhile, Zwelibanzi, whose narrative is notably absent from the text, is indicated to originate from the kingdom of Amampondomise. His introduction into this context as the sole male figure signifies his destined role in inheriting his father's position and assuming kingship. Consequently, Nobantu is poised to become the queen alongside her husband. It was anticipated that Nobantu would possess knowledge of the customs associated with the

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amampondomise and demonstrate reverence for cultural practices; the izinyanya (ancestors) significantly influence the formation of society and community. Although respect and careful language were ingrained in the societal framework, Nobantu has found it challenging to adhere to these principles and has not effectively put them into practice in her life.

Negotiated Resistance in an African Feminist Framework

African feminist theory highlights negotiation over confrontation as a key strategy of resistance. This is evident in Browne et al. (2024), who note that African feminist theory "focuses on negotiation, compromise, and navigation around oppressive forces" (p. 3). Nolasti doesn't aim to dismantle marriage but to reshape it into a partnership, not a form of domination. Her activism and faith in education stem from modern ideals, yet she clings to the union.

NOLASTI *Yhu-u! Niyavuya ke nina. (Aphume aye kwenza imisetyenzana yakhe. Amane ethetha yedwa.) Banoyolo ke kodwa abantu basesikolweni ngokwenza kanye le nto banqwenela ukuyenza ngeli xesha iintliziyo zabo zisithi mabenze njalo. Yintoni ke phofu le ithi umfazi makabe neentloni ukugona umyeni wakhe xa ebona abantu? Liphi inyala apho? Andithi into eyenza iintloni yinto embi? UMedem unxiba into ayithandayo, upheka xa ethanda, uvuka akuva efuna, ndingabala litshone, kodwa into ebalulekileyo kukuba umyeni wakhe uyayihlonipha iminqweno yakhe, uyamazi ukuba ungumntu, uyadinwa okanye ukhe angafuni kuyenza enye into ngenye imini. (Asebenze njalo de lifike ixesha lokugoduka.) (Indima 2, Umboniso 1, iphepha 16-17)*

NOLASTI Oh my! You are fortunate. (*She goes out to do her chores. She just talks to herself.*) Joyful are the educated people who do exactly what their hearts tell them to do. What is it that says a wife should be ashamed to hug her husband in public? Where is the shame in that? Is it not only a bad thing that causes embarrassment? Madam wears what she likes, cooks when she likes, and gets up when she wants. I have lost count, but the important thing is that her husband respects her wishes; he knows she is human, that she gets tired, and that sometimes she is not able to do anything. (*She continues with her duties until the knock-off time.*) (Act 2, Scene 1, page 16-17).

Her refusal to divorce permanently—or remarry while he's alive—shows deep cultural roots. This doesn't erase her resistance; it embodies scholars' "negotiated agency," carving dignity within constraints. Negotiated agency is explained as a concept that "involves a discursive process with oneself and others in overcoming both self-imposed and externally imposed constraints to agency" (Venugopal&Viswanathan, 2020: p. 5)

NOLASTI *Uyabona ke? Uyithatha lula wena yonke le nto. Asizenzi njalo kaloku thina izinto. Andinakuphinda ndiye kwenda ngoku umyeni wam esaphila nokuba ebenokubakho umntu. Eyokuba ndingancuma nomntu omncinci kum ke andikwazi nokuyicinga. Asiqhubi njalo thina. (Indima 5, Umboniso 5, iphepha 69)*

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NOLASTI See? You're taking all this lightly. We don't do things like that. I can't get married again while my husband is still alive, even if there was someone. I can't even imagine dating someone younger than me. We don't do things like that. (Act 5, Scene 5, page 69)
Ceasing to call him by name post-assault isn't mere submission but tactical recalibration amid power imbalances. Likewise, halting pleas for reinstatement after family pressure signals a sense of self-respect preserved.

NOLASTI *Asindim oziqweqwedise zeza kufika apha iziganeko Tata, nguyise kaMandla othe akafuni nokuba ndithi cakatha emzini wakhe. (Indima 4, Umboniso 5, iphepha 55)*

NOLASTI I am not the one who caused the situation to be where it is, Daddy; it is Mandla's father who said he doesn't even want me in his house. (Act 4, Scene 5, page 55)

The Politics of Blame and Social Discipline
Nolasti embodies a classic patriarchal dynamic: resisting women bear blame for men's violent backlash. Despite justice system intervention via her employer and doctor, she faces family distrust and exile.

LUVUYO *(Eyengezelisa iinyembezi.) Owu yini Mama! Inganguwe ozise elinje ihlazo ebomini bam. Ndiza kubajonga njani abanye abantwana esikolweni xa ndinabazali ababambana ezinkundleni zamapolisa. (Indima 3, Umboniso 4, iphepha 41)*
LUVUYO (*Crying*.) Oh, Mommy! Is it really you who brought such shame into my life? How will I look at other children at school when my parents are going to the police courts? (Act 3, Scene 4, page 41)

Her guilt—convincing herself her defiance hurt her son—shows patriarchy's psychological grip alongside its physical force. Women face discipline through violence, shame, and ostracism alike.
NOLASTI *Musa ukundixoxisa torho Mfazi undibona ukuba ndixakene nesimo sezinto. Ukuba ibinguwe okule ndawo ndikuyo ngewungacikozi kangaka, Ukuthetha akufani nokwenza ndikuxelele, ndiyayibona loo nto kunamhlanje nje. Anditsho ukuba ndijibilikile kwinto ebesingayo, qha ndithi makhe sijongisise indlela esinokulwa ngayo ephucukileyo. Olu hlobo besiqhuba ngalo aluqeqeshi ndoda le kuphela, lutywatyusha nezidalwa ezingenatyala, abantwana. Ukuba ubumvile uLuvuyo ephalaza intlungu yakhe kum izolo ngebuphele tu ubugagu ndiyakuxelela, (Indima 5, Umboniso 2, iphepha 61-62)*

NOLASTI Don't ask too many questions, women, you can see that I am stuck with this situation. If you were in my shoes, you wouldn't be so talkative. Talking is not the same as doing, I see that today. I'm not saying that I've turned against our aim, I'm just saying, let's look at a better way to fight. The way we've been going about it isn't just punishing men; it's also affecting innocent

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creatures, children. If you heard Luvuyo pour out his pain to me yesterday, you wouldn't be this courageous. (Act 5, Scene 2, page 61-62)

Quitting her job to salvage the marriage underscores constrained agency: she chooses, but from a narrowed field. The novel thus unveils agency persisting under duress, molded by stark power imbalances.

NOLASTI *Hayi ungazikhathazi ngezo zinto Medem, ndakubona ukuba ndithini ngelinye ixesha. Into endiyizeleyo ngoku kukuza kucela ukuba sikhululane ngoxolo. Ndicinga ukuyeka emsebenzini kuba okokoko ndaqala ukusebenza andizange ndihlale kakuhle emzini wam. (Indima 5, Umboniso 5, iphepha 68)*

NOLASTI No, don't worry about those things, Madam, I will see what to do at some other time. What I have come here to ask is that we part ways peacefully. I am thinking of quitting my job because things at home have not been good since I started working. (Act 5, Scene 5, page 68).

Love, Religion, and the Complexity of Endurance

Nolasti's persistent love for her abusive husband stands out as her most riveting trait. Feminist scholars warn against mistaking endurance for passivity. In African settings, marriage weaves romance with social, spiritual, and communal threads.

NOLASTI *(Encuma.) Hayi noko Medem akasoze andibulale. Wenziwe ngumsindo nangoku kuba akazange akhe andibethe ngaphambili. (Indima 3, Umboniso 3, iphepha 39)*

NOLASTI (*Smiling*.) No, Madam, he will never kill me. He did that because of anger; he has never hit me before. (Act 3, Scene 3, page 39)

As a Christian, Nolasti holds marriage sacred and unbreakable. Her drive to protect the family honors religious vows and maternal duty. Thus, her perseverance emerges as emotional negotiation rather than passive yielding.

The novel sidesteps tidy liberation tales. It portrays resistance as deeply costly, emotionally draining, and socially perilous.

Nobantu: In response to themes of love, religion, and the intricacies of endurance, as depicted in Ingqumbo yeminyanya. Nobantu cherished his husband Zwelinzima, who was on the verge of becoming king. Their bond originated at Lovedale College, Dikeni, where they pursued their studies together. Yet, they were unaware of their differing religious beliefs; this article presents observations and analyses. It is possible that Zwelibanzi did not regard Nobantu's Western identity with the seriousness it deserved. Perhaps Nobantu also failed to fully appreciate this aspect, which became an obstacle to their affection, as Zwelibanzi embodies a traditional African man. The theme of religious disparity is illustrated in the narrative when Nobantu killed the snake, a significant act for the amampondomise. They believed that whenever the snake entered the homes

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of the amampondomise, it signified a celebration of an event, affirming that the occasion or any cultural practice was successful and blessed. However, Nobantu, identifying as a Western woman, chose to kill the snake as it slithered near the newborn child. The crowd's ululations turned into celebratory songs from passersby as the snake moved over the infant; they fell silent after Nobantu struck the snake with a stick. Immediately following the snake's demise, the amampondomise began to utter curses.

Conclusion: Agency Within Constraint

Nolasti embodies African female agency that's neither fully submissive nor outright revolutionary. Educated, employed, outspoken, and progressive, she still harbors emotional ties, cultural roots, and religious devotion.

Through her, *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* shows women's resistance in patriarchy as intricate, tactical, and full of contradictions. Nolasti's path proves that agency rarely yields clear triumphs. It often unfolds via negotiation, adaptation, endurance, and quiet claims to dignity amid constraints.

In the end, the novel argues that individual defiance falls short; actual change demands an overhaul of patriarchal institutions. Moreover, in the Ingqumbo Yeminyanya, Nobantu has not experienced any physical or emotional suffering in her relationship with Zwelibanzi; nonetheless, her in-laws have imposed undue pressure upon her. The discourse between these two selected isiXhosa works illustrates that while women may face marginalization, certain literary works reveal their resilience and strength.

Conclusion

In patriarchal societies, marriage frequently reinforces gender hierarchies. *Iinkunzi Ezimbini* foregrounds Nolasti as a significant disruptor of these norms. As an educated, wage-earning woman in a traditional polygamous household, Nolasti challenges expectations of wifely obedience and silence, thereby generating tension within the household’s established order.

Nolasti exemplifies the complexities of women's agency within patriarchal African contexts. The novel avoids simplistic portrayals of rebellion, instead presenting her resistance as relational and shaped by negotiation under social pressure. Through her character arc, the narrative reveals both the potential and the significant limitations of female empowerment within deeply entrenched traditional structures.

Culture is the outcome of social life and human social engagement; as illustrated in the novels Ingqumbo Yeminyanya and Inkunzi ezimbini, two isiXhosa works, these works exemplify this notion. Consequently, by posing the question of the cultural evolution of behavior, the authors directly engage with the social dimension of development. Furthermore, Nobantu’s social context differs from Nolasti's; upbringing may play a significant role. The cultural evolution of human behavior transpires within the social framework of human development, as societal practices evolve over time. Thus, for Nobantu, killing the snake was not surprising, as she was not raised in

a society that celebrates snakes. The historical context illustrates variations in societies' methods and traditions and integrates culture into societal processes. These distinctions are evident in social processes such as child-rearing, education, and youth socialization practices (Gobodwana & Mtsi, 2025, p. 262). In this article, we have advocated for the representation of women in two selected isiXhosa works, illustrating that women can be marginalized by their in-laws and partners, while some women are able to express their discontent and cultural beliefs. This article aims to reveal and clarify women's roles in Xhosa society and calls for women to be treated equitably and for their voices to be heard when circumstances permit, within culturally traditional practices.

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